



**How Do I Tell the Kids ...
about the
DIVORCE?**

**A Create-a-Storybook™ Guide
to preparing your children –
with love!**

By Rosalind Sedacca, CCT

This book is dedicated to my son,

CASSIDY DANIEL SEDACCA,

the greatest blessing in my life.

I will love and cherish you always!

MOM

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

This ebook is fully protected by the COPYRIGHT LAW OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. No part of this ebook may be reproduced or distributed by any means without the express written permission of the copyright owner: Rosalind Sedacca. Violations of the copyright law will be enforced to the full extent of the law. If you receive this ebook as part of a package without payment, then you are holding an unauthorized copy.

Please report all violations immediately to

Rosalind@childcentereddivorce.com.

Table of Contents

Forward	5
Part One: Facing the Challenge	
Chapter 1: My story	7
Chapter 2: The experts agree	14
Chapter 3: Getting started	19
Part Two: Your Storybook	
Chapter 4: Your History	22
• Why it's so important	22
• Expert's perspective	23
• Your sample storybook template	27
Chapter 5: Explaining the Problem	33
• Understanding the challenge	33
• Expert's perspective	34
• Your sample storybook template	59
Chapter 6: Explaining the Solution	62
• Essential components	62
• Expert's perspective	63
• Your sample storybook template	69
Chapter 7: The All-Important Ending	72
• Closing your storybook	72
• Experts' keys to remember	73
• Your sample storybook template	92
• What to expect ahead	95

Part Three: Fine-Tuning Your Storybook

Chapter 8: Adapting Your Template	97
• Expert's Perspective	99
Chapter 9: My Closing Thoughts	102
Chapter 10: About the Author	105
Chapter 11: Chapter 13: Staying Connected to <i>How Do I Tell the Kids?</i>	106
Chapter 12: Resources to Turn to	110
Chapter 13: Your Storybook Templates	

IMPORTANT NOTE:

You will find the two customizable **StorybookTemplates** in Chapter 13 in a separate Word document. Just click on the link at the end of the book to access your templates.

Forward: My Son's Message

This year I celebrated my 28th birthday. Although I have been an 'adult' for many years, I still feel and remember the sensation of being eleven years old and looking into my parents' eyes as they mouthed the numbing word ... "divorce." I still remember feeling the chills down my back and my stomach churning with the sickening news. It was news that changed my life forever.

Today, as I am soon to start my life as a husband, and later as a father, I look back on my childhood and those feelings with a strong sense of understanding and compassion. Being a child of divorce, I know first hand just how terrifying and devastating that news can be for a child. From their perspective, nothing worse could happen in the world than learning that your parents are going to separate permanently. It is almost as if their life support is being pulled from them, and they are being left out in the cold. As an eleven year old I "*knew*" that both of my parents were wrong in divorcing. How could my mom and dad not love each other any more? How could they break up my family? How could my parents ever consider being with other partners? And most frightening of all ... *Was I to blame?*

Because divorce is such an emotional issue for both parents and children, it can seem near impossible to get a child to understand why this horrible thing is happening to their family. In their eyes, no good can come from this situation. Presenting such a sensitive subject to a child must be done with much thought and creativity, emphasizing key points and answering questions that each child has – the kind of questions I asked all those years ago. The most important point is for parents to see the situation from their *child's eyes* – to be able to relate to the child's needs, insecurities and concerns from *their* perspective. I was very fortunate to have two parents who were able to do just that.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

More than a decade ago, my mother created a special storybook for me. It was like no other book I had read. My mom, dad and I read it together. This was a story book about *my* life, complete with photos of me and my parents. It was filled with memories, love and praise. It told a simple tale of how my mom and dad met, the love that they had for each other, and how, over time, it had changed. It ended with talk of divorce, what it meant to me, and why it was the beginning of change – *not the end of my family*.

While divorce changed my life forever, this book changed my outlook about divorce forever. It reminded me that I was not at fault, will always be loved by my parents and that things will work out okay. It opened my eyes to the value of parents telling their children about an impending divorce in just the way my parents presented it to me.

I enjoy a very close relationship with my mother and father today and now can see that divorce was the best solution for them. Both have remarried and are leading happy lives. I am grateful that the innovative storybook concept offered in "*How Do I Tell the Kids ... about the DIVORCE?*" enabled my parents to address my fears and insecurities back then in a loving and reassuring manner. I am confident that the message of this book – which once so deeply touched my life – will deeply touch the lives of you and your children, paving the way for the best possible future for you all.

Sincere best wishes,

Cassidy Daniel Sedacca, DVM

Part One: Facing the Challenge

Chapter 1: MY STORY

I've faced many difficult moments in my life. Who hasn't? But preparing to tell my son that I will be divorcing his father was absolutely one of the worst. The emotions surging through my body were overwhelming. Deep gut-wrenching fear. Continuous anxiety. Incredible guilt. And the oppressive weight of shame.

My son, after all, was innocent. A sweet, gentle soul who loved his father and mother dearly. He certainly did not deserve this.

I struggled with the anxiety for weeks in advance. When should I tell him? How should I tell him? Should we tell him together? And most frightening of all, WHAT SHOULD WE SAY?

How do you explain to a child that the life he has known, the comfort he has felt in his family setting, is about to be disrupted – changed – forever?

How do you explain to a child that none of this is his fault?

How do you reassure him that life will go on, that he will be safe, cared for and loved, even after his parents divorce?

And, even more intimidating, how do you prepare him for all the unknowns looming ahead when you're not sure yourself how it will all turn out?

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

I needed a plan. A strategy. A way of conveying all that I wanted to say to him at a level of understanding that he could grasp.

My son, Cassidy, was eleven at the time. He was still a child, yet old enough to feel the tension in our home that had been escalating for several years. He heard the frequent irritation in our voices when his father and I spoke. He heard the arguments that would flair up suddenly in the midst of routine conversations. He heard the sarcastic inflections in our communication as well as the deafening silence when we were beyond words and engulfed in frustration and anger.

Silently, internally, my son was experiencing it all and, not surprisingly, he began to show signs of stress. Sometimes it came in the form of headaches which had been increasing in frequency over the past two years. Other times it was his tears that revealed the pain he felt hearing what he heard and being helpless to stop it. Many times he acted out, showing us his escalating temper. This took attention away from our drama and placed it on him, our son, who was quietly filling up with rage about controlling a situation that was moving out of control.

The most frustrating part of it all is that we knew better, his father and I. We knew better than to fight in front of our son, to allow him to be caught up in our difficulties. But as our unhappiness together grew over time, we lost a handle on what we knew and gave in to what we felt. It was a terrible mistake, one which I will always regret because my innocent child, the person I loved more than anyone in the universe, was paying the price.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

I wrote a list for myself of what was most important for me to convey to Cassidy when I – or both his father and I – spoke to him. Six points stood out as most essential:

This is not your fault.
You are, and always will be, safe.
Mom and Dad will always be your parents.
Mom and Dad will always love you.
This is about change, not about blame.
Things will work out okay.

But ... how do I say that? I rehearsed dozens of conversations in my head during those weeks. They seemed awkward. Rehearsed. Insincere. Nothing felt right or did justice to the importance of this conversation.

Everything I tried brought up more questions than answers. How do I begin? How do I prepare myself to answer all his questions? How do I cope with the inevitable tears? And then what?

One night in bed at 4 a.m., while my troubled mind rehashed my insecurities, a thought came to me that resonated in a powerful way. I remembered that my son always enjoyed looking through the family photo albums, primarily because they were filled with photos of him. He liked seeing his baby pictures and watching himself change as he grew. The albums were like a storybook of his life. They kept his attention for long periods of time. They also brought out his curiosity and questions, which opened the door to many relaxed family conversations.

What if I prepared a photo album for my son that told the story of our family in pictures and

words? And what if it spanned from before he was born right up to the present, preparing him for the new changes ahead?

The storybook concept gave him something tangible he could hold on to, and read over again and again, to help him grasp what was about to transpire. It would explain, in language he could understand, why this was happening and what to expect. Most important of all, it would be a format that allowed me to make sure I emphasized the six crucial points I knew I had to get across to him.

And, rather than rehearsing a conversation that felt like a mine-field of possible mistakes and detours, the storybook would give me a written, pre-planned script that was well thought through in advance.

The idea still had merit the next morning. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to be the best option, both for my son, and for us, his parents. With this new concept solidly in mind I moved ahead in this creative new direction. And it worked.

When the storybook was completed I showed it to my husband. It was important to me that we both agreed about the message we were conveying to our child. What I said was not controversial, judgmental or accusatory. On the contrary. The story in the book told the truth while focusing on areas of mutual agreement ... the six crucial points that most every parent would want to get across.

While my husband was angry with me for initiating our divorce, he understood that the point of our storybook was not to air our differences, but to

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

show as much support to our son, during this difficult time, as was possible. He agreed the book was well done and important.

On the evening we set aside, my husband and I sat down with Cassidy and told him we had put together a storybook photo album about our family. He was immediately interested. I started reading aloud. At times, I stopped for a moment as we reminisced about a birthday party, vacation or other memorable event mentioned in our story. It felt good to laugh together, even if only briefly, sitting on the sofa as a family for, perhaps, one of the very last times.

As I started reading about changes in the family, tensions, disagreements, and sad times, I watched as tears pooled up in my son's eyes. By the time I reached the end of the story he was weeping uncontrollably and holding on to both of us as tightly as he could.

Then came the inevitable anticipated responses. "NO! You're not getting a divorce. I don't want you to. You can't. It isn't fair." And then, as a family, we talked, cried, hugged, answered questions, repeated answers, reread passages in the book and consoled one another.

The deed was done. It was God-awful to go through. But somehow, having the book as an anchor, something to reread, hold on to and keep, was helpful for my son. We had the conversation about the impending divorce many, many times in the next weeks and even after the divorce itself. Sometimes we'd refer back to a passage or two in the book as a reminder that Mom and Dad will still love him forever and that everything will be okay.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

The book also helped me and my husband to keep a perspective about our son. It reminded us that this was not about good guys and bad guys, judgments and accusations. It was about people and situations and how they change. Life evolves. Beyond our differences, our frustrations and disappointments, we were still both Cassidy's Mom and Dad – and always will be. With that in mind, we were able to treat each other with dignity and respect.

It has been more than a decade since I prepared that storybook about our family. I have since remarried, and my son has graduated college and Veterinary School and embarked on an exciting career. As a grown young man in his late twenties he is still very close to his father and me. He tells us, much as he hated our decision at the time, he now believes we were wise to get a divorce and move on with our lives, both of us choosing more suitable mates. When I approached him with my idea about sharing our family storybook with others who are facing divorce and emotionally torn up about how to tell their children, he enthusiastically agreed that it was a great idea.

So did the six therapists I approached. They not only endorsed the concept but graciously contributed to the value of this book by adding relevant suggestions and insights based on their professional experience. For this I am truly grateful.

In the chapters to come, I will share with you the template I have prepared which will enable you to create a storybook customized to your individual family. I will help prepare you for the questions to expect from your children and how best to answer

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

them. And I will refer you to additional resources you can turn to for advice, support and counseling at whatever level is appropriate for you.

By the end of this book you will not only know **how to tell your kids about divorce**, you will also have a viable means with which to do so ... your family storybook. May it be a resource you will thoughtfully create, and turn to, when expressing your love for your children as you move through divorce and beyond.

At this difficult time in the life of your family, I send you my heartfelt compassion and my very best wishes for the most positive and peaceful resolution for everyone involved.

Chapter 2:

THE EXPERTS AGREE

When I finally decided to write this book and tell my personal story I knew I couldn't do it alone. I knew I had to enlist the support of professional therapists and mediators who understand the complexities of divorce. I wanted to enlist the assistance of highly respected experts in their field who routinely walk through the world of families in distress. This team would know about the emotional, physical and psychological effects of divorce. And they would understand the many ways children internalize and then react to the news.

I am happy to say I found my team – a diverse group of experts I could depend on to give this subject the sensitivity and depth of understanding it fully deserves. These skilled, highly respected professionals, offer new insights and valuable perspectives that parents, caught in the drama of their “situations,” often fail to recognize. Each of them, in their own way, adds another dimension to this book. **How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?** would not fully serve the needs of my readers without the additional support and advice of this distinguished group of therapists.

Let me introduce them to you alphabetically.

Matthew Anderson, D.Min.

Dr. Anderson has been a pastoral counselor for thirty-five years and is author of *The Prayer Diet*, a spiritual approach to weight loss. He is a

motivational speaker and has created many CD's and Internet courses for inner growth, successful living and taking charge of your life. He was a columnist at eDiets for seven years also hosted his own weekly radio/Internet show, *Spirituality for Grownups*. He has a successful private practice in Boca Raton, FL.

