

TEN TIPS FOR DIVORCING PARENTS

Divorce is never easy on kids, but there are many ways parents can lessen the impact of their break-up on their children:

1. Never disparage your former spouse in front of your children. Because children know they are "part mom" and "part dad," the criticism can harm the child's self-esteem.
2. Do not use your children as messengers between you and your former spouse. The less the children feel a part of the battle between their parents, the better.
3. Reassure your children that they are loved and that the divorce is not their fault. Many children assume that they are to blame for their parents' hostility.
4. Encourage your children to see your former spouse frequently. Do everything within your power to accommodate the visitation.
5. At every step during your divorce, remind yourself that your children's interests-not yours-are paramount, and act accordingly. Lavish them with love at each opportunity.
6. Your children may be tempted to act as your caretaker. Resist the temptation to let them. Let your peers, adult family members, and mental health professionals be your counselors and sounding board. Let your children be children.
7. If you have a drinking or drug problem, get counseling right away. An impairment inhibits your ability to reassure your children and give them the attention they need at this difficult time.
8. If you are the non-custodial parent, pay your child support. The loss of income facing many children after divorce puts them at a financial disadvantage that has a pervasive effect on the rest of their lives.
9. If you are the custodial parent and you are not receiving child support, do not tell your children. It feeds into the child's sense of abandonment and further erodes his or her stability.
10. If at all possible, do not uproot your children. Stability in their residence and school life helps buffer children from the trauma of their parents' divorce.