

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH MARRIAGE BREAK-UP

The following guidelines are suggested to help parents assist children in coping with a marriage breakup:

1. Keep the lines of communication open and spend time with each child. They will be more likely to open up to you and confess their fears. Once their concerns are expressed each parent can offer reassurance.
2. Bite your tongue. Do not be tempted to criticize your ex-spouse to, or in the presence of, your child.
3. Children will not be happy all the time and the break-up of a relationship may require some grieving on the part of the child.
4. Assure the child that he or she is not responsible for the break-up.
5. Do everything possible to maintain a civil relationship with the other parent. Studies show that it is not the separation that traumatizes the child; it is the ongoing parental conflict. Children who live in the crossfire of parental warfare suffer long-term emotional damage.
6. Remember that each parent has the ability to discourage the child from loving the other. This must be avoided.
7. Because the other parent may have failed as a spouse does not mean that he or she will fail as a parent. Do not expect perfection and give your spouse a chance.
8. Keep routines steady, as this will add to the stability of the child. Spend extra time with each child and remember that they are experiencing some trauma. Reading stories or books about divorce and its impact on children may help.
9. Do not make your child choose sides if they prefer one parent to the other.
10. If parental conflict or the break-up is having a severe negative impact on a child, put your differences on hold and agree on an approach for some family and/or child counselling. Be concerned, be patient, but above all be optimistic.