Beverly Gibel, LCSW, ACSW, BCD

Ms. Gibel has practiced psychotherapy since 1975 in Florida, Massachusetts and New York. She earned her Masters in Social Work from Columbia University and obtained a Certificate in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy from the prestigious four year postgraduate Training Institute for Mental Health, New York City, graduating with honors. She had additional training in Family therapy and Brief Solution-Oriented Psychotherapy, holds a Diplomate status from the National Association of Social Workers and is listed in the National Register. Her expertise spans a wide spectrum of mental health issues including adjustment and personality disorders, depression, anxiety and mood disorders. Her practice includes family and couples treatment, "constructive" divorce counseling, life transitions, adoptions, parenting and aging. She also specializes in men's issues, anger, and stress management, offers workshops for community agencies and has taught Masters levels therapists. Ms. Gibel is an expert in holistic healing, and utilizes a mind-body-spirit approach to healing when patients are open to it. Her private practice is in West Palm Beach, FL.

Deri Ronis, Ph.D.

Dr. Ronis' is a Florida State Certified Family/County Mediator and a Certified hypnotherapist in private practice specializing in psychospiritual issues, anger management, behavioral therapy, family issues, and addictionology. She is a Pastoral Counselor, and has served as a founder and part-time mediator/counselor at the Toussaint L'Ouverture High School of Arts and Social Justice. She is also a Redress Mediator for the United States Postal Service and currently serves as an Adjunct Professor for The Union Institute, Miami, FL. She is also an author and corporate trainer in Anger Management, Multi-Cultural Diversity, Human Resource Management as well as Conflict Prevention and Intervention. Dr. Deri co-founded the Conflict Resolution Clinic in Nassau, Bahamas and helped to found the Bahamian Bar Association and is currently serving as a Rotary Scholar and Goodwill Ambassador in San Ignacio, Belize.

Amy Sherman, M.A., LMHC

Ms. Sherman is a licensed Mental Health Counselor with a master's degree in Counseling/Psychology from Vermont College. She has been providing individual sessions, group therapy and family counseling to men, women and children for more than twelve years. She has worked extensively with adolescent substance abusers and their families at a treatment facility where she experienced, first hand, the emotional impact of divorce on children. She has also developed and facilitated groups for men and women involved in physically and mentally abusive relationships. Working with these populations helped her understand the intricate dynamics between children,

parents and spouses and has enabled her to successfully help many troubled families. She has taught psychology to young adults at the college level and is presently in private practice, specializing in relationship issues, women's health and substance abuse. She is in private practice in Lake Worth, FL.

Jo Ann C. Simmons, M.A., LMHC., RCC

After completing more than 23 years of public school counseling experience, Jo Ann enjoys working in private practice in Orlando, FL where she provides family counseling, corporate coaching, and woman's wellness programs. She also advises parents who may be facing a messy divorce by providing key strategies for making a better transition. She received her Master's Degree from Florida Atlantic University, and acquired her Mental Health Counselor License in the State of Florida. Her new ebook, "*Single No More*," is written for women and men who are "ready" to begin a new chapter in their lives. When she's not traveling with her husband, she's offering personal achievement seminars and coaching for singles who want a "better fit" in a love relationship.

C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC

Dr. Wanio is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Licensed Mental Health Counselor in private practice in Boca Raton and Lake Worth, Florida. He is also licensed as a Marriage, Family and Child Therapist in California where he was co-founder of the West Valley Counseling and Psychotherapy Center outside of Los Angeles. Dr. Wanio is the author of the book: "*I Love You ...I Think: When Sex Disguises Itself As Love*" and

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

conducts seminars and workshops on a variety of related topics. He is certified to practice hypnotherapy in Florida and California and served as the “relationship columnist” for the Boca Raton News. He has appeared on numerous radio and television shows and was on the board of directors for the non-profit group, “Women Helping Women Help Themselves.”

* * * *

As you move through the creation of your storybook, this impressive team of professionals will be on hand to offer suggestions as well as words of caution. They will share examples and expertise based on years of counseling or mediating families facing divorce. Their insight will flesh out each chapter with a broader perspective to make it more meaningful and relatable to *your* story, *your* family and *your* children.

By the time your “storybook” is complete, you will have created it with a deeper understanding of the possible obstacles on the road ahead. You will also have the benefit of therapist-recommended resources you can turn to for support during trying times. Most important of all, you will be ready to tell your kids about your impending separation or divorce with a keen awareness of how this will impact the dynamics of your family structure.

Chapter 3: GETTING STARTED

What you are about to create for your child or children is a personal family storybook that is different from any storybook they've ever read before. It's different because it's all about their family and them. It's written by an author or authors who know them intimately, love them deeply, and want to shelter them from sadness and pain. Consequently its message comes directly from the heart.

You will be writing this storybook because you and your spouse know its content better than anyone else on the planet. With the help of my simple, fill-in-the-blanks template you will be guided in having a difficult conversation by conveying your message with clarity, empathy and love.

The appearance of your storybook can be as creative and personal as you desire. Your time, energy, ability to focus and other related factors will play a part in determining which format to choose. I used a simple photo album with clear adhesive pages when creating my storybook for my son. It had an attractive, yet simple cover design. I created a title page with a dedication, which I'll share with you in a later chapter.

Whether your format is simple, imaginative or elaborate, remember its ultimate value and purpose – a reassuring resource to help you tell your child about changes ahead that may be sad, disturbing, unexpected, a relief or even frightening. Design it with your family in mind and you're sure to achieve your purpose.

Here are some suggestions to consider for your own storybook:

A. Computer generated pages

Simply fill in the blanks on the template, print out the pages on colorful stock, construction or other type of paper and combine with matching pages of photographs downloaded from your computer or pasted onto your stock. Include a cover page. Use a ring binder, staple together, bind with colorful string or ribbons or have it bound at a local Kinko's. Be open to size and shape options beyond the norm to make your storybook more appealing to your children.

B. Simple photo album

A basic photo album with clear adhesive pages from a dollar store or Wal-Mart will do the trick to create your storybook. Print out the text on colored or white printer paper. You can put the text on the right side and your family photographs on the left side. Or cut the text sheet into sections and integrate with photos on each page.

C. Gift-store photo album

You may want to consider selecting a more elaborate photo album from a gift or specialty store. The process is the same. The results will just appear that much more special as a keepsake.

D. Personalized scrap book

Scrap booking has become a major pastime in many nations around the world. There are stores dedicated exclusively to scrap book supplies,

designs and decorative pieces. Those who are moved in this direction will find many gratifying ways to embellish your storybook text and photos with color, texture and impact. Family-related themes, such as pets, nature, baseball, skiing, music, etc. can add an additional dimension of credibility to the storybook

E. Customized storybook

Those of you with creative, artistic gifts may be motivated to put a lot of thought and energy into designing and completing your storybook using paint, decoupage, fabric and more. However, don't forget the reason you're creating this book so you won't get carried away in a distracting direction.

Regardless of the style and format you choose, I encourage you to include family photographs and drawings to bring the storybook to life. The pictures make your book relevant, authentic and very personal. They bring up memories, shared experiences and thoughts of better times (maybe even a smile or two). They also reinforce for your children the message that yours is a family and, as a family, you will meet this new challenge head on.

You are embarking on a project that will help your family weather significant changes ahead with dignity, integrity and compassion. Keeping your children's emotional needs foremost as you move through your pending separation or divorce will reap unimagined rewards for both you and them in the weeks, months, years and decades ahead.

Part Two: Your Storybook

Chapter 4: YOUR HISTORY

Why It's So Important

Children rarely think about their parents' lives before they were born. Self-absorbed by nature, kids are usually preoccupied with their needs, wants, fears and interests above all else – even into late adolescence and early adulthood.

Children also love stories. They like to hear them, read them and tell them to others. When given the opportunity, kids are fascinated by stories about their parents – how mom and dad met, things they did together, where they lived and worked and what life was like before they were born. By reminding your children that their parents had a history together before their birth, you give them a perspective on life as an ongoing process with many ups and downs, twists and turns. Life becomes a continuous ever-changing adventure.

That is why we begin our storybook by attracting your children's attention with information and selected memories about mom and dad's history. This ultimately will set the stage for understanding that there are many new adventures in their lives still to unfold after the divorce.

The pending changes in your family become yet another chapter in their life process, but certainly not the last one. There will be days, months and years ahead, with new experiences, new challenges and new rewards – maybe even new storybooks.

The Experts Perspective

Adapting Your Storybook

By Beverly Gibel, LCSW, ACSW, BCD

There is no exact way that a parent should approach telling their story. Each person's history is unique, each person's comfort level in self-disclosure is different, and each child's sensitivity varies. Guidelines about how to share your background should be based on the positive feelings, goals and aspirations you had as you entered into the relationship with the other parent. You can begin by reflecting where you were at in your life when you decided to get married or enter into a serious committed relationship, focusing on your desire to share love, life, a home and family.

Difficult situations can be shared if they are presented with age-appropriate details and with a relatively positive outcome. So if, for instance, a pregnancy was unplanned, this can be reframed by telling the child that he or she was a surprise, but what a wonderful surprise gift to know a baby was on the way. And yes, preparing for a baby under any circumstances takes adjusting to because there are many

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

arrangements to be made and things to be bought; but the excitement of having a new little person in the family counteracted the worries.

In other examples, perhaps the child's birth was very traumatic, or there was post-partum depression, or financial problems. Any of these can be acknowledged, but not delved into, and always followed by a description of related positive thoughts, preparations, and situations - even if they were few and far between. Difficult times around childbirth and the child's early years, regardless of who had the problem, should be couched in terms of how hard the parents strived to cope and correct the problem, and how they did, indeed, overcome adversity.

One reason not to be brutally honest about negative events, situations and feelings is that there has probably been an overload of negativity in recent times, leading up to the divorce. The likely truth is that there was much positive emotion when the marriage began, and it is quite therapeutic for both parties to dust off the cobwebs of their memory bank and reconnect with all that was good between them. The omission of painful or very intimate details is not to be viewed as an attempt to deceive the children, but to spare them further pain.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

For instance, one woman I know wanted a divorce following many years of her husband's infidelity. Although level headed and even-tempered, she thought she was on the right track with her intention to tell their 11 and 15 year olds that their father suffered from a character defect. She wanted them to know that she had been a good and loyal wife who had tolerated his indiscretions from the beginning; she wanted to tell the children the details of his many affairs.

She was encouraged, instead, to work on her underlying anger towards her husband, including some serious private talks with him. She needed to spare the children this ugly truth, since he was otherwise a devoted father and husband. She had to grapple with her own understanding of him as a sex/relationship addict who required psychological help. The children's psychological needs to hold on to the positive traits of their father were of greater importance than telling "the truth" at this point of transition in all their lives. Hopefully, as he progresses in his own psychotherapy, he could disclose what he learned about himself when the children were grown and mature enough to understand such adult issues.

In another family, a devoted mother's chronic alcohol use was the reason for the husband initiating a divorce. In this case, three young children had

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

seen their mom impaired and smelled alcohol enough to know that “mom has a problem.” This father had to suppress his own anger and the wish to put her down and say the derogatory things he thought she deserved; instead, he had to ‘reframe’ the issue.

He had several talks with his children which included how he loved their mother but had to detach because she would not acknowledge her serious problem. He would tell them, “Sometimes a good person makes poor choices. Your mom loves you but has to face her problem when she is ready. In the meantime, I need to be away from her so that I can give you kids a healthier home.”

While these two examples may be atypical divorce situations, they underscore the need for all divorcing parents to edit anger, resentment and the wish for revenge out of their conversations with their children. Instead I encourage them to focus more on positive traits and situations, and how negative traits and conditions can be worked on and ameliorated.

Starting the Process

We’re ready to start creating your family storybook. This book contains two versions of the template. The first is for children aged five to ten. The second is designed for older children up to about age

fifteen. As parents, you are the best ones to determine which template most closely accommodates your child's emotional maturity. Some nine and ten year olds are more precocious and emotionally involved in the issues surrounding the separation or divorce. Some eleven and twelve year olds are better off getting a simpler, more succinct version of your story.

What if you have several children ranging from five into the teens? I suggest you use the most basic template for the entire family and reserve more intimate and detailed conversations for your older children in the days and weeks ahead, as the subject comes up.

In this chapter we are starting with the first section of your template, which should be easy to complete. The answers will be obvious and you can alter any sentences to fit your circumstances. Keep your responses short, simple and positive. This is not the place to mention troubles during your engagement, past separations, or troubled times such as evictions, lost jobs, etc.

Below, I've prepared a Section One template with completed answers (**shown in bold**) as a sample guide for your reference. After reviewing this section I encourage you to write your answers in your actual template at the end of the book and use it as the text in your final customized storybook.

