

## 6 Big DON'TS When Discussing Divorce With Your Children!

By Rosalind Sedacca, CDC

Preparing to break the news to your kids that you're divorcing their other parent? Feeling insecure about how to broach the subject? Wondering how much to share before, during and after the divorce? Concerned about how your children will react? How to handle their questions? How to deal with your special circumstances? Want to know what the experts suggest?

Well you're not alone.

Talking about divorce to your children is tough. You don't want to make errors you will regret.

Ideally, tell your child together with a message you have prepared and agree upon in advance. You don't need to have all facets of the divorce and future changes in place when you break the news. This first conversation is about emotional acceptance and adjustment. Let your child know Mom and Dad are working on the details so they need not have to worry.

Reassure them that while all this is new, and may feel frightening to them, things will work out okay because you are both determined to make that so. Then step up maturely to keeping that promise – because the wellbeing of your child depends on it!

There are many common mistakes parents make at this time. Learn six of the most important DON'TS so you can avoid them.

- Don't put your ex down in front of the kids. When you speak disrespectfully about your children's other parent they are often hurt and riddled with guilt and confusion. Their thinking is, "If there's something wrong with Dad or Mom, there must also be something wrong with me for loving them." This can result in damaging your own relationship with your children, as well.
- Don't fight around the children. Studies show that conflict is what creates the most pain and turmoil for children of divorce. Keep parental battles away from your children – even when they're sleeping or when you're on the phone. They deserve the peace of mind.
- Don't pressure your children to make choices. Most kids feel torn when asked to choose between their parents. Don't put them in that awkward, difficult position. You can encourage your kids to share their feelings but don't make them responsible for outcomes they may blame themselves for in the future.
- Don't neglect to tell your kids they are not at fault. Too often parents assume their children understand that they are victims in your divorce. That's not the case. Remind them frequently that they bare no blame in any way related to your divorce – even and especially if you are fighting with their other parent about them.

- Don't share information only adults should be privy to. Parents frequently do this to bond with their children or try to win them over to their own side. It creates a burden that children shouldn't have to bare. Talk to adults about adult issues. Let your kids be kids!
- Don't use your children as confidants or spies. Never ask and expect your kids to tell you secrets about their other parent's life and home. It makes them feel uncomfortable and puts enormous pressure on them. Don't make your kids your confidants. They'll resent you for it. And it robs them of their childhood.

Fortunately you can reach out to Divorce Coaches, Parenting Coaches, therapists, school counselors or other professionals to help you if you're not positive about how best to approach your children. Speak to a divorce mediator or find an attorney who practices Collaborative Law, which will result in more positive, cooperative outcomes. Don't forget the many valuable books and articles on this topic as well as support groups in many communities.

Whatever you do, prepare yourself in advance when talking to your children. Be aware of the impact of your words on their innocent psyches. Avoid the mistakes we have discussed. Think before you leap and give your family a sound foundation on which to face the changes ahead with security, compassion and love.

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