

Torn Apart: Children and Divorce

Despite the difficulties faced in a divorce, the children should not be placed in the center of the crossfire. During the divorce process, and sometimes following the divorce process, it is not uncommon for a parent to become so wrapped up in anger, vengeance or simply being “right” that they forget the effect the whole process is having on the children. Below are some behaviors to avoid and some suggestions to assist you with improving your communications during the divorce process:

1. Do not use children as messengers between “mom” and “dad.”
2. Do not criticize your former spouse in the presence of your children because children realize they are part “mom” and part “dad.”
3. Resist any temptation to allow your children to act as your caretaker. Children need to be allowed the freedom to be “children.” Taking on such responsibility at an early age degrades their self-esteem, feeds anger and hinders a child’s ability to relate to their peers.
4. Encourage your children to see your former spouse frequently. Promote a good relationship for the benefit of the child.
5. Do not argue with your former spouse in the presence of the children. No matter what the situation, the child will feel torn between taking “mommy’s” side and “daddy’s” side.
6. At every step during the divorce process, remind yourself that your children’s interests are paramount, even over your own.
7. If you are the non-primary parent, pay your child support.
8. If you are the primary parent and are not receiving child support, do not tell your children. This feeds a child’s sense of abandonment and erodes their stability.
9. Remember that the Court’s view child support and child custody as two separate and distinct issues. Children do not understand whether “mommy” and/or “daddy” paid child support, but they do understand that “mommy” and/or “daddy” wants to see me.
10. If at all possible, do not uproot your children. When a family is falling apart, a child needs a stable home and school life to buffer the trauma.
11. If you have an addiction problem, whether it be drugs, alcohol or any other affliction, seek help immediately. Such impairments inhibit your ability to reassure your children and give them the attention they need.
12. If you are having difficulty dealing with issues relating to your former spouse, discuss such issues with mental health professionals and counselors.
13. Reassure your children that they are loved and that they have no fault in the divorce.

Though these steps are not all-inclusive, they will assist you in dealing with the complex issues of a divorce and hopefully minimize the impact of the divorce process on the children.