* * * *

(SAMPLE Template)

Basic Template: Ages 10-15

Our Family Story

Before you were born

This is a story of our family. The **Smith** family. It's a story of all the different things we've done and the changes we've gone through. It begins long before you were born.

Mom and Dad met ...

when we were both working at the Stoneybrook Hotel in Marion, Ohio. Dad was a waiter in the dining room and Mom worked in the recreation department.

On our first date ...

we went to dinner at the Lakeside Inn. We went dancing after that.

We enjoyed doing many things together such as ...

Swimming, dancing, going to the old drive-in movie theater and sometimes trips to the shore. We also liked to go bowling with a group of friends.

We got married on **June 25, 1991** at ...

Wayne Methodist Church in Wayne, Ohio. The reception was at Le Chateau. We had about 85 guests attending.

The first place we lived was ...

1225 Brian Street in Wayne. We had a one-bedroom apartment on the second floor of a townhouse just 3 blocks from Granny Greene's house.

Mom and Dad had many happy times together after we were married. There were tough times too. Sometimes this created sadness in our lives. But we always tried hard to make our marriage work.

One thing Mom and Dad agreed about was having a baby. We wanted to have a child who would get all the love we both had in us. That baby was **Erika Dawn**, born on **October 5, 1993!**

When You Were Born

(for a one child family)

or

Starting A Family

(for a family with 2 or more children)

Having a new baby who grew quickly into a little toddler kept Mom and Dad very busy. There was little time to think about much beyond taking care of our beloved **Erika** and working to make money for our family.

On **March 14, 1996** we were blessed with another baby, **Brian Matthew**, who we also loved dearly. Our family was growing.

A few years later, on

_____,
was born, and we were all so happy to
welcome our newest baby into the world.

And then, on _____, little
_____ joined our family –
giving us another special person to love.

Our family did many fun things together. Do
you remember when we ...

**visited Grandma and Grandpa Smith in
the old farmhouse? You kids loved
feeding the chickens and riding the
neighbor's horses. We also had fun on
our vacations to big Lake Tyron where
we rented the cabin. Remember our
picnic lunches on the little island?**

Mom and Dad were happy to watch you grow
and loved you with all of our hearts. But Mom
and Dad were not always very happy.

(End of Section One)

* * * *

If you are using the template for ages five to ten you
can simplify your answers to just a few words or one
sentence. You just want to convey a thought,
putting a simple picture in their minds.

As you will note, this template can be adapted to a
family with one child or families with multi-children.

If only one child is receiving this book, you can use YOU instead of their name when referring to their birth. Obviously, you will stop your story at the number of children in your family, deleting the other sentences, or add additional sentences if your family is even larger.

Suggested photographs

Just a few photographs go a long way in conveying the history you are referring to. Choose a photo of mom and dad together. Perhaps you have an action shot skating, bowling, or celebrating a birthday with the family. The interior or exterior of your house might be fun to share with the kids. You get the idea.

Storybook format options

There are three basic ways you can translate the template into your final product.

- A) You can print each completed page of the template, then cut and paste the pages into your storybook along with appropriately related photographs.
- B) You can print out the text in the font, size, color and style you prefer for your storybook.
- C) You can also hand-print the text with colored markers or ink, weaving it around the photos as a reflection of your personal artistic expression.

Of course, there are many variations of the above that you can choose in designing your storybook. With a little time and creativity, the options are

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

limitless. Regardless of how you convey the text, creating a platform for sharing your history as the parents of your children is your ultimate purpose in this section of the storybook. Have some fun with it. And remember that it's okay to experience your emotions as memories trigger nostalgia for days long past, and perhaps happier times.

Chapter 5:

EXPLAINING THE PROBLEM

Understanding the Challenge

In this chapter we focus on how to tell your children something that they probably already know ... Mom and Dad are having problems. Years of research verifies that children usually feel the tensions, emotions and dysfunction within a family structure long before they are told or can understand what it's all about. This manifests in different ways within different children. But the consequences are usually much the same – children who are confused, sad, angry, hurt and feeling powerless about what to do.

Children reflect the energy around them. They hear what's being said – and not said. Like the most sensitive radar, they pick up on tones of voice, disrespectful references and all the subtle nuances that shout PROBLEMS, even when no one is acknowledging them.

Whether you and your spouse are having loud fights around the children ... or whispering in hushed tones behind the bedroom door – whether you go for days barely speaking beyond essentials about the daily schedule ... or ask your children to be intermediaries in answering questions about your partner's activities – you are not fooling your children or keeping them from feeling the pain of your own pain.

With this clearly in mind, we move on to the message conveyed in the next section of the template – **our marriage has been experiencing problems**. By owning and sharing the truth, and

explaining that this happens to many people in life, we now set the stage for introducing the divorce element to come.

Avoiding judgments

In preparing this section of the template one thing is essential for you both to remember. This is not about judging either parent as good or bad, right or wrong. People are different. The families they were raised in are all vastly different. Their life experiences greatly differ. And, consequently, they see the world differently. Is there any wonder so many people have problems getting along? This section of the template suggests that this is a challenge taking place in our family right now, and we need to do something about it.

It is important to note here that the above statement about not judging “good or bad” reflects on separations and divorces involving two basically loving parents who cannot see eye-to-eye and need to move on in separate directions. In situations where fear, physical or emotional abuse, immorality or some other major issue stands between both parents, the wording in your storybook will have to be adapted accordingly. Refer to the suggestions some of our experts make in handling difficult emotional, ethical and moral challenges between both parents.

The Experts’ Perspective

Preparing Your Children for the Divorce

By Beverly Gibel, LCSW, ACSW, BCD

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

If you are like most people, difficult issues and bad news make you feel uncomfortable. The usual tendency is to avoid distress; this is human instinct and a protective psychological defense. It follows, then, that people thinking about marital separation and divorce often avoid facing the issue with their children, or they handle it in inadequate ways.

Often parents have had trouble facing their own needs and wishes for divorce for varying amounts of time. I have encountered many people who have taken years. They experienced feelings of marital unhappiness. The need to end the union and be free to move on may have been faint, fleeting and incubating without overt acknowledgement. By the time a person is ready to begin to act, he or she has endured much anger, hurt, sadness and guilt. Along with the stresses and strains of daily life, the foreboding separation can be overwhelming. Thoughts of how to manage the physical and financial separation often overshadow those of the emotional separation.

People in this situation clearly need help. Yet, more often than not, only severe coping problems or a crisis will propel a person into psychotherapy. Few people actually read books on divorce. While the information acquired can be useful,

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

the benefit gained is purely on an intellectual level which does not help a person cope with their difficult emotions. Talking with family and friends has its limitations, since these people are neither trained nor objective in their feedback, and hence, are unlikely to know the best approach to address children's emotional needs.

What a stroke of genius that Rosalind Sedacca has originated a simple but deeply meaningful tool to assist us.

How Do I Tell The Kids about the Divorce? can help you face your own painful feelings, then enable you to help your children to become aware, tolerate and eventually accept the break-up of their family as they know it.

Hopefully, as a parent, you will use this book and will not rely on its creation and reading as a one time event. Whenever a person is in the process of moving towards divorce, it is never too late to begin the right way. It is important to think of preparing for divorce as a series of events and conversations over a period of time. It is helpful to start acknowledging, in bits and pieces infused into daily life, what your children may or may not already know: that Mom and Dad have not been getting along, have not been seeing much of each other, have been arguing, or whatever description applies to your

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

situation. This is a way to open a conversation as well as to validate what your children may have been observing.

Then listen for your child's response. If none is forthcoming, you might ask your child, "What do you think?" Hopefully, if you can be patient and give the child some time to reflect and respond, there will be some dialogue about the tensions between Mom and Dad. Perhaps, either the parents or the child may mention specific incidents that were distressing. Again, just listen and validate the child's perceptions and feelings, neither defending nor blaming one parent nor the other.

The conversations with children, both formal and casual - if possible within those "teachable moments" - are preparatory and eventually therapeutic in that they can assist in healing. Parents are typically aware of their child's need for a stable home environment or consistency in routine and activities. But they are less knowledgeable about their child's emotional needs.

For simplicity sake, we can say that there are several aspects of divorce: the legal, the financial, the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. By the time a couple decides to act on one or more of these variables, there has probably been a

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

huge build-up of negative emotion. Again for simplicity's sake, we can categorize these as variations in intensity and duration of anger, sadness, fear, guilt and shame.

The chronic build-up of any of these emotions can be extremely detrimental in both parents and their children. These emotions may have been expressed verbally or physically, appropriately or not. They may have been suppressed (consciously held in) or repressed (held in without awareness). Intense emotion may be acted out (for instance, one parent may overspend the budget or have an affair to get back at the other, or a child who is fearful about home life may suddenly be unwilling to go to school).

Intense emotion held in can get channeled into the tissues of the body, leading to physical or mental symptoms. For instance, emotional distress commonly can cause digestive disturbances, headaches, anxiety attacks or depression. Every single symptom, except that caused by physical trauma, starts out as emotional distress. That is why it is imperative that divorcing parents learn to handle their own emotions and that of their children in healthy ways. Further guidance about the constructive handling of emotions will be offered in later chapters. Suffice it to say, that ***How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?*** will be your map,

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

and the mental health experts will be your guides, as you embark on this journey.

How Will Divorce Affect My Child?

By C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC

This may be one of the most difficult times that you have ever experienced in your life. Adding to your distress may also be the thought of how difficult a time this is for your child. To ask, "How will my divorce affect my child?" is a very courageous question.

Because you care and want the best for your child, you may not want to see the ill-effects that your divorce may be creating. No one wants to feel responsible for causing undue emotional pain to someone that they love. You may also feel overburdened by your own emotions. Helplessness, confusion, frustration and guilt are feelings common to parents as well as to children. Yet, this is a time of countless demands. Not only are you expected to understand what your child is experiencing, but to know what to do about it. Clear thinking and good decision-making are imperative while all the while you may feel most like giving up.

The first thing to remember is that you are only human and you will do your

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

best. Do you doubt that? Then, think about why you are reading this book. That's right. You care about getting through this time with your child(ren) in the best way possible.

The next thing to remember is that young children (especially preteen) do not think as adults. As sophisticated as they may appear, they are still quite emotionally immature and divorce can make them feel even more so.

Divorce is always a significant, emotionally difficult and sometimes even traumatic experience. Though it can potentially help a child to become a more sensitive and mature individual, it is an event through which a child must struggle, often silently. It is an event he/she must sort out, make sense of and, hopefully, adjust to in a manner that will create growth rather than future problems.

There are ways to lessen the severity of the negative effects of divorce and actually help your child (and yourself) through this time. Acceptance and courage may be the two most important concepts to keep in mind - acceptance of the changes, the pain and complications of divorce and the courage and strength to move forward.

Facts About Divorce

The following reflects some general information regarding the effects of

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

divorce. This may or may not apply to your particular situation and is meant only as a guideline.

- ❖ Divorce affects all children, but boys seem to be more strongly affected than girls. Often, more is expected of them, they are given less support and are more threatened by the loss of their fathers. Boys can be helped regarding problems of identity formation and role modeling by having other adult males in their lives. (The same also holds true regarding women role models for little girls.)
- ❖ The most vulnerable ages for children in general are between 3 and 10 years old. No age is immune, however, and even adolescents are often strongly affected.
- ❖ Preschoolers are more frightened and anxious, but tend to adjust better in the long-run. Their biggest fear is of abandonment. Older kids understand more, but do not have adequate coping skills and seem to have more long-term problems. They also remember life before divorce so experience a greater change.
- ❖ Mothers and sons usually have the most difficult time and run up

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

against the most emotional conflicts.

- ❖ Boys may become more aggressive and girls more precocious.
- ❖ Withdrawing (staying to oneself) or regression (reverting back to more infantile behavior) is common in both sexes.
- ❖ The first two years of divorce are the most difficult and it can take an average of three to five years to really “work through” and resolve many of the issues and emotions. For some, the effects of divorce last many additional years or even a lifetime if not dealt with appropriately. Taking steps (like outlined in this book) are important actions to help move through this time rather than merely letting “time heal all wounds.”
- ❖ Children often miss the absent parent even if they were not treated well or were ignored. Sometimes this parent is missed even more due to the horrible feeling that what was absent in the parent-child relationship will never be obtained ... that getting the missed love is even more hopeless now. The child's anxiety comes from feeling desperately needy of this parent's love and

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

approval in order to feel worthwhile, important and lovable.

- ❖ Though children may have witnessed a troubled marriage and family life, they may still benefit greatly from observing their parents working out a reasonable and respectful post-divorce arrangement. This will affect a child's adjustment more than any other factor.
- ❖ There is a tendency for the role of the absent parent to be re-created through the child. Mothers commonly create the same kinds of arguments with their sons that they had with their husbands. And, sons attempt to imitate their father as a way of holding on to him. This replacement role should be avoided and changed when it occurs. (This can also occur between fathers and daughters.)
- ❖ The degree of consistency in the home environment and how well the parents have handled their separation greatly influences a child's reaction to divorce.
- ❖ Children often persist in believing that there is hope of their parent's reconciliation, or not believing, initially, that the divorce is "real." Even when told ahead of time, they can still be

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

taken by surprise when the divorce occurs and often do not understand why it happened even when it appears obvious to everyone else.

