

# naked divorce

Your new life in 21 days

## Help your Children

**21**  
DAY

*The first year after  
your divorce*



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# Help your Children with your divorce

I don't have children. I'm not an expert and can't speak from experience about children and divorce, but I have successfully coached many men and women with children. I have also helped many children and teens accept and process their parents' divorce and run Tantrum Clubs to help them handle the emotions.

Using my experience with my clients who are parents, and having consulted the best parenting-after-divorce experts in the field, I have included this section to help you support your children through the trauma of divorce and its aftermath. What you read below is a distillation of what these experts' advice and recommend and what I have learnt from coaching people, children and teens. All books, interviews and recommended reading is listed in the bibliography at the back of this book.

In my reading, one of the most useful resources (I highly recommend it) I came across is from 'Don't Divorce Your Children', written by pediatricians Jennifer Lewis and William Sammons (Contemporary, 1999), the website [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org) as well as in my interview with Sherlyn Luedtke, founder of Present Parent Training.

## **What do children believe during divorce**

Many children believe that they had something to do with the divorce. They may remember times when they argued with their parents, got poor grades, or got into trouble. They may associate that conflict with their parents' conflict and blame themselves. Also, some children may worry that their parents will stop loving them, or that they will never see the estranged parent again. Sometimes young children don't understand the meaning and permanence of divorce. Sometimes they believe that it's one parent's fault or that someone else is to blame.

Reassurance and consistency is important in the early days of divorce.

Sherlyn Luedtke says, "tell your children that although the love between mom and dad has changed, that this kind of love is different than love between parent and child. This love is forever and special." Sherlyn also believes in telling your children the same things over and over again to prove that there is consistency.

## Tip-

*Treat your child's confusion or misunderstandings with patience. Reassure your children that both parents will continue to love them and that they're not responsible for the divorce.*

*Gently clarify any misunderstandings about the custody arrangements.*



## **What do children want from their parents**

This list is taken from a study done at the University of Missouri where children of divorce were asked what they needed from their mom and dad. The list is written by children themselves:

- ➔ "I need both of you to stay involved in my life. Please write letters, make phone calls, and ask me lots of questions. When you don't stay involved, I feel like I'm not important and that you don't really love me."
- ➔ "Please stop fighting and work hard to get along with each other. Try to agree on matters related to me. When you fight about me, I think that I did something wrong and I feel guilty."
- ➔ "I want to love you both and enjoy the time that I spend with each of you. Please support me and the time that I spend with each of you. If you act jealous or upset, I feel like I need to take sides and love one parent more than the other."
- ➔ "Please communicate directly with my other parent so that I don't have to send messages back and forth."

- ⇒ “When talking about my other parent, please say only nice things, or don’t say anything at all. When you say mean, unkind things about my other parent, I feel like you are expecting me to take your side.”
- ⇒ “Please remember that I want both of you to be a part of my life. I count on you both to raise me, to teach me what is important, and to help me when I have problems.”

## How you communicate with your children is key

Difficult as it may be to do, try to strike an empathetic tone and address the most important points, right up front. Give your children the benefit of an honest, but child-friendly, explanation.

If you go to [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org) and read the texts I have recommended, they indicate there is a specific way to speak to your children so that you have told them enough but not too much. A summary of all the texts say:

- ⇒ **Provide continuity.** Children need the sense of continuity provided by a certain amount of structure such as dependable meal and bed times, leisure and work times.
- ⇒ **Be consistent in routines and explanations of what happened.** Children have very keen attention to detail when stressed. Repeat the same reason for your divorce several times if necessary. Sometimes they need to hear the same message 100 times. Try to have a plan with your ex that they do the same thing.
- ⇒ **80% of communication is related to tone and body language.** Ensure you are calm and grounded before engaging in communication.

