



# Helping Children Adjust to Divorce

## How Parents Can Help Their Child Adjust to Divorce

1. **Help them feel connected and loved by both parents.** The child is not being divorced.
2. **Help them adjust to the discomfort of divorce.** The divorce says nothing about them.
3. **Overcome their sense of being unlovable.** A parent didn't leave because of anything they did or didn't do (& parents' love continues).
4. **Help them feel they have some control.** They can't control their parents' decision, but they can have some control over the way divorce affects their life. Let them be a part of decisions.
5. **Help them cope with their anger.** They have a right to be angry, work through it, and forgive; realizing the parents did not want to hurt them,

but to make a better, happier life.

6. **Don't put the other parent down in front of the child.**
7. **Get children out of the middle of parent conflicts.** They need to maintain the best possible relationship with each parent.
8. **Accept that the divorce is real** and not a bad dream and that they cannot change it.
9. **Help the child support or maintain the value of love and loyalty** in human relationships. There are risks in commitment, but life is lived much fuller by wisely risking than fearfully holding back.

### Avoid common pitfalls

10. **Avoid using children as message carriers.** Don't probe them for information after visiting the other parent. Show interest in the child, not the ex-spouse or their relationship.



11. **Avoid using a child to validate** who's "good guy" and "bad guy." Encourage the child to hold onto positive images.
12. **Seek support** from other adults or professionals when your feeling become intense; not your children.

### Help children "vent" or express their feelings

- develop good **listening skills** (make time and eye contact in order to HEAR, UNDERSTAND, and RESPOND).
- invite **sharing of feelings**
- create an **inviting atmosphere** (avoid judging)
- stick to **listening only**, at least in the beginning
- when children use inappropriate methods (hitting, slamming), reflect on their understanding of the anger, then **set limits** on expressing it.

### Get Help From Others

- ☞ Seek a professional counselor who specializes in helping families and children deal with divorce.
- ☞ If your child is in the public school system, many schools offer support groups for children whose parents are going through a divorce.

For more information contact:



**The Center for Parent Involvement** (FCPI) was funded by the U.S. Department of Education; Goals 2000, Educate America Act from 1994-1999. Guided by an advisory board of parents and professionals, the FCPI's goal was to tap the power of parents.

The FCPI gathered information on parent needs, coordinated the information, and created a series of resources organized by theme, including fact sheets for parents and professionals, "Beyond the Basics" resources, and resource identification lists. Many of the resources have been translated into Spanish language versions, and every effort has been made to preserve the meaning and flavor of the original English documents. This series of materials provides a wealth of current information for both parents and providers; the complete set of resources can be obtained in PDF format on the Department of Child and Family Studies Website at [www.fmhi.usf.edu/cfs/dares/fcpi](http://www.fmhi.usf.edu/cfs/dares/fcpi). The staff of the FCPI are hopeful that their work will continue to help children get ready to learn for many years to come.

The series' themes include:

- Family Empowerment
- Parent Involvement
- Parenting Support
- School Readiness
- Violence in the Lives of Children
- Transition to Kindergarten

The Center was one component of a project led by Hillsborough County Center of Excellence in collaboration with the Department of Child & Family Studies at USF's de la Parte Institute and the Florida Children's Forum. Other project partners include HIPPI (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters), Hillsborough County Head Start and Hillsborough County Even Start. For more information about these projects, call 813.974.4612.

Parent Support Series., Parent Tip Sheets, #9: Helping children adjust to divorce.

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