- ❖ Children who maintain good, healthy, continued relationships with both parents tend to fare much better than children who have access to only one parent (unless, of course, one parent is abusive).
- ❖ To a young child, a couple of days or a week can seem like “forever.” Be sensitive as to how long a time your child is away from the primary caregiver or length of time between seeing the non-custodial parent. “Extended” time a parent spends away from their child can also cause anxiety. Children miss their parents and can be greatly distressed when away for too long a time from their “home base” or when a parent is away. Each child’s response will differ due to age, maturity level and coping ability.
- ❖ Mothers play a very important role and are usually the ones who provide the most nurturing. They are also a role model for girls and give boys their first view of how women treat men in a relationship. The role of a father is also profoundly important on child development and

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

should not be minimized. Boys form much of their identity from their fathers and girls obtain their first views of how a man treats a woman from them. How loved and respected by both parents a child feels affects self-esteem, identity, the concept of how lovable he/she is, and a sense of what to expect from future relationships in their lives.

- ❖ Most women suffer a strong decrease in their standard of living with a divorce, yet women are usually the primary caregivers of children. This affects not only the children, but an entire generation. It also creates a negative vision of men in the eyes of children if settlements are imbalanced. On the other hand, if women re-marry and/or have adequate financial means, to demand more from the other parent can appear vengeful, hostile and disrespectful.
- ❖ Fathers who comply with spouse and/or child support, share parenting decisions and responsibilities, and maintain a good working relationship with the other parent, are more satisfied with themselves and their roles as fathers.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

- ❖ Many studies indicate that children experience less emotional distress or trauma due to parental separation and divorce than from the emotional turmoil of a severely troubled intact family.
- ❖ Though very difficult, divorce is not always traumatic. While it is stressful and upsetting, it can also be a relief from a destructive situation and an opportunity to create a much healthier situation and lifestyle.

Discussing the "Other Parent"

By C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC

Ideally, it is best to discuss your divorce with your child before its occurrence, with enough time to prepare, but not so much time as to cause prolonged anxiety. Two or three weeks in advance is a general rule of thumb, but use your own judgment.

Age-appropriate language and explanations should be used without making anyone the "bad guy." Since your child identifies with both of you, suggesting one parent is "bad" is like telling your child that a part of

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

him/her is "bad." Speaking ill of the other parent leads to:

- making your child feel the need to chose between you,
- teaching the use of blaming and complaining,
- creating conflicts and a negative self-image within your child,
- perpetuating more ill-will and negative feelings.

Even if you are very angry and the other parent did treat you and your child terribly, putting that parent down will only create much inner turmoil for your child and is not a good idea. If your child is upset with the other parent, be understanding and even supportive, but use discretion. Let your child have his/her own feelings without going overboard with your own. Again, if there was abuse or abandonment, assure your child that he/she was not to blame and is not at fault. You may wish to say (in your own words) that you don't like what happened, are upset by it, and that these circumstances were due to a "problem of the other parent" which made it impossible for that parent to appropriately show love, that you don't blame your child for being angry, but it's best to now go on with your lives. Though it may temporarily feel good to unleash your own anger, this usually

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

only promotes conflicts within your child and may even prolong your anger.

In general, it is best to criticize the *actions* of the other parent, not the parent him/herself. And, rather than having your child feel responsible for any abuse, neglect or abandonment, explain that your child was in a "no win" situation and could not do anything about it. Distinguish with your child the difference between certain behaviors that do have positive and negative consequences, and this situation which was not dependent upon how your child behaved. Assure your child that getting in trouble for not doing chores has nothing to do with the divorce and that your child is loved even when he/she has misbehaved. If abused, neglected or abandoned by the other parent, explain that this is not caused by a child's behavior, but by a problem within the parent. Since your child may be feeling guilty and insecure, your clarification, explanation and support will make an important difference.

Trusting Your Relationship With Your Child

Though some marriages end with mutual respect and continued responsible parenting, others do not. If you suspect that the other parent is manipulating and "conning" your child or that your child is "blind" to the

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

other parent's faults, do not become overly alarmed.

Though it is very hard to watch an irresponsible parent receive praise while you do what's right and get criticized, be patient. If you are truly being responsible and loving, your child will eventually see "the light." Believe in yourself and your relationship with your child. If you try too hard to fight or change your child's feelings, your child will only fight you, become more convinced that the other parent is right, and you will have created the very thing you're trying to avoid. By arguing, your child will become even more allied with the other parent which will delay the time it will take to see what's really occurring. This is often the case when one parent is all "fun and games" and the other is the "rule-maker," "disciplinarian," "tutor" and one who takes the child to the doctor, dentist, etc. This may also occur if one parent continually disappoints the child and the child does not want to face this, so takes that parent's side in order to create a relationship where none or little exists.

Trust that when your child does see the other parent's "true colors" it will have much more impact than anything you could have said. Your child can fight your words, but not his/her own eyes. This may take some time and your child may not want to see the truth. That

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

kind of truth can be very painful and hard for your child to believe. Even after children see that they have been lied to or deceived, they are often too hurt to openly admit it. So, have patience, help your child to think for him/herself and to form his/her own opinions.

Just because your child doesn't see things the way that you do doesn't mean that he/she is against you or doesn't love you. Trust in your relationship with your child as you continue strengthening this bond through your talks, your honesty and your caring.

Dealing With Anger

Dealing with anger in your child or former spouse is a real challenge. Because it can provoke so many strong emotions, the first step in coping with anger is in learning to defuse it. To defuse it, you must understand it.

The expression of anger often occurs when a person is feeling physically or emotionally attacked, mistreated, lonely and sad, "wrong" or "a failure," uncared for or helpless to change a situation. It is an attempt to obtain power and attention (to be noticed, respected, responded to or obeyed), to "let off steam" or obtain revenge. And, although anger comes from feeling threatened, hurt or frustrated, the key ingredient is the feeling of

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

powerlessness - that I will not get my needs met or be listened to. (A person who knows that they will be listened to doesn't have to yell.) Anger may also be an expression of a strong need to assert or protect oneself by sending the message, "No! Stop it! You are hurting me and that's enough. You have gone too far and I must stop this now or I will regret it. Please hear what I am saying!"

When you observe your child becoming excessively angry and hostile, it usually means that he/she is feeling overwhelmed, hurt and incapable of getting some need met. That "need" may not be obvious to yourself or to your child and may be masked or hidden by various distracting behaviors. A tantrum at dinner time may have nothing to do with "eating spinach," but may be due to Mommy/Daddy not being there. Running through the house screaming may be due to feeling a loss of stability within the family structure and a need for limit setting and to know that someone is in charge.

When a child is afraid to express anger directly due to not wanting to further alienate and "lose" a parent's love, feelings may build up until the hidden anger takes the form of the "accidental broken lamp." It's difficult to know what is really going on because the need of the child and the root of the anger is usually hidden and must be searched out. Since anger tends to

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

breed anger, handling these situations is a real challenge. The best approach to use is to not become caught up in your child's expression of anger, but to focus on what it represents - a petition to you to help sort out his/her true feelings, to stop any inappropriate or destructive behavior and to find a better way to get his/her needs met.

You will need to be firm, but compassionate. Let your child know that you understand how upset he/she must be and that it's okay to feel that way, but not okay to call you names, throw things, curse, hit, etc. Do not take it personally if your child says that he/she hates you, or the other parent, brother or sister. This kind of reaction indicates emotional distress which not only needs expression, but a wise person (you) to see beyond the seemingly harsh words to the child's true feelings - fear, disappointment, helplessness or frustration. These are powerful emotions and if not allowed expression, may go inward resulting in intense guilt, stress, anxiety and/or depression. When out of control, redirect your child's outbursts into appropriate actions and expressions that will more effectively relate to the child's problem.

For example: "Johnny/Joanie! I want you to stop throwing things and to tell me what's wrong!"

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

- Or, (taking the child by the hand) "Tell Mike and Jane that it's not okay to knock down your blocks and if they don't stop it then you won't play with them, but you don't hit them."
- Or, (in a low and non-accusatory tone of voice) "I don't believe that you hate me, but you sound very angry with me. Tell me what it is that you're upset about. I want to know."
- Or, "I know it was wrong of them to cheat while you were playing and that you are angry at them, but hair-pulling and kicking are not okay. The next time that happens, you stop playing with them and come and get me. Now, I want you to rest here for 5-minutes (time out) until you settle down."
- Or, "I'm not going to get involved every time you have an argument. I want you to handle some of these things yourself, unless it's an emergency. The next time that happens, here's what I want you to say and do..."

When your child yells, resist the temptation to yell back (accept to initially get his/her attention). If you hear an, "I hate you!", your child is obviously feeling something very strongly. Respond by listening, asking what is wrong and reflecting back the feeling:

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

- "You're really upset, aren't you? I'm sorry that you feel that way. Why don't you come over here and we'll talk about it?"
- Or, I know that you're feeling very angry with me right now. What's wrong?"
- Or, "I know that you're quite upset with me, but I don't want us to talk about hating and trying to hurt each other. Tell me what's wrong so we can work it out together."

If your child is constantly saying, "I hate..." or a particular curse word, then let him/her know that you have heard him/her, understand, and that that's enough. It may also be a signal that your child needs some additional private time to talk with you. But don't say, "Now, Johnny/Joanie, you don't really hate anyone or feel that way, now do you?" This will only feel confusing and provoke even more anger in your child since you are not being very understanding, not really hearing the message that your child is expressing, and seemingly telling your child that he/she doesn't feel what he/she is feeling. That can be very exasperating for a child. Telling your child that he/she doesn't feel the way that he/she does feel will not change anything. It will only help your child to feel more confused, misunderstood and self-doubting.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

A basic rule to remember is: "It is always alright for a person to feel whatever they are feeling, but it is not always alright to do whatever one wants to do." Examples:

- "I understand that you are angry with Joe/Jill, and it's OK to tell him/her that you're angry, but it isn't okay to hit, call dirty names or to break his/her toys."
- Or, you can reframe the word "hate" to "anger."

Along with compassion, children need this kind of structure and limit setting to help them to grow up and to feel secure. It is not enough to tell children what is unacceptable. We must also teach them acceptable ways of coping and doing what we expect of them. Often, an expression of strong anger by a child is a message that the child is in need of behavioral limits. Children need to know that there are limits or boundaries for their behavior. This enables them to feel safe in knowing that their feelings, expressions and behavior will not become overwhelming, out of control or even dangerous.

A second basic rule is: "Children may become hostile, adults should only be stern." One is aimed at revenge, the other is aimed at resolution. For an adult, anger should be worn like a sweater which can easily be removed or put on according to the "atmospheric

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

conditions." Anger should merely be used to make a strong point, not to rant, rave and unload a flurry of feelings or hurt a child's feelings. This implies being in control of one's anger rather than being controlled by it. How is that done? Much in the same way that an actor becomes angry for a particular scene, feeling the anger, yet remembering the lines - where thinking and feeling go hand-in-hand. Where the motivation for the actor is the play, the motivation for the parent is the child's well-being. Remember, that no matter how angry you become, the person with whom you are angry is also someone that you love.

Understanding that your child's anger is mostly an expression of helplessness will make it easier for you to handle these situations without becoming overly furious. If you find yourself becoming hostile rather than merely angry and your actions aimed at revenge rather than discipline, it is a signal that your stress level is too high and that a significant problem exists between your child and yourself. Do not put off getting some quick professional help with a problem like this or a terrible strain will develop between you and your child.

A good place to start is to call various counseling centers to see if they have any "parenting classes or groups." There are some very good ones available which are relatively

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

inexpensive. Why do I recommend counseling, psychotherapy or self-help groups? Because they are simply the most effective and fastest way to get through these situations. Even so, it can be very hard to make that phone call. But, because I know that those are the most efficient and practical solutions that will save you time and exasperation in the long run, I urge you to call and make an appointment.

In fact, if you are experiencing difficulties of this nature with your child now, why not put this book aside while we're talking about it, and make a few calls? Look in the Yellow Pages under Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Mental Health Counselors, Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, Hospitals, or call 211 and ask about "parenting groups" for people in your situation and for someone who works well with families. Be persistent. And if you can't find a suitable group, consider starting your own divorce group for mutual support, sharing ideas and child care.

