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The Divorce survival guide, how to overcome the typical pitfalls.

Three T's

In all relationships, it's important to go at the slowest person's pace. Before you begin the conversation, check the following:

Timing - "There's something I'd like to talk about is now a good time?"

Tempo - "Is this ok for you? Am I going to fast or do you need a break?"

Tone - Are you speaking slowly and calmly?

When and how to tell them

Bed time is always a time for anxious thoughts, I recommend telling kids either in school holidays or early on a Friday afternoon. This gives them time to ask you questions about it before being back at school all day. Never do it around a holiday or birthday as this will tarnish their special days!

It is always preferable to tell them together, this sends the message that you are committed to working through this together as their parents.

What they need to know are the basics "mum and dad wanted to try and fix their relationship but couldn't." or "mum and dad want to stop arguing and that means being apart." It doesn't matter whose "fault" it is. Children do not need to know if someone had an affair or that "dad wants to leave us".

Give them the basics of how it will affect them

"Dad is going to live at this address and you'll see him every x,y,z, you and mum will stay at this house.

" Reassure them with what will stay the same, for example school, sleep overs with friends, holidays and extra-curricular clubs.

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After you've told your kids make sure they have opportunities to ask questions

"I know what we've told you is a lot to take in, if you have any questions you can always ask." I would then give them some time but if no questions arise after a couple of days, I'd check-in. "It's been a few days since me and mum told you our plans, do you have any thoughts?"

If you don't know the answer, then be honest, tell them you don't know yet or need to think about how to answer.

Nurture the bonds between both parents

The feeling of loss is normal as on most situations' parents no longer co-habit. If you speak badly or undermine one another, you will damage the bond between you and your child as well as the child and their other parent. If for example as a father you say negative things about the mother, your child will wonder if they can trust either of you, after all, they love their mum so can't believe what you say without questioning it.

Cognitive dissonance is difficult for adults, holding two conflicting views isn't comfortable. For children it is emotionally very painful as they don't have the capacity to accept we can all be a bit good and a bit bad. If you blame and shame your ex-partner, you force your child into turmoil as they are left wondering "how can this person I love so much be the source of all this pain?"

Before you share any views or information about the other parent or the situation, ask yourself "Who does this serve?" If the answer is "I'll feel vindicated" DON'T DO IT. You won't feel good for long and will cause unnecessary damage to your child and family dynamic.





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Finding a new normal

Decide together (or with a mediator) how you will manage shared care.

Keep boundaries and rules the same, it might be tempting to spoil them but it won't help. Children crave and thrive with familiarity, keep bedtimes and meals all the same as usual. Limit conversation when exchanging responsibility of the children. Only address basics like when you're next seeing each other. Never ask your child to be a messenger, it is not their job and even the smallest ask can feel overwhelming.

I always advise selecting one form of communication in written form, sometimes email is best as we tend to be more focused on longer form information-based communication when we open our emails. WhatsApp and text can work when things are amicable but if there is malice, this can lead to quick responses without consideration.

Respect each other's time. Be on time but not early for collection and have all their belongings ready. If it is your turn to pack, be sure to think of anything they may need i.e. homework, sports kits etc. Respect each other's privacy. You are no longer entitled to know everything about one another.

Final comments

There is an increase in the rate of behavioural issues, anxiety and depression in children whose parents separate. I know that it is painful for all involved but your number 1 priority needs to be ensuring your child is not placed in the middle or privy to unnecessary and vindictive comments. If you need an outlet, arrange a weekly call or meeting with a friend or search for a psychotherapist. As a child psychotherapist, I urge you to read this carefully and only ever act in your child's best interests.