

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Your children need simple explanations about the separation or divorce to help them understand that they were not the cause of it. Tell them in advance when it will happen, why it is happening, and what sort of visitation schedule is being set up.
- Expect children to show signs of grief following the separation or divorce, and let them know you understand. Though at first they may pretend not to care or believe what is happening, soon they will show emotions. Being upset is part of what they must go through.

Preschoolers generally feel guilty for causing the problems.

Young elementary-age children usually experience sadness.

Children over the age of eight or nine most often feel angry.

- Your child will need to be reassured that you love him or her. Children sometimes believe that because parents stop loving each other, they may also someday stop loving the children.
- Children of all ages may act babyish for a while, like baby-talking, bed wetting, having temper tantrums, clinging, and pretending to be ill. In general, they need extra support, not punishment, at this time, to regain their former self-confidence.
- Many changes may occur that children can learn to accept when you explain things to them and continue to be lovingly attentive and firm: less money, less attention, more responsibilities, moving, new school, new friends, new work schedule, different rules and discipline styles in each home.
- Don't argue in front of your child.
- Don't criticize the other parent to your child. Usually, your child loves both of you.
- Don't use your child as a messenger to deliver information to the other parent.
- Don't use your child as a spy to find out what the other parent is doing.
- Don't use your child to get revenge on the other parent by denying child support or visitation.
- Set up a regular visitation schedule. Children feel most secure when they know when and for how long the visitation will occur.
- Even if you live out-of-state, regular contact by phone and/or letter is important to let the child know you still love and care about him or her.
- Don't feel you need to provide special toys, treats, or outings at each and every visit. Children need normal family time in both parents' homes.
- Continue to set rules and limits as you did in the past. Children need this consistency in each home.
- Your child needs to know that your decision to separate or divorce is final. Children tend to fantasize for years after the separation that their parents will reunite.

TIPS FOR PARENTS, CONTINUED

- Meet new dates away from the home at first rather than having many strangers coming and going in your children's lives.
- After divorce, some parents blame themselves for any misbehavior or unhappiness their child experiences. All children go through rough stages in their growth. You don't need to think that it would have been different if only you and your spouse had stayed together.