* * * *

Your Storybook Template: Section Two

We are now ready to review the second section of your storybook template. In many cases, this section can stand alone and be used as written without any further personalization. You can end

this section after the first paragraph under **Facing Our Problems.**

However, if you are talking to older children or those who have been keenly aware of problems in the family structure long before this, you may want to provide additional details here. Continue using the template by completing the sentences provided. They offer you an opportunity to acknowledge glaring differences between parents that are no secret to the children and may, in fact, be creating considerable tension in their lives.

Only address issues related to the children here. Circumstances revolving around sex, adultery, financial conflicts and other marital differences of an adult nature should not be revealed and explored with your children unless they are directly relevant.

(In some cases, financial problems may affect school activities, moving to a new neighborhood, taking a second job, etc. Since the children are directly affected, you may want to state some of these differences in your template.)

I've included two samples you can refer to as a guide in preparing your own answers. Be honest, brief and non-judgmental in your responses. You may list one major difference or several. Just don't get complex at this time. Remember, you are not encouraging your children to take sides. Rather, you are stating obvious facts that have lead to the circumstances at hand. Clarification is your only purpose here.

* * * *

(SAMPLE Template continues)

There Were Problems

As you can see in the pictures, Mom and Dad have gone through a lot of changes since we first met. Those changes have taken place on the outside and also inside our hearts and minds.

There were many things Mom and Dad did not agree about or want to do together. Sometimes we had little fights about that ... and sometimes the fights were not so little. You've heard us fighting many times as you've grown, so it's no secret to you.

When we fight we know it makes you sad. It makes us sad, too. It especially makes us sad because none of this is your fault. Even though we tried hard, Mom and Dad couldn't stop the fights or keep them from hurting you. We are not proud of this. The truth is, that was a big mistake.

Facing Our Problems

Mom and Dad do not get into arguments because either one of us is a bad person. We just do not agree about some important things. Much of what we like and care about are different, too. These differences have created problems for us.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

You may know about some of the problem areas in our family because you've heard Mom and Dad talking about them many times.

You know that Mom believes ...

you children should do your homework before you can watch TV or play on the computer.

(or)

having dinner together as a family is more important than football practice. You need to decide on one sport only, not play two.

Dad, on the other hand, believes ...

you are old enough to decide when to do your homework yourself and don't have to be told.

sports are an important part of a healthy childhood and should have priority status in a kid's life. There's nothing wrong with participating in two or three sports at one time.

Fighting is not good for a family, especially for the children. It makes kids feel upset, sad and frightened. Very often children blame themselves for all the problems even though it is not their fault. Mom's and Dad's differences and problems are definitely not YOUR fault!

Mom and Dad tried hard to solve our problems. What we've done so far has failed. So now, after all the sadness, we think there is a way our family can be happier again – when we're together and when we're apart.

(End of Section Two)

* * * *

Always keep in mind the age of the youngest child who will be listening to you as you read this storybook. If they are not able to understand the complexity of the problems behind the divorce, don't address them at this time. Make it a point to have additional conversations with older children to discuss these matters, always using age-appropriate language.

Photo suggestions

I suggest you use a few family photos in this section, perhaps from when the children were very young, progressing to more recent shots. It's a reminder that even though we are acknowledging that there have been problems, we are still a family and there have been good memories that we can all share.

If both parents were not frequently present over the years, then use happy pictures of the children with the primary parent.

Chapter 6:

EXPLAINING THE SOLUTION

Essential Components

We are now approaching the most sensitive part of our storybook. In this section we are addressing differences between you and your spouse, while at the same time reinforcing that you have united for a mutually beneficial purpose – protecting the children you love.

The message you are sharing at this time is very clear: while many changes will be taking place in the coming weeks and months, many things will still remain the same. Here we create an opportunity for you to focus on details in the children's lives that will not change: i.e. the primary house they are living in, the school they attend, sports and social activities, their bedrooms, their friends, their clothes and toys, etc.

Next, and most crucial of all, the storybook shares some things about your relationship with your children that will not change, i.e. being there for Little League games, making dinner every night, washing the car together Saturday afternoon, reviewing homework or studying together for a test.

Of course, there will be changes and differences ahead as a result of the separation or divorce. Those changes, in a very broad manner, will be revealed or implied in this section.

It is important for you to notice that the changes are presented as givens, previously discussed and agreed upon by both parents. Your children must

understand that they are not responsible for making these decisions. They can not and should not have to experience the pressure of choosing between parents, determining who is right or wrong, or where they want to live. The weight of those decisions, along with the guilt and anxiety attached to them, is far too heavy for children to bear.

The most important idea conveyed in this section is that the love both of you as parents have for your children will continue. This is presented in several ways, again and again, throughout the text, so that the message, and the security it provides, comes through to each of your children.

The Experts' Perspective

Magical Thinking

By C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC

For children, there is a fine line between fantasy and reality. Their imaginations are very powerful and they may see *unreal* monsters that live in closets or under beds which inspire *real* fears. They will also believe that their thoughts can cause real events to happen "magically."

For example, if a child is angry at one of his/her parents and that parent is hurt or has an accident, the child may feel secretly guilty and responsible for "causing" the accident (or divorce) because of having "bad"

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

thoughts, "ill feelings" or "nasty wishes" about Mommy or Daddy.

In believing that a person can cause things to happen just by thinking or wishing it, "**magical thinking**" serves a special purpose for the child. It helps the child to feel a sense of power and control over life ("If I can make bad things happen, I can also make good things happen -- I can have the world just the way that I want it. I can make Mommy and Daddy okay again!")

This type of thinking is a natural part of childhood development and helps a child to cope with reality and feel secure.

Because of the need for a child to make sense of life, the child unwittingly tries to make sense of the impending divorce through "magical thinking" that goes something like this: "I can cause Mommy and Daddy to be angry or happy. Since I cause things to happen, I must have caused the divorce and everything else to happen. Since I cause 'bad' things to happen, I must **be** "bad." If I'm "**bad**" then I'm at fault and to blame. If I'm to **blame**, then I'm **responsible**. If I'm responsible, then it's up to **me** to fix everything!"

The child will further conclude, "It's not that something is wrong with Mommy and Daddy or that **they** have a problem

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

(an overwhelming thought). No, something is wrong with **me!** I am the problem. Period. That's it! **It makes sense!** Now, if I can just figure out what to do, everything will be okay again!" (Of course, these thoughts are at a subconscious level and not something a child is aware of doing.)

This line of thinking obviously creates an impossible and overwhelming dilemma for the child. However, it also offers the child **hope**, a kind of "solution" and a feeling of security. It offers this by making sense to the child. ("It's not my world, parents or God who have a problem or are "wrong." It's me! What a relief! For a moment I thought that the world was unreliable, untrustworthy, "crazy," unpredictable and unloving, but no, no, it's just me.")

Because a child is still dependent upon his/her parents, it becomes too threatening to believe that the chaos and instability brought about by divorce represents how life really is. So, the child creates an imaginative and clever solution in order to cope. The solution may be harmful for the child (self-blame), but at least it appears to make life sensible and bearable.

To the degree that the child holds on to this self-blaming (and it can be held onto for a lifetime), the child's

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

self-esteem, growth and joy will be diminished. To counter this tendency, the child must be shown that:

-- he/she is not to blame for your divorce

-- a major decision such as divorce is and can only be made by parents, not children

-- parents are ultimately responsible and in charge of what happens in the family, and

-- he/she is an important person who is loved and will be listened to, talked with, and cared for.

Divorce: Changing Your Perspectives

By Deri Ronis, PhD

Part of facing the challenge of divorce is recognizing that your children are not to be used as pawns between you and your spouse. They are a gift and one of the greatest lessons you get is to treat them as such. In addition, you also get to practice your own lessons in acceptance, letting go and healing your identity. It often seems that one person in a marriage does not want the divorce. However, both parents must remember that divorce does not always indicate a failure, but rather the

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

realization that two people have chosen not to grow together anymore.

Therapists like to focus their attention on finding ways to keep love relationships from being so painful. One perspective is for both married partners to accept that they chose to be together for an unknown time period to learn the lessons they had to teach each other. This is a much different mindset than simply blaming your spouse for what happened.

It is often stressed that each person needs to take 100% responsibility for what they create. With this way of thinking, we can re-examine who we were when we made the decision to marry and who we have become or grown into when we feel we have to leave for our own survival. Consequently then, the real challenge is in not asking your children to be responsible in any way for *your* decisions.

Many parents make the mistake of looking to their children for validation. Are you guilty of this? By focusing not on blame, but on accepting the lessons you need to learn, wouldn't that make facing your challenges at this time a bit easier?

It is wise to do some exploration into your history. The concept of the "genogram" implies that unconscious behavioral patterns are passed on

inter-generationally. From that perspective, we get to heal unfinished business that we have stored within our psyches. Perhaps now is the time to let go of negative patterns or behaviors in order to open the door to creating a more positive future.

Your Storybook Template

Once again we return to our storybook template. Before you customize your own, please review the sample of the *completed* template I've provided. It gives you an idea of the degree of detail you should provide here. Note that I've listed a couple of suggestions for each fill-in area. You only need to use one brief sentence in your own storybook.

Once again, keep in mind that when having this initial conversation with your children, less is more. Divorce is a complicated process. The purpose of the storybook is not to provide information that may or may not be fully determined at this time. This storybook serves as an introduction that opens the door to many, many discussions to come. In those talks you will be better prepared to discuss specific changes that can be expected in future weeks and months.

At this time, your storybook should not focus on specifics as much as on the emotional support that will always be there for each child in the family. If you can get that message across, then you will have accomplished your primary goal for this initial conversation.

* * *

(SAMPLE Template continues)

Finding A Solution

Mom and Dad have talked about what to do about this many times and have finally found an answer that can work for us all. We have decided ...

that Dad will move into another house in town and you kids can stay with him on weekends and over vacations.

(or)

that Mom and you kids will move to Akron, near Grandma and Grandpa. Dad will visit you every month and see you at vacation time as well.

Even though this will mean changes for us, these changes can be good for our family and create happier times ahead. For example:

- There won't be as much fighting or tension at home
- You will still ...

have your own room, in our house, and go to the same school.

(or)

play with the same friends and toys and go to school with your brothers and sisters.

- You can still ...

play in your Little League team, go to gymnastics and visit Granny on weekends.

(or)

keep Fluffy and go to the dog park with the family.

- Mom will still ...

take you to piano practice and to the movies with Becky on Saturdays.

(or)

have dinner on the table every night and help you with your homework when you need it.

- Dad will still ...

take you to McDonalds and the batting cage every weekend.

(or)

help you with your math homework and take you to visit your cousins next July.

- Mom and Dad will still be your parents and still love you VERY, VERY much!

* * * *

Suggested photographs

This section is an ideal place to showcase photos of your children doing different activities with each parent over the years. It shows that they have spent

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

valuable time with Mom and Dad separately in the past – and they will continue to do so in the future.

If you don't have the photos suggested above, use any photos of your children doing things and it will bring up fond memories.

Chapter 7:

THE ALL-IMPORTANT ENDING

Closing Your Storybook

The final section of the storybook template does not require additional personalization. However, there are sentences for you to complete if you have older children and divorce arrangement specifics already at hand.

This text focuses on helping your children accept the inevitability of change in life. It stresses that change, while often frightening, can result in positive new experiences.

I suggest, at this point in your reading, that you talk to your children about other changes they have experienced in life which turned out to be positive for them. There are many examples that should come to mind. Perhaps you can talk about:

- spending the first day at a new school
- visiting a new place like a zoo, museum, nursing home or theater
- meeting a new friend in the neighborhood
- traveling to a new destination on vacation
- starting a new sport
- beginning to play a new instrument

Each of these might be a way of personalizing this concept. I encourage you to also talk about changes in your own lives that were frightening or intimidating at first but resulted in positive outcomes. Some suggestions might be starting a

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

new job, going on a date, moving to a new town or learning a new skill.

The very end of the template brings you to the primary point of the storybook -- the message that you want to leave with your children. In the days, weeks and months ahead, it is important that you never forget just how vital this message is, not just the first time you talk about divorce, but every day through the coming months and years.

Children need to hear this message and be reminded again and again that they are safe, not to blame and will always be loved by both Mom and Dad. If every conversation regarding the future opens and closes with this reminder, each child's experience will be more accepting and less emotionally charged as they face the changes and challenges ahead.

Experts Keys to Remember

Points To Ponder

By C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC

The following questions and comments are to assist you in becoming aware of the needs of your children and the essential ingredients in their psychological well-being. They are not merely included here for you to consider, but to actually answer. Ask yourself the following:

- 1) How can I help my child to develop a sense of security and**

trust in him/herself, in people, in the world, and in getting his/her needs met? (A child needs to feel important, loved, and a sense of belonging - to know that someone is there to help - that his/her needs will be recognized - and that there are a set of standards, rules and values by which to live.)

2) How can I caringly protect my child from excessive conflicts and frustrations at home?

