

Assisting Your Children in Handling Separation & Divorce

It is a well-documented fact that having multiple birth children brings additional challenges for the family. As well as the obvious of increase financial expenses, there may be the additional burden of separation and divorce as couples struggle to adjust their lives to their new and suddenly enlarged family. Should separation and/or divorce be an issue in your situation, the following are some helpful tips provided to assist you and your children when dealing with family break-up.

- Remember children need to love both parents as well as know that you continue to love them in return. Unless your former partner is a threat to your children, encourage them to spend time with their other parent.
- Make significant adults in your children's lives aware of the situation. These include teachers, counsellors, doctors, and childcare providers.
- Reassure and reinforce with your children that the situation is an adult problem – that they did not cause the divorce and that they are still loved.
- Preserve normal household rules and routines as much as possible. Keep change to a minimum including residence wherever possible.
- Encourage and clearly answer questions about the separation and any changes it might bring.
- Use family, support groups, and professionals for assistance and guidance.
- Don't belittle and/or criticize the other parent in front of your children. This can be very damaging to children's self-esteem since they are part of both Mom and Dad. If criticism does occur, children may feel it is necessary to 'choose sides'. As separation and divorce issues are between the adult partners, it is important that the children never feel that they must 'choose' one parent over the other.
- Don't ask children to keep secrets from your ex-partner.
- Don't send messages to your ex-partner through children. Some families do keep a notebook and write messages to the ex-partner. These messages can include status on the children's health issues, schoolwork, etc.
- Don't tell your children what to think and feel.
- Don't ask children to take sides or pump them for information about your 'ex'. Don't use children as confidants or substitutes for your spouse and friends.
- Remember that your children's best interests are the most important things during each step of the separation and divorce.
- Get help if you have a problem with any addiction. You won't be able to care for your children if you are impaired.
- Pay child support if you are the non-custodial parent. The loss of income hurts many children.
- Do not complain to your children if you do not receive child support. This will only add to their feelings of abandonment and guilt.
- Don't give your children too much responsibility. As a single parent it is too easy to rely heavily on children. They will grow up quick enough.

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- Don't ask children to be responsible for one another. It can cause friction between siblings.
- Let your children move on when they are developmentally ready. Don't make them feel guilty.
- Remember to take care of yourself both emotionally and physically. Your children need you. If they sense that 'no one is in charge', they may feel scared and frightened.

Sources

- *Helping Children Cope with Separation and Divorce*, American Mental Health Counsellors Association Committee on Childhood & Adolescence, 1989
- *What Should I Tell The Kids: A Parent's Guide to Real Problems in the Real World*, Siegler, Ava L.
- *Stepping Back From Anger*, American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers

Other Resources

- ***Single Parents of Multiples*, Multiple Births Canada**
- ***Single Parenting of Multiples*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet Series**
- ***Single Parents Reading List*, Multiples Births Canada Fact Sheet Series**
- ***Single Parent Resources*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet Series**

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