



Recommendations for Parents Who Have

Parental conflict is a significant contributing factor to why children are unable to move through the grieving process successfully. It is also strongly related to why children develop problems within the family, in school, in their relationships with friends, with their siblings and beyond. These problems often appear as behavioural concerns. Examples include acting out behaviour or withdrawal.

The following are recommendations for parents to help their children deal with parental separation or divorce.

1. Stop or limit contact between the natural parents if this contact continues to result in arguing, yelling, screaming, crying upset, name calling, threats, belittling, put downs, violence and other such things. Children should not witness the above either during face-to-face contact or during phone contact. Contact between natural parents should be like a business relationship.
2. Do not use children as “tools” to pump for information about the “other” parent. This places children in the middle of their parents’ relationship. When in this position, it is not uncommon for children to avoid situations, to “lie” inadvertently to protect a parent or answer questions in such a way as to please a parent.
3. Ensure that when children are in your presence, put downs, name-calling, threats, are not made about the absent parent. Parents should not share inappropriate information with their children about the “other” parent or about themselves (i.e. discussion of finances, court issues, the absent parent’s behaviour or partner).
4. Maintain regular, APPROPRIATE contact with your children including face-to-face and phone contact. Children of all ages can become extremely concerned with issues related to abandonment and rejection. “Appropriate contact” refers to contact which is structured, supervised, emotionally healthy, and safe. This contact does not require a parent to have to spend money. Many parents engage in purchasing items for their children or taking their children to special activities all the time in an attempt to alleviate their own personal guilt over the separation and why it occurred. Please do not use material items to “buy” your child’s affection.



5. Do not make false promises to your child (i.e. saying you will visit, phone, do something or go somewhere with them and then not follow through). Commitment to promises is extremely important.
6. Ensure that you are seeking the support of other adults, not your children, for personal issues related to the separation and divorce. It is not the children's responsibility to emotionally care for their parents. When children observe that their parents are not coping, a break down in communication, and role reversal can occur. Children will inadvertently not share their feelings and will begin to assume a care-taking role over their parent(s). While you and your child may have a friendly relationship, it is not your child's role to be your friend.



7. Spend quality time with your children. Read stories, play games, participate in outdoor activities. Do not simply use television or videos as a means to entertain your child.
8. Express to your children that they are not responsible for what has occurred. In order to make sense about what is happening, children tend to take responsibility for parental behaviour, feeling that *it must have been because of something I've done*. Children need to know that they are not to blame for the separation and some children need to be told this **many, many times** over a long period of time in order to truly begin to believe it.
9. Give your children permission to ask questions. They need some sort of an understanding as to why the separation has occurred. Parents need to be careful of the details they tell their children and ensure that age-appropriate information is being shared. Children should not be told information about money, court processes, or intimate details about their parents' relationship.
10. Be cautious about when you introduce new partners/dates to your children. Engaging in a new relationship within the first year of a separation is generally not recommended. When new relationships do develop, parents need to be aware of the fact that if these relationships end then another loss for the child has been created. If you are dating, it is recommended that you develop the relationships for a considerable period of time before introducing or including your child.
11. Be a good role model. Children observe their parents when a separation has occurred. If parents are not coping well, generally children will not cope well either. Parents are the most significant role models in a child's life and it is the example parents' set that will affect the emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of their children.