(Children cannot handle as much as adults. A child must have a feeling of safety and protection at home - know that someone is in charge who will not allow overwhelming emotions or situations to occur - will set limits with fairness - will listen compassionately - and explain confusing situations to alleviate any fears.)

3) How can I help my child not to feel guilty or ashamed about mistakes, accidents or failures?

(Children need to learn from their mistakes, not feel put down or be punished for them. They need to believe in themselves - to know that it is okay to make a mistake - and that you still love them and believe in their potential. Especially now, they need to know that your divorce is not their fault.)

- 4) **How can I assist my child to feel a sense of self-esteem and encouragement?** (Children need to feel that their self-worth does not merely depend upon accomplishments, but upon who they are as individuals and because they are your children. They need to feel accepted by you even if you or others do not always approve of their behavior. At this time, knowing that they are loved by both parents is especially important. Putting down the other parent is like putting down a part of your child since he/she **is** a part of that parent. Avoid disparaging remarks about the other parent even if you are angry.)
- 5) **How can I encourage independence and a feeling of competency in my child?** (In general, children need a sense of their **very own** achievement, even if it means possibly being wrong or different. They need to handle some things on their own or with minimal assistance, to be given choices [even if limited] and to feel some sense of being trusted and capable. During the time of divorce, your child may become more vulnerable and regress to an earlier stage of development. Do not demean your child for this, but understand that he/she may

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

need to feel more "like a little kid" than "Mommy's/Daddy's big boy/girl." If handled with compassion, this should be a temporary situation. If long-lasting, it may represent undue emotional stress.)

- 6) How can I discipline my child without having him/her develop a negative self-image?** (Simply put: Limit your child's behavior, but not your child's thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings are not "bad," though behavior may be inappropriate. Seek to influence *thoughts*, to understand and accept *feelings* and to improve *behavior*. True discipline should not be a punishment, but a lesson to teach your child about life.)
- 7) How can I help my child to feel good about him/herself, being male or female, secure when away from me and curious about life?** (Children need to develop a sense of identity, to begin to answer the question, "Who am I?," and to find satisfaction in being oneself. The more loved, understood and trusted they feel, the more secure they will be in their self-discovery. Your example and relationship with your child will have a very powerful influence in this regard.)

**Making Promises: You Mean A Lot To
Your Child**

By C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC

During this time, your child needs to re-establish trust in you, the other parent and the world. You can play an important role in this regard by structuring times and events and by being consistent. Be careful not to break promises to your child or make ones that you cannot keep.

Give your child the opportunity to plan things with you and be sure to specify when you can be counted on to arrive. Then, always arrive on time. Being late can affect your child much more than you may think or than your child will admit. If you must be late, call to tell your child, even if it means pulling off the road to do so. Your child may tell you that it doesn't matter when you finally arrive and that you can take your time, but arrive on time anyway. It really does matter. And, take care not to forget important occasions. I've seen it silently break a kid's heart to have a parent forget or be late for a birthday or other important event.

Of course, mistakes will occur and disappointments will happen. That's a part of life too, but it certainly can feel bad. So, when it does happen,

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

have a "heart-to-heart" talk with your child. The two of you mean a lot to each other.

Handling the Messy Break-up

By Jo Ann C. Simmons, M.A., L.M.H.C.,
R.C.C.

From my professional and personal experience, if you fit into the category of a messy break-up, there are **important steps need to make before sitting down with your child to break the news.** YOU NEED TO HAVE A BASIC PLAN FOR YOUR OWN HEALING PROCESS, FIRST.

As a seasoned public school counselor with more than seventeen years experience, I helped families work their way through various life traumas. This experience, however, did not prepare me for my own personal journey of hurt, blame and guilt when it came to ending my fifteen-year marriage. I found myself faced with the scenario too many women face when experiencing domestic violence and emotional abuse during the course of their marriages. (Of course, men can be victims of abusive marriages, as well.) The following information is for all who need it.

The impact of going through a tough and/or violent divorce causes deep suffering and trauma for both the

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

adults and the children involved. In my case, I was left with a toddler, child care responsibilities, financial devastation and a diminished sense of self-worth. The deeper "knowing" in my soul provided me with the courage I needed to take bold steps in the direction of wholeness for the sake of my young daughter.

Even though the road was very rocky, what helped me get through the entire ordeal was keeping my focus on creating a peaceful environment in which she could grow up. Knowing she relied on me for her life, enabled me to get a handle on my "dark night of the soul" and all the challenges that lay ahead.

While those were difficult years, I have successfully re-married today. My husband is a caring and loving mate and we live a relatively peaceful and happy life. We are looking forward to attending my daughter's wedding in a few months. She's radiantly expressive these days because of the anticipated marriage. If my life situation straightened out, there's hope for yours, as well.

Here are some suggestions I'd like to pass on to you that helped me through the process.

1) Set up a Safe Environment to live in. Create a place where you and your children can sleep well at night.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

Safety first must be your absolute goal. If you require legal assistance and police intervention, get it. Don't hesitate to access the help you need to insure a sense of well-being for you and your children. There are wonderful women's shelters located all over the country, set up to help victims of domestic abuse. There are also hot lines, counseling centers, churches and synagogues, and other community resources available to people in crisis. Don't hesitate to call to get immediate help.

2) Get Spiritual Support and gain a spiritual perspective for yourself. Learn to ask for support from spiritual counselors. Participate in spiritual practices that will help you get through this crisis and inspire you to reach higher levels of consciousness. Whether or not you go to church or meet with a group who share a loving nature, let something into your life that you can feel profoundly grateful for! Pray often, and listen to answers. Let others pray for you, as well.

3) Ask for and accept the Loving Support of Family and Friends. Use their shoulders to lean on to help you through an emotionally tough time. Find people who will love you, listen to you, and who don't have to rush in to fix you or your situation. In this way you will not be tempted to use your child as a confidant, because you

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

have caring adults to play that role. When I was in the early stages of my divorce, I had a list of phone numbers to call. I called them often and asked them if I could talk and have them just listen. I moved in with my sister for a month. All these steps, and more, gave me a life raft when I needed one. Get rid of negative people in your life and choose friends who uplift you.

4) **Get Professional Help.** Find a licensed therapist or counselor to help you through this difficult time, and help you gain a better perspective on your situation. Your child is depending on you to guide the way for him/her. Make sure you have some guidance for yourself! Give yourself comforting mantras to say daily, such as "This too will pass," or "I'm being protected and guided every step of the way." During my divorce, and for several years after, I received professional counseling. I value the insight and courage I gained from speaking to someone who had wider lenses and a broader perspective to offer me.

5) **Remember, the Better you Feel about Yourself, the Better Off your Child will be in the long run.** Your children are looking to you for their safety, love and well-being. If you model someone who seeks advice, and learns from mistakes, this natural vulnerability will teach them how to

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

be human and receptive to learning vital lessons in human relations. Children model themselves after adults in their world, so it's up to you to move beyond this experience with the least possible damage. The most rewarding moments can be felt when we make our way through a crisis and learn valuable lessons from it.

6) Be Kind and Thoughtful when Speaking to your Child about your Ex.

Avoid the temptation to bash your former spouse. Also avoid the other temptation to turn them into a saint when they are not. Try to stay honest and fair in your communications with your child. Whatever you do, think in terms of what it may be like to be in your child's shoes. It's best to get professional help with difficult situations in order to address the absence of a parent. Avoid parental alienation by never "talking trash" about your former mate in front of your child, over the phone, or with friends. Get good advice on how to broach a sensitive subject with your child before sitting down to explain things to them.

With that in mind, I'd like to add the following important points.

- Read through the story book again immediately before sitting down with your child to have the

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

initial conversation so the concepts are fresh in your mind.

- Create opportunities to have many discussions with your child, and become a careful listener. Release your reactions and opinions so that you are focused more on hearing what *they* have to say and less on what you want them to know.
- It's best to allow your *child to take the lead*, and you become the follower when it comes to communication issues. I've learned that listening with full attention is a powerful healer. When we care and listen, children feel validated and heal more easily and quickly.
- The best thing you can do for your children is to take care of yourself. That way, you'll have the reserve to be present for them when they need you.
- Studies show that resiliency factors in healthy youth development result from quality time spent with caring adults. Therefore, get your child involved in wholesome activities such as chorus, youth groups, sports, etc.

In closing, many public and private schools provide counseling services on

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

campus. Check with your local administrator and see if there are groups for children set up at school or off campus to deal with issues regarding divorce. Children gain much help and insight through these groups. By joining with others who are going through similar experiences, we tend to feel less isolated and hurt. In addition we learn some important coping skills. In some of our churches in Orlando, Florida we have wonderful programs that gently assist children and parents with these matters. One program that comes to mind is called Open Hearts (www.openhearts.com). If you don't have any groups available in your area, advocate for some and avail yourself of material you can access on-line.

Understanding the Spiritual/Constructive Divorce

By Beverly Gibel, LCSW, ACSW, BCD

Divorce does not have to be an adversarial process. It depends on how you choose to perceive your circumstances. One of the more beneficial ways of looking at your situation is referred to as a "spiritual divorce." It is another dimension of divorce that begins with a re-thinking of the old Judeo-

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

Christian belief that marriage should be forever -- 'til death do you part'.

The old archetype of marriage that holds that there is only one right partner for a person through their entire lifetime is decaying. If we look at the extremely high rate of divorce, we must admit that divorcing people are neither bad nor disturbed. At the most basic level, they acknowledge that their union has ended and they need to change their partnership.

In this context, many therapists take the view that all relationships are entered into to promote one's healing and growth, to meet spiritual needs, even to increase awareness or enlightenment. A marriage can be considered a "living laboratory." Within a marriage we can try to work out psychological issues, whether they are conscious or subconscious. It follows, then, that a divorce signals the end of the union for that purpose. People have learned or experienced all that they need to or are capable of with this partner. It is time to end this contract and be free to move on. The marriage did not fail, it accomplished what we needed it to. If these ideas can be embraced without judgment, both partners can be less guilt-ridden, sad, angry, fearful, or shameful. Each can look forward to a next step in their lives .."when one door closes, another opens." These are

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

important, positive ideas to convey to any age child of divorcing parents.

An explanation to a child might sound like this: "All people go through different phases in their lives. We go to school, graduate, get a job. Sometimes we make friends that we keep just for a while (use examples from their lives or yours), other friendships last years. Usually a person has a crush on someone in grammar school, then maybe has a boyfriend or girlfriend in high school, or perhaps not until they go to college or get a job. Maybe they will have several different boyfriends or girlfriends, each with something wonderful to offer (again, you can use examples from your lives). You can be companions, share interests and activities, even work on projects together. But if your interests change or you finish your project, you may not have anything to keep you together. That is how it is with your Dad and I. We loved each other, wanted to have a family together and that's what we did. We've done that, and we were thrilled that it brought you into our lives. But now that part of our relationship is finished and we each need to go our separate ways. We cannot stay together as husband and wife. We still love each other and will always be friends and your parents."

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

This leads to another equally important concept: the constructive divorce. As I tell my patients, "if you couldn't have a happy marriage, at least have a happy divorce." This is best accomplished by conducting all your actions according to what is 'the highest good for all'. For children, that means treating them and your spouse with respect and recognizing and channeling intense emotions into constructive actions (yours, your spouses, your children's). You don't indulge your wish to get back at your spouse by getting them 'on your side'... you won't use your children to convey messages to your spouse ... you don't blame your spouse or your child for the marriage ending. You take responsibility for your own needs and wants, show your children that you empathize, understand and can tolerate your children's needs and emotions, and find a balance between yours and theirs.

Raising Healthy, Well-Adjusted Children - Despite Divorce

By Amy Sherman, M.A., LMHC

Parenting is a continual learning process, which is compounded when you are going through a divorce. Not only does it require an understanding of the child's needs and the skills to meet those needs, but it requires additional special attention. Talking

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

to your children about the divorce could be one of the most difficult experiences of parenting, because you want, of course, your wisdom to be heard and then your child to apply it. From my work with divorced parents and their children, I have gained much insight into what we, as adults, need to do to make the relationship work effectively on both sides.

The major complaint that parents have about their children is that they just don't listen. Not surprisingly, children have the same complaint. "My parents don't hear me. They would rather lecture me." If we want our children to feel comfortable talking with us during this trying time, we must adhere to several key principles that can enhance our relationship with them, and ultimately, help them to become well-adjusted and emotionally healthy.

The following are 10 important components to raising healthy, open children - even after they experience their parents' divorce:

- 1) Be willing to listen first, then offer opinions -- rather than turning the dialogue into a lecture. You do not want your children to feel like you're not working on their same wavelength. This could lead to misunderstandings and fights. However, you are not their peer,

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

so it is always necessary to maintain the parental role.

