

6. Don't share financial concerns (yours or how your ex-spouse handles his/her money) with your child. It might make him feel that he has caused the financial strain and to try to handle adult responsibilities with his limited child abilities.

7. Do not belittle your child's step-mother or stepfather or succumb to the thought that your child has a new "dad" or "mom" who has taken your place. Remember that you will always be your child's father/mother and that no one can replace you.

**NOTE:** If you die, your child will probably end up living with your ex-spouse and the person they married. If you continually criticize them, your child might become depressed or act angrily if he has to go live with them, and ultimately blame you for any misery he might feel.

8. Finally, discuss these suggestions with your ex-spouse, new spouse, and any grandparents so that a greater degree of consensus and stability can be achieved. Such stability will promote trust and increase your child's chances for happiness during childhood and adulthood.

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### **Books for Adults**

Co-Parenting after Divorce: How to Raise Happy, Healthy Children in Two-Home Families, Diana Shulman. Winn Speed Press, 1996

Vicki Lansky's Divorce Book for Parents: Helping Your Children Cope with Divorce and Its Aftermath, Vicki Lansky. Book Peddlers, 1996

### **Books for Teens**

Why Me?: A Teen Guide to Divorce and Your Feelings, Rachel Ayt. Rosen Pub. Group, 2000

### **Books for Children**

Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families, Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. Little, Brown, 1986.

It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear: A Read-Together Book for Parents & Young Children During Divorce, Vicki Lansky. Book Peddlers, 1998

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD COPE WITH DIVORCE**

by

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## **ANSWERING YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS...**

1. When asked, be willing to talk with your child regarding factors leading to your separating and divorcing. Answer only what he asks and state facts, not opinions. Don't ever blame your child; i.e., "You're the cause of all of this".

Before answering your child's questions, ask for guidance and/or assistance from a mental health professional trained to work with children, or consult books like those written by

Dr. Lee Salk or Dr. Richard Gardner. If you and your spouse received marital counseling, ask your counselor for advice or guidance. Input from such a counselor should serve to minimize subjective coloring and maximize factual reporting of the events leading to the breakup..

2. Do not, as Dr. Richard Gardner has cautioned, feel that you have to protect the other parent's image or that you have to reassure your child of the other parent's love. Most children, if given the facts, will draw valid conclusions about you and the other parent. Also, **DO NOT FEEL YOU HAVE TO DESTROY the EX-SPOUSE.**

## **VISITATION AND COMMUNICATION**

1. Maintain frequent and regular (makes child's world more predictable) contacts (telephone and visitation) with your child if he does not reside with you. For example, call him weekly and at the same time each week. Also, if possible, visit on a regular basis. Regular visits, phone calls, or letters are seen by most children as signs of love and efforts to show that love.

Also, if you have important information

(e.g. medication regimen, doctor's appointments, teacher conferences, etc.) to communicate to the other parent, use e-mail or a large note-book that can be carried back and forth between households.

2. Do not play what Gardner calls "visitation games", i.e.,

Don't be late for pick-ups or drop-offs. This only creates hostility in your ex-spouse that your child will have to endure. This also sets a bad example. Remember, children learn by what we SAY and DO.

Do not argue, criticize, or hit the other parent during pick-ups and drop-offs. Children learn what they see and hear. They often develop a dislike for both parents after witnessing such distressing events and re-enact the events when they return home, go to school, or go to daycare.

Don't, on a routine basis, call your child unexpectedly and keep him on the phone when homework, chores, or friends are waiting on him. When your child makes a scheduled call to you, always be available, or **EXPLAIN TO THE CHILD** (not your ex-spouse) why you can't be available and when you can listen to him. Pleasant communication promotes further communication and strengthens relationships.

Don't tape record or listen to your child's telephone conversations with the other parent. This destroys his trust in you, violates his privacy, and teaches him to be suspicious of persons close to him.

Don't plan for or make special fun trips for times your child is absent and then tell him that he will miss or did miss the trip because he "had to visit" the other parent. In the short-run, this will make your child angry toward and resentful of the other parent. In the long-run, he will realize your manipulations, resent you, and emotionally distance himself from you.

3. Don't conduct grand inquisition regarding life in your ex-spouse's household. This will put pressure on your child and possibly cause him to become a "cover-up artist". Children taught to hide or be ashamed of their happiness grow up to be unhappy adults.

4. Don't be jealous of the good, enjoyable times your child had or might have with his other parent or stepparent. Listen attentively and without criticism to him while he recounts his experiences

5. Don't make daily schedules at your house that are drastically different from those at his father's / mother's (i.e., keep the same bedtimes, mealtimes, as much as possible). Continuity between households stabilizes a child's life, and children of divorce need all the stability we can give them.