

Protecting Children from Unnecessary Trauma During Separation and Divorce.

Janine Brissett



This tip sheet was designed to encourage parents to focus on their children during separation and divorce, and protect them from their own adult issues and conflict.

How should I communicate the news to my children that their Mum/Dad and I have decided to separate?

- Choose a time and place to speak with your children carefully.
- Make it clear that you and their other parent are still their Mum and Dad and that this won't change.
- Let them know your arrangements for moving, but avoid blaming or despairing language.
- Be ready to listen to any questions or concerns.

How do I reassure my children when I'm feeling upset or worried?

- Acknowledge their concerns, and how uncertain or "wobbly" people can feel during times of change.
- Invite them to come to you whenever they need a hug or someone to talk to.

Is it ok to let my child know how angry or anxious I am?

- It is fine to let your children know that you are feeling sad or upset, but they also need reassurance that you are able to recover from strong emotions.
- If you are having difficulty coping with intense emotions, it is better to talk with other adults, than vent with your child/ren.
- Let your friends and family know that you are trying not to talk to your children about adult issues and ask for their support with that.
- If you are having ongoing difficulties managing your emotions, seek professional advice.

My child/ren's Dad/Mum has never done much "hands-on" care of our child/ren. How can I let him/her know what they need, when I am not around?

- Many parents who have not been "hands on" before, learn these skills, *after* divorce as circumstances change.
- Do your best to keep communicating, so that either parent can ask the other for advice or support without fear of judgement.
- Use a communication book to support each other in daily rituals, and share things that are working well.
- Children manage their parents' differences well, particularly if parents don't argue about them.

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I am worried that my child will be neglected or treated harshly at her mother/father's home.

- The fact that you no longer trust your former partner does not necessarily mean that s/he is untrustworthy as a parent.
- Notice when you are letting your pain or resentment colour your perspective.
- If you still have concerns for your child's well-being, you will need to find a parenting agency or organization to assist you in addressing your particular concern more directly.

Should I let my child know how worried I am about our finances?

- Remember that finance is an adult issue.
- Expressing your concerns about money too often, affects children's sense of security and stability.
- Try not to express your anxiety about money as a criticism of their other parent.
- Each time your child sees you working through your emotions, and steadying yourself, s/he is being reassured that you and s/he *will* be ok.

How can I make changeovers between my former partner and I less traumatic for my child/ren?

- Take time to prepare yourself. Your children need you to be as calm and courteous as possible.
- Changeovers are not the time to express your disapproval of your former partner.
- Your children are letting one of you go, as they embrace the other. Keep your focus on them, and the mixed feelings they are likely to be having.
- Keep change-overs brief, imagining for that short time, that your former partner is a colleague or acquaintance.

Can you suggest anything to make our divorce process less traumatic for our children?

- Remember that mediators are trained to assist you to avoid a long and adversarial court process wherever possible.
- Be aware of how much time, money and energy you are spending fighting your partner. Consider ways you can preserve these resources to build a better tomorrow for you and your children.

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