- 2) Improve your understanding by using good body language. Be sure that your facial expressions and words are in alignment, because body language reveals an overall emotional tone.
- 3) Repeat back what the child says. "I hear you say that you're afraid of the changes that are happening in our family. Is that right?" This is called reflective listening. "I understand what you're saying. However, I want to assure you that..."
- 4) Encourage a free expression of feelings, thoughts and ideas without shutting down the child. This keeps the conversation open and maintains your awareness of the child's perspective.
- 5) Allow "kid contact time" that engages the child in a positive interactive experience with you. In other words, save time in your day for quality time with your eight year old or shopping with your twelve year old. Make a point to praise something every day and be generous with your love, hugs and compliments. This encourages a sense of trust and closeness, essential components for a child

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

whose parents are no longer living together.

- 6) Be empathetic. By putting yourself in your child's shoes, you begin to remember what it was like to be that age -- what you were afraid of, what your most important concerns were, what you needed from your parents. Remember that what your child is experiencing is very real.
- 7) Set down some rules and guidelines and be consistent with following through. However, if there are too many restrictions, children have more opportunity to fail. On the other hand, too few rules, too much permissiveness, offers no guidance and no structure. Studies show that children prefer to know what they can and cannot do. "House Rules" help children to understand expectations and to develop self-control. Invite your children to participate in developing those rules, because their input is important for their self-esteem and confidence.
- 8) Practice being a good role model. Therefore, express the traits you want your children to copy, such as respect, fairness, friendliness, honesty, kindness and tolerance of others. How you handle your anger, for instance, is the behavior you pass on to

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

your children. If you don't like what you see, take a look at *yourself*.

9) Be a strong support system for your children. As a support, you are available when they need to talk. You are there to help and encourage them. Seize every available moment to make a connection. Help your children identify other supportive people in their lives with whom they can also talk.

10) Make flexibility a priority. Try not to base your expectations on "shoulds." Every child is different and his/her response to the divorce will be unique. Some children will react with anger, sadness, or guilt. Others will react with complete silence. Adjust your handling of each child according to the personality and needs of the individual.

Understand that stress comes with the enormous responsibility of parenting your child before, during and after the divorce. Be aware of your own needs and limitations. You have strengths and weaknesses and with an awareness of both, you can be kinder and gentler with yourself. If you take care of yourself and your own well-being, you are modeling an important value for your children, as well.

* * * *

(SAMPLE Template continues)

Always Remember ...

Through these changes Mom and Dad will get along better so our family will be happier and more relaxed. To help this happen, there are some important things we want you to know.

Always remember ...

- Even though one of us will be living in a different home, we **will both always be your Mom and Dad, and we will both still care about you in every way.**
- Mom and Dad know you love both of us very much. Since this is not your fault, you never have to choose between us, or take sides. You do not have to decide who you want to be with or who you love better. We will decide who will ...

remain in this house, who will move to another house, and how to arrange our visits.

(or)

prepare dinner for you on which nights, take you to soccer practice and hang out with you on specific weekends.

- While you may have many strong feelings about what is happening, our problems are not about YOU. They have to do with US.

We just want our family experience to be happier and that means Mom and Dad have to live in different homes. However, Mom and Dad both love you and always will. We believe we will all be happier if we ...

divide our family into two homes where you can grow up and be loved.

(or)

see each of you at separate times, but still remain part of the same family that loves you.

(or)

move close to Granny in Jackson and still visit regularly with Dad during the school year and in the summer.

Change is OK

Changes can sometimes be scary. Even when things are not going well, people are often afraid to make changes. We know that and understand. This separation is sad for all of us in many ways. But we can also look upon it as the beginning of a new adventure for our family. We think it shows that our family is willing to try different solutions when we're stuck in a bad problem.

We also feel your life will be much better if you are around a happy, calm Dad when you

are with Dad and a happy, calm Mom when you are with Mom. Think about that.

It is important that we all take the time to discuss this change in our family. We want to hear your feelings and we want you to understand ours. You may not agree with our decision ... and that is okay. It is always helpful for us to talk about how we feel.

What this is really about is change ... like when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. Maybe our family will become as beautiful as a butterfly after making these important changes in our lives. Let's give it a try and see!

Some Things Never Change

Now you understand why Mom and Dad wanted you to know the truth about our marriage, and why we have decided to make some important changes. However, there are some things that never change. Never.

The most important one is that Mom and Dad still love you very much. We want you to know, understand and remember ... **NONE OF THIS IS IN ANY WAY YOUR FAULT.** Actually, it is no one's fault. It's just the way things turned out. It's just what is. You are not responsible. **YOU ARE INNOCENT. YOU ARE LOVED BY US BOTH, AND YOU ALWAYS WILL BE!**

No matter what happens in the future, we will always be a family. No one else will ever become your real Mom or Dad. Mom and Dad will never stop loving you. No matter what! That will never change.

Remember: **Mom will always be your Mom. Dad will always be your Dad. God gave you to us to love and care for ... and we always will. You can count on it!**

* * * *

What To Expect Ahead

Telling your children about the pending separation or divorce is only the beginning of a long transition in the life of your family. Before you have this crucial conversation it is important that you truly understand what to expect in the hours, days and weeks after presenting your storybook.

You are embarking on a series of changes that are likely to affect every member of your family physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. You cannot expect one reading of your storybook to totally prepare your children for the magnitude of changes that result from separation and divorce. As parents, you must be prepared not only to discuss the subject repeatedly, but to answer questions, continually reassure insecure children and handle emotional outbursts.

You are not entering unknown territory. Much research has been done on this subject. Professionals know what to expect from children at

different ages. Through their commentary, our team of professionals have been preparing you with the most common questions children ask, how to answer them and where to turn for expert advice and information. Armed with this awareness, you will be more confident about handling upsets. You will understand your children's fears and be more capable of reassuring your children that you and they will be okay as they move through the changes to come.

In most cases, tears will be flowing long before you end your storybook. Be prepared to stop for hugs and reassurances at any point in the reading before continuing. Upon reaching the very end, expect a range of emotional responses including weeping, anger, fear and silence. Preparation for these responses is essential. Accepting and understanding any and all reactions, without judgment, is vital at this point. Warm embraces, kisses, eye-contact and compassionate active listening skills will make a positive difference in paving the way ahead.

Suggested photographs

In this last section of the storybook all you need is a photograph or two of the children with Mom and one or two of them with Dad. That is the visual message you want to leave them with. They will still have the love and attention from both Mom and Dad, just at separate times.

Hearts and other artwork that convey warm visual reminders of love are a perfect way to end your storybook. Make sure hugs and kisses follow.

Part Three: Fine-Tuning Your Storybook

Chapter 8:

ADAPTING YOUR TEMPLATE

Congratulations! At this point you should have completed the initial draft of your divorce storybook. I say initial draft because this is a very important book that deserves considerable attention. You want to get it as “right” as possible before presenting it to your kids. Keep in mind that you are creating a very personal, intimate book designed to serve a special purpose. It’s a recounting of *your* family’s unique circumstances as a way to open a dialogue with your children about your impending divorce.

There are many ways the “standard” storybook template can be adapted to even better fit your family’s needs. I encourage you to be creative, flexible, honest and sensitive as you re-read the book with an eye toward fine-tuning any details necessary.

As you review your storybook, read it with several key points in mind.

- 1) Have you adapted your text to accommodate your family’s size? Do you have one child, two, three, four or more? Make sure the references to each child’s birth and special qualities is appropriate, especially in *Chapter 4: Your History*. Be consistent when using singular or plural terms (child vs. children.)

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

- 2) Are you using age-appropriate language throughout? Be sure to use the template best suited for the age of your child. In families where children's ages range from young to teens, you have a couple of choices. Use the template geared to the younger children so that they can grasp the message as easily as possible – and share with the entire family. Or create two separate templates for the family. If you decide to use the template for children aged 5-10 and also have older children, you can have a follow-up conversation with them afterward to share more in-depth information if you feel it is appropriate. Trust your judgment on this.

- 3) Are you addressing the specialness of your family situation? Every family is unique. Be prepared to “tweak” the text of your storybook to accommodate any circumstances that need additional attention. This may include discussing adoptions, death of a sibling, sickness in the family, grandparents or other relatives co-habiting in your family home, an “absent” parent, a gay parent, violence or other abuse that the children have experienced, etc.

If you cannot find a comfortable way to adapt your storybook text to fit these circumstances, don't be alarmed. You can contact a professional therapist or clergyman in your area for guidance. You can contact me for assistance. You might want to call a trusted friend for advice. Remember: this storybook concept does not require detailed explanations. You just want to acknowledge the truth about your family as a means toward

preparing your children for the changes ahead – and, despite the challenges, reassuring them about a positive future.

- 4) Are you using the best format for your storybook presentation? You don't have to be an artist to create a storybook that is visually pleasing and sensitive to the subject. The options available to you are broad. Print the storybook text on colored paper, paste photos on the opposite page and staple down the side. Cut and paste the text throughout the book around the photos you use. Create a collage-like design. Purchase a photo album with clear plastic pages and turn that into your storybook. Purchase a scrap book and design your storybook with color, texture and an array of artistic elements. Use your computer and Photo Shop-type software to create an original "masterpiece." The choice is yours. I encourage you to be as creative as you desire, within your time limits and the guidelines set forth here and by the contributing psychology experts. Just don't ever lose sight of what this storybook is about and why it's so important, both to you and to your children.

Expert's Perspective

A NOTE TO PARENTS

By Matthew Anderson, D.Min.

Divorce is difficult for everyone, especially children. However, you can make it easier if you follow some

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

simple and rather tough minded guidelines I have listed below. Your children will benefit enormously.

1) Do not use your children as pawns in the divorce. They are not property to haggle over and they need contact with both of you. Make sure their needs are a priority. Do your best to keep your conflict separate from the children. If you have to fight, then do it out of their sight and hearing.

2) Do not talk negatively about your ex-spouse to your children no matter how old they are. This practice makes every child feel as if they have to take sides and children hate taking sides. It also makes them feel guilty if they love the other parent. Ultimately, children appreciate and feel safer with the parent who stays positive about the other parent.

3) Do the right thing when it comes to birthdays, graduations, sports events, holidays, weddings and other special occasions that involve the children. The "right thing" means to show up and be decent to your ex-spouse in the presence of the children. Remember, you will be connected to your ex (through the children) for the rest of your life. Make the best of it for the sake of the kids.

4) Remind your children that you did not divorce them. While conversations are valuable, this is far better

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

accomplished through your behavior. Show up in their lives and they will begin to trust that they are not being abandoned.

5) Do not interrogate your children about the life of your ex-spouse. Allow them to share what they want but do not pressure them to give you information. If you persist they will usually begin to hide information or lie to you. However, if they do share with you then it will be important to keep your judgments to yourself. Being non-judgmental will encourage openness and honesty.

6) Finally, keep your children away from your new intimate relationships. Children of divorce form attachments easily. If your new relationship does not last then your children could re-experience a painful loss. It is best to keep children separate from your new potential partners until you make plans to get married.

Chapter 9:

MY CLOSING THOUGHTS

This book was not written to be the definitive word on divorce and all the emotional baggage that goes with it. Its purpose is simple: to alert parents about the vulnerability of their children before they begin any conversation on this subject. It's here as a guide to creating a powerful tool that can assist both parents in bringing up the subject and then moving ahead with the details related to your specific life situation. It helps ensure that you mention the six crucial points that every child needs to hear and absorb as they face their fears about the future. Once you've created your family storybook and sat down with your child to talk about the changes ahead, your responsibilities are far from over.

That conversation is just the beginning. It opens the door to many, many other frank, honest and caring conversations in which you, as parents, will do more listening than lecturing. It is your responsibility to be a parent first – and a divorcing spouse second – as you walk the delicate tightrope of creating a workable plan of action for the weeks and months to come.

You will need help at this time. Don't be afraid to lean on the shoulders of family and friends. Don't be shy about seeking out resources that can assist you in any way at this time. Read books and articles. Listen to CDs. Take advantage of internet resources and websites. Attend classes, workshops and seminars. Schedule private counseling, coaching or spiritual support sessions with appropriate professionals. Speak to school Guidance

Counselors. Look to mediation before adversarial agitation.

Above all, strive for solutions that will create what I call a *Child-Centered Divorce*, one that puts your children's well-being first. Let go, for a while, of your anger, hurt, fear, guilt, frustration, shame and mistrust. Forget approaching your spouse as an adversary, an enemy, someone to attack. When child custody becomes a battle, everyone loses. You lose whatever harmony may be left within your already fragile family structure, and innocent children inevitably pay the price.