## Normal reactions to separation and divorce

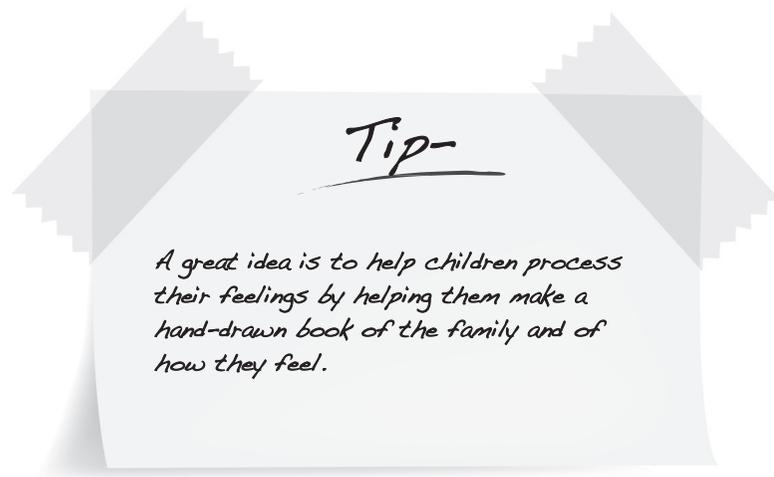
The resources [www.childrenanddivorce.com](http://www.childrenanddivorce.com), [www.parentcoordinationcentral.com](http://www.parentcoordinationcentral.com) and [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org) state that although strong feelings can be tough on children, it is normal for them to experience some anger, anxiety and mild depression BUT if things get worse rather than better after several months, it may be a sign that your child is stuck in depression, anxiety or anger and could use some additional support. [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org) states you must watch for these warning signs of divorce-related depression or anxiety:

- ⇒ Sleep problems, nightmares or bedwetting.
- ⇒ Poor concentration.
- ⇒ Trouble at school.
- ⇒ Drug or alcohol abuse.
- ⇒ Self-injury, cutting.
- ⇒ Frequent angry or violent outbursts.

- ➔ Withdrawal from loved ones.
- ➔ Avoiding favourite activities.

## Steps to reduce traumatic effects of a divorce on your children

There are several steps to follow to reduce the traumatic effects of divorce on children and now that you have taken care of yourself, study the resources, books and texts I have provided in this chapter to ensure you provide stability, structure and continuity for your children. Support them by helping them express emotions, and commit to truly listening to these feelings, without getting defensive. Listen and help them find words for their feelings, acknowledging their right to their feelings. Also let your children know that even though the physical circumstances of the family unit will change, they can continue to have healthy, loving relationships with both of their parents.



## Develop a parenting plan

Pediatricians and authors Jennifer Lewis and William Sammons recommend that divorced parents develop a parenting plan for their children.

Most divorcing parents are understandably concerned about the custody status of their children because it defines how the major decision-making responsibilities will be allocated, and may influence where the children live. However, what primarily impacts the children's lives is not their custody status but the schedule of time that they spend with each parent and the nuts and bolts of how that schedule is implemented.

This blueprint for the children's care, Lewis and Samons call the parenting plan, should be a much more comprehensive document than the typical visitation agreement. A successful parenting plan needs to incorporate sufficient details to ensure children will not experience ongoing arguments and conflicts between their parents about the arrangements they are putting in place. A parenting plan could contain the amount of time that the children will spend with each parent, the time(s) and place(s) of handover, guidelines to holidays and vacations, calendar of joint schedule, joint-parenting rules and guidelines so that there is consistency in parenting (including bed times, diet, watching television, homework etc.) It has also been advised to include details such as what to do in the event of last minute delays or cancellations.

### Tip-

*Share your parenting plan and divorce agreement with your children. This inclusion helps children look to the future with a sense of certainty and decreases the fear that parents are hiding something even direr than the divorce.*

*Letting your children read the settlement agreement lets them know there are rules that govern your actions post-divorce, which you have agreed you are legally bound to obey. Even for the young child who wants the document read to them - and that usually lasts for about 2 paragraphs since most kids think it's very boring - just hearing it and seeing it are reassuring.*



### **Letters to your children**

*In my weekly newsletter, you will find LOADS of tips, techniques and letter templates for helping your children come to terms with the divorce. The templates include letters to young children, older children and letters to the school. Sign up at [www.nakeddivorce.com](http://www.nakeddivorce.com) today.*



# Notes

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**Adèle Theron** helps high powered professional career men and woman heal from divorce using an intensive 21-day process. She has written other trauma programmes too which can all be accessed online and used around your busy schedule to maintain your high performance.

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