



Tips for Divorcing Parents

Kids Bill of Rights: What Every Kid Should Know About Divorce (By Mike McCurley)

Every kid should know he or she has rights, particularly when their mom and dad are splitting up. Below are some things parents shouldn't forget (and kids shouldn't let them forget) when the family is in the midst of a break-up:

- **You have the right to love both your parents. And you have the right to be loved by both of them.** That means you shouldn't feel guilty about wanting to see your dad or your mom at any time. It's important for you to have both parents in your life, particularly during difficult times, such as a divorce.
- **You do not have to choose one parent over the other.** If you have an opinion about which parent you want to live with, let it be known. But nobody can force you to make that choice.
- **You're entitled to all the feelings you're having.** Don't be embarrassed by what you're feeling. It's scary when your parents break up, and you're allowed to be scared. Or angry. Or sad. Or whatever. Above all, don't feel like the divorce is your fault.
- **You have the right to be in a safe environment.** This means that nobody is allowed to put you in danger, either physically or emotionally. If one of your parents is hurting you, tell someone: either your other parent or a trusted adult, like a teacher.
- **You don't belong in the middle of your parents' break-up.** Sometimes your parents may get so caught up in their own problems that they forget that you're just a kid, and that you can't handle their adult worries. If they start putting you in the middle of their dispute, remind them that it's their dispute, not yours. Also, don't become a messenger for your parents. If they have questions for each other, they should ask each other themselves, not have you ask for them.
- **Grandparents, aunt, uncles and cousins are still part of your life.** Even if you're living with your dad, you should still be able to see relatives on your mom's side. And vice versa. You'll always be a part of their lives, even if your parents aren't married anymore.
- **You have the right to be a child.** Kids shouldn't worry about adult problems. Concentrate on your school work, your friends, activities, etc. Your mom and dad just need your love. They have to fix their problems. You can't.

Ten Tips for Divorcing Parents (By Mike McCurley)

Divorce is never easy on kids, but there are many ways parents can help 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 batter 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.

Questions about divorce to anticipate from your children:

1. Why are you getting divorced?
2. Will you get back together again?
3. Where will I (we) live?
4. Is the divorce my fault? Was it because I was bad?
5. Will I have to change schools?
6. When and how often will I see Mom or Dad?
7. Can I still see my grandparents?
8. Are we going to be poor?
9. What will we do about the holidays?
10. Can I still go to camp, play basketball, etc...?

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