Parents who make a concerted effort to sit down with each other and discuss the future care of their kids together, keep their perspective where it really belongs – on the children. To do this, they must take into account and ask themselves some very serious questions:

- What's best for our children today, tomorrow and in the years to come?
- How can we minimize the physical, emotional and spiritual damage inflicted upon our children as a result of our pending divorce?
- How can we best support our children through this difficult time?
- How can we show our love and compassion for them as they move through challenges they did not ask for -- or create?
- What can we do to boost their sense of security, self-esteem and well-being during the transitions ahead?
- Who can provide the least traumatic home environment for the children – and for what percent of each day, week, month and year?

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

- How can each of us best contribute our assets – physical, emotional and spiritual – to create harmony, good will and peace within the family structure?
- How will our children look back at this divorce a year, five years, ten years and more from now? Will they understand?
- How can we make life better for our children after the divorce than it was before?

The answers to these questions are not simple, nor are they black and white. They require honest communication between two mature adults who have their children's best interest at heart. And yes, it may likely take more than the two of you to come to resolution on all the child-custody details. This is the model for Child-Centered Divorce. Don't you owe it to your children to settle for nothing less?

My sincere best wishes go out to you all. May the challenges you are facing today lead you to a better, more harmonious and satisfying tomorrow. And may your children be blessed with the gifts of parental love and peace.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The two storybook templates are provided for you in a separate Word document so you can customize, edit and adapt in any way you choose. Please double-click the icon below to open the storybook templates.

Or continue reading through the resource chapters to the end where you will find another icon link.

Chapter 10:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosalind Sedacca is a Certified Corporate Trainer, author, national speaker and workshop facilitator. The focus of her programs has been creating healthy relationships for singles, couples and families using techniques that work in the stress-filled 21st Century.

Rosalind has facilitated workshops for business, professional and spiritual organizations throughout the United States including the National Association of Women Business Owners, American Marketing Association, Parents Without Partners, The Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International, The Public Relations Society of America as well as churches and spiritual centers of many denominations.

Based on her personal experience, ***How Do I Tell the Kids ... About the Divorce?*** is an easy-to-read ebook that is unique because it doesn't just tell you what to say. *It says it for you!* The customizable template, family photographs and age-appropriate language convey, with love and compassion, the key messages parents need to share with their children.

Rosalind is also the author of the ebook ***How To Break In as a Professional Speaker or Trainer*** and is profiled in Blythe Camenson's VGM Career Portrait book, ***Writing*** as well as Dana Cassell's book, ***Writers At Work***. She is listed in eight "Who's Who" directories including "Who's Who In American Women." She is also a guest columnist in Linda Brakefall's book, ***Unlocking the Secrets of Successful Women in Business***. She has been invited to share her relationship communication insights on numerous TV and radio programs and served five years on the Board of Directors of the Florida Speakers Association.

She can be reached at Rosalind@childcentereddivorce.com or at her web address: www.childcentereddivorce.com.

Chapter 11:

STAYING CONNECTED TO *HOW DO I TELL THE KIDS ABOUT THE DIVORCE?*

Free Special Report

for readers of

How Do I Tell the Kids About the Divorce?

What To Do -- and Not Do regarding kids and your divorce.

Once you've had the initial conversation telling your children about the impending separation or divorce, your responsibilities are far from over. There must be a continuous open dialogue as questions and issues come up.

This Special Report, written by Dr. C. Paul Wanio, provides valuable information you need to be aware of on some of the most important concepts to discuss with your children in the weeks and months ahead.

To get your free report, simply email me at Rosalind@childcentereddivorce.com and put **Free Special Report** in the subject line. I'll send it right out to you!

Stay connected to Rosalind Sedacca
and her team of experts through her:

- **FREE EZINE:** subscribe at www.childcentereddivorce.com
- **Teleseminars, Webinars & more:** Learn more about succeeding at Child-Centered and Collaborative Divorce through a series of timely audio and web-based events facilitated by Rosalind as well as guest experts. Subscribe to her ezine or check the childcentereddivorce.com website regularly for dates, times and other details.

Connect with Our Experts

The experts who contributed to this book are caring professionals in the field of family counseling and/or mediation. All are in private practice offering on-site individual or group counseling and therapy. Most also offer telephone sessions, e-courses, seminars, and a variety of other products and services. I invite you to contact them directly to learn more about the resources they offer.

Matthew Anderson, DMin; www.DrAusa.com
Boca Raton, FL; 561 362-4049; matt_coyote@bellsouth.net
Resources include:

Your Journey to Self-Love – A 3 CD set (audio) that explores the effective psychological and spiritual tools and techniques that increase self-love.

Wake-Up and Drive Your Life – A one hour CD of tough talk and exercises about waking-up and taking responsibility for life.

Wake-up 101 – A 10 week Internet course about waking up and taking charge of your life. Inspirational lectures and effective homework assignments.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

The Journey of Love – A 10 week Internet course about the transforming power of love in every area of our lives. Lectures and homework assignments.

Surviving Hell – A 32 page guidebook for managing, healing and transforming extreme stress.

How To Lose 100 Pounds – A one-hour best-selling CD that helps you transform your life while taking off pounds.

Beverly Gibel, LCSW, ACSW, BCD;
www.beverlygibel.com
Beverlygibel.LCSW@netscape.com
West Palm Beach, FL; 561 684-8335
Resources include: group sessions: Healing From Depression, Healing From Anxiety Disorders; therapy, coaching and e-courses.

Deri Ronis, PhD; DrDeri.com; drderi@aol.com
West Palm Beach, FL; 561-644-3904
Resources include:

CHOICES: Learning to Respect Yourself – Helping youth and adolescents aged 9-14 deal with anger, confusion about roles, and understanding how to share their feelings in a safe, sound way.

How to Handle Conflict: A Practical Approach – A useful short guide to help people communicate without verbal abuse, empowering them to ask for what they need in healthy ways.

Soulful Love: The Search for the Self – Comes with a companion CD. A guide to finding meaningful self-love with compassion and awareness.

Amy Sherman, LMHC; bummedoutboomer.com
Lake Worth, FL; 561 281-2975
asherman@bummedoutboomer.com
Resources include:

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

Distress-free Aging: A Boomer's Guide to Creating a Fulfilled and Purpose-filled Life – A new how-to ebook offering Baby Boomers specific insights and strategies for positively transforming their lives.

The Joy of Optimism – This e-course provides valuable suggestions and techniques that change negative patterns into constructive strategies for a more optimistic view of the world.

Joann Simmons, MA, RCC; joann-simmons.com
Orlando, FL; Joann@joann-simmons.com
Resources include:

Stop Looking and Let Love Find You! How Dating Singles can become Irresistible Love Magnets – An ebook that takes you through the steps to finding a meaningful, committed love relationship.

C. Paul Wanio, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC;
DrPaulWanio@aol.com
Boca Raton and Lake Worth, FL; 561 251-0202
Resources include:

I Love you ... I Think. When Sex Disguises Itself as Love – an insightful glimpse into distinguishing real love from infatuation for singles of all ages.

Chapter 12:

RESOURCES TO TURN TO

At this vulnerable time it is important for you to understand that you are not alone in facing the uncertainties ahead. There are innumerable resources available to help you get through this transition in your life and the lives of your children. Of course, these include your family and friends. But don't stop there.

You want to explore the benefits available from group, family and individual counseling or counseling with a trusted member of the clergy. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of mediation before or in addition to enlisting the services of divorce lawyers. Within your community there are often workshops, seminars and meetings focused on divorce for you to attend. Professional associations and organizations related to therapy, mediation and divorce attorneys are also good resources to tap into.

Many excellent books on divorce are available via the internet as well as at book stores and libraries. You will also find excellent articles on this subject in magazines.

On my website, www.childcentereddivorce.com you'll find numerous articles, an ezine, CDs, webinars and teleseminars focused on related topics as well as links to useful websites.

There are many other websites devoted to this subject that provide sound information to guide you through the divorce process.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

Below is a list of valuable resources you can turn to at this time. While comprehensive, this is by no means inclusive of every possible venue available. New resources, especially on the internet, open up every day. By taking advantage of this wealth of expertise, you will feel supported and guided as you progress into your divorce and beyond.

Websites

www.childcentereddivorce.com	Rosalind Sedacca's website
www.divorcemag.com	Website of Divorce Magazine
www.divorcenet.com	Legal information
www.divorcesupport.com	Professional help
www.divorcesource.com	Legal information
www.tesslercollaboration.com	Collaborative divorce
www.divorcecentral.com	Links to related information
www.divorcehelp.com	Legal referrals
www.gooddivorcebooks.com	Book referrals
www.divorcecare.com	Recovery support
www.divorcebusting.com	Focus on saving the marriage
www.womansdivorce.com	Advice and help
www.divorcehq.com	Professional listings and information
www.mommymentors.com	Women helping women

Articles

www.childcentereddivorce.com

Numerous articles on child-centered and collaborative divorce issues

www.kidsturncentral.com/topics/issues

Divorce articles for children

www.relationshipgolf.com/divorce/index.htm

Rebuilding life after divorce

www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/families/divorce.html Articles for teens

Legal Resources

Lori Barkus, PA Family Law & Mediation

www.barkuslaw.com

lbarkus@barkuslaw.com

954 349-7988

Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Raoul Felder, Matrimonial and Family Law

www.raoulfelder.com

lmallin@raoulfelder.com

(212) 832-3939

New York, NY

David Hirsch, Certified Family Mediator, Circuit Court Arbitrator

Brawer, Hirsch and Associates, PA

www.brawerlaw.com

dlhirschpc@aol.com

954 749-0066

Sunrise, FL

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

Don Klein Esq. Divorce Law & Mediation

donklein.lawandmediation@verizon.net

(610) 821-3001

Allentown, PA

Pauline Tesler, Collaborative Practice

Collaborative family lawyer, trainer, speaker and author

www.teslercollaboration.com

teslercollaboration@lawfsf.com

415-383-5600

Mill Valley and San Francisco, CA

Professional Associations

AFCC: The Association for Family and Conciliation Courts

NAFCM: National Association For Community Mediation

AAA: American Arbitration Association

APA: American Psychological Association

NASW: National Association of Social Workers.

NASP: National Association of School Psychologists

AMHCA: American Mental Health Counselors Association

NMHA: National Mental Health Association

AAPC: American Association of Pastoral Counselors

CRC: Children's Rights Council

ACR: Association for Conflict Resolution; www.acrnet.org

IACP: International Academy of Collaborative Professionals

Recommended Books & CD's

Spiritual Divorce: Divorce as a Catalyst for an Extraordinary Life by Debbie Ford. Highly recommended perspective on spiritual principles and personal triumph!
(<http://www.spiritualdivorce.com>)

Collaborative Divorce: The Revolutionary New Way to Restructure Your Family, Resolve Legal Issues, and Move on with Your Life by Pauline H. Tesler, Peggy Thompson. A pioneering family lawyer and psychologist team to share an enlightened approach to divorce. Excellent.
(<http://www.collaborativedivorcebook.com>)

How To Divorce As Friends – And maybe save your marriage by Bill Ferguson. 4 audio cassettes or 2 CDs + other books.
(<http://www.divorceasfriends.com>)

Surviving Hell by Dr. Matthew Anderson. Set of 2 CD's. Practical Guidelines for Surviving, Managing and Transforming Life's Most Difficult Times.
(<http://www.mattcoyote.com>)

Choice and Self Esteem – Learning To Respect Yourself by Dr. Deri Ronis. Written to help youth and adolescents aged 9-14 deal with issues of anger, making healthy choices, confusion about roles, and understanding how to share their feelings in a safe way.
(<http://www.drderi.com/products.htm>)

How To Handle Conflict: A Practical Approach by Dr. Deri Ronis. A useful short guide to communicating without verbal abuse. It empowers

people to ask for what they need in healthy ways with compassion and awareness.

(<http://www.drderi.com/products.htm>)

Soulful Love: The Search for the Self

Companion CD by Dr. Deri Ronis.

Focuses on overcoming oppression, healing the heart, and understanding the impact of the psychological and spiritual journey we are all on. You learn how to create and maintain a healthy, romantic relationship and empower yourself to make healthy choices and forgive yourself for the unhealthy ones.

(<http://www.drderi.com/products.htm>)

Attract Love & Build Wealth System for Singles

By Mari Smith, Relationship Coach

Singles: attract your ideal partner and build wealth together as a team

(<http://www.attractlovebuildwealth.com>)

Coaching services: www.marismith.com

The **Divorce Mediation** Handbook: Everything You Need to Know by Paula James

Divorce Solutions: How to Make Any Divorce

Better. Sound child-centered advice by award-winning author and divorce attorney, Ed Sherman.

(<http://www.nolotech.com>)

Chapter Thirteen:

YOUR STORYBOOK TEMPLATES

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The two storybook templates are provided for you in a separate Word document so you can customize, edit and adapt in any way you choose. Please double-click the icon below to open the storybook templates.

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?

Rosalind Sedacca, CCT
www.childcentereddivorce.com