

# HOW DO I TELL THE KIDS ... ABOUT THE DIVORCE?

## Special Bonus

### The What To Say CHECKLIST when telling the kids about your divorce.

By C. Paul Wanio, PhD, LMFT

In discussing your divorce, express that there were reasons for you and the other parent to have grown apart. Be factual, but avoid too intimate or gory details. Explain that you still love and will take care of your child, and that all of the specifics and details will be worked out. Allow adequate time for your child to feel your care and compassion. Carefully cover the following subjects:

Your divorce is based upon everyone's best interest and isn't just some overly emotional, "spur-of-the-moment" whim, but has been well thought out.

All of this difficulty is regrettable, and you are sorry for the hurt your child is feeling, but the divorce is or was necessary.

This decision (to divorce) is final.

Reassure your child regarding the present and future of your lives (immediate and future plans).

Clarify custody and visitation issues – (when you know them) i.e. where your child will live, go to school and when he/she will stay (live) with each parent.

Reassure and help calm any of your child's concerns or fears.

Confirm that you are in control and will handle family problems even though things may appear unsettled and disrupted.

Your child is not to blame for the divorce -- it was not his/her behavior that lead to your divorce, but Mom and Dad's inability to live with one another. Even if you did argue about your child, it was not really your child's fault, but your inability to deal effectively with your child's problems and with each other regarding your child. Things can now improve as there will be far less disagreement since each parent will now have their own separate sets of rules in two separate homes.

There is a plan for the future (some of which is certain and some of which is

tentative). Assure that your child's needs will be met. Give small details like how your child will still attend piano lessons, play baseball, be told bedtime stories, etc.

[ ] Whatever your child is feeling is OK to be feeling. You understand.

[ ] Cooperation will be needed from your child and from you.

[ ] It is all right for your child to continue to love both parents without offending or hurting either of you.

[ ] Avoidance of bitterness and vengeful comments regarding the other parent (although appropriate expressions of anger are fine if the child was unjustly hurt by the other parent, but be sure that comments are aimed at the actions of the other parent and not at the parent him/herself).

[ ] Reassurance that though some things have changed, your child is still loved (even if not able to be shown by an absent or abusive parent who is "troubled") and will be taken care of. Also reassure that you and the other parent did once love each other, did want your child to be born and that your child will never and can never be replaced.

[ ] If possible, it is beneficial for both parents to discuss and explain your divorce. This has the stabilizing effect of seeing the two of you united in how you speak about and plan the future.

[ ] Ask if there are any concerns or questions that your child may have, or intuitively see if you can guess what else may be bothering your child.

[ ] To create a feeling of participation and choice, allow suggestions from your child regarding some of the new changes and plans you are making – selecting a new dresser for the non-custodial home, what to eat on a certain day or watch on TV, etc.

[ ] Let your child know that you are available to talk about anything at all that may be on your child's mind (by telephone, if need be).

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