

Divorce and Children

Dealing With Their Emotions and Answering Their Questions

by [Tracy Achen](#)

Some common emotions that children experience are anger, humiliation, rejection, and neediness as they adjust to the loss of their old family structure. While they miss their Dad, they may not express it for fear of appearing disloyal to Mom. They may feel as if no one understands what they are going through. Consequently, they may withdraw and lose interest in hobbies, school, friends, and the general enjoyment of life.

It is important to be emotionally available to help your children work through their feelings. An excellent book that captures the essence of children's feeling about divorce is [My Stick Family](#) which puts into words the emotions that children experience. Even though it is written for smaller children, adolescents can relate to it also.

Children have a tendency to blame themselves for the divorce, and will try to transform into the perfect child in hopes of keeping their parents together. It is very important to stress to your children that misbehaving, a dirty room, or bad grades didn't make Daddy leave. Let them know that divorce happens because of conflicts between two adults. Assure them that they didn't cause the breakup, and that you love them just the way they are. Though you are probably dealing with a fair amount of stress, anger and sadness, try to patiently answer your children's questions about divorce in a straight-forward manner without bitterness. Here are some common questions that children may ask:

1. If you stopped loving Dad, does that mean that you can stop loving me? Explain that the love that adults feel for each other is very different from the love between a mother and her child. Stress to your children that you will never stop loving them.
2. What will happen to me? Where will I live? Be honest about the living arrangements and what changes will occur. Let them know that although you take their feelings into consideration, these are adult decisions. If you give false hopes to their wants, they will be very disappointed later on, and may feel like you deceived them.
3. Why are you getting divorced? (This is one of the hardest questions with divorce and children, because it is sometimes so hard to explain). Be as honest as possible, but don't burden them with adult issues or make accusations. If there was infidelity or abuse, tell them that the marriage had adult problems that were unhealthy, and that being together

was bad for both of you. Children are very intuitive. They have probably sensed for a long time that things weren't right between you and your husband. Remember that if you start berating your ex, you are putting down their Daddy, and also putting them in the middle.

4. Can I still see Dad? Be honest about the child custody arrangements and what the visitation schedule will be and reassure them that they can call their father anytime that is reasonable.

5. How will we live? Will there be enough money? The money aspects of divorce are tough. If your standard of living will be changing, let them know. Suggest ways to cut back, and let them contribute their ideas, thereby allowing them a sense of control over their situation. Find ways to compromise so that they can still enjoy some of the things they did before, without projecting your worries about how you will survive on them. If the children are living with you, don't be surprised if they seem to take their anger out on you, or lay on a guilt trip about the divorce. You are the parent that is most available, and they feel safe expressing these emotions. Just realize that this is a normal part of the grieving process.

When it comes to divorce and children, it takes about two years to adjust to the changes. To help in their transition, you need to provide a stable environment. Give children a sense of stability by keeping a regular household schedule, and setting clear limits and rules.

Before, during, and after your divorce, offer you continuing encouragement, and don't lean on them for emotional support. Remember that kids need to be kids. Don't burden them with adult worries or bad-mouth your ex-husband. Let them know that it is okay to love both parents, and that they will always be loved also.

As far as divorce and children are concerned, the most important thing that you can do is to always show your love for them, and truly care about what affects them. Let them know that they count, and that you will always be there to listen to their problems.