

What Kids Need From Divorcing Parents

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What kids really need from divorcing parents is for them to get whatever help they need to find their love again and get along in the same family. These days, there are plenty of excellent counselors to help folks do just that, even if they're really angry and hurt by their spouses and not in love any more. Good counseling teaches people to stop doing what got them to the door of divorce in the first place, and to do again what got them to the door of marriage at the outset. Good counseling helps people learn to forgive the part between those two doors that was not so hot, or just plain awful, and work from this day forward to have a win-win marriage.

Make no mistake about it, the facts are in. Divorce is very traumatic for children, because their family as they know it is dying, and the grieving process affects their development for years, and often a lifetime. Divorce leads to anxiety, depression, hostile behavior, lack of interest in academic achievement, withdrawal and a host of other possible symptoms. Do all children of divorcing parents get all these symptoms? Of course not. Do most children of divorcing parents get some of these symptoms? Yes.

Keep in mind that when you decided to have children you made a unilateral contract with them to provide them with a stable home in which they could learn the skills they need to succeed in life. One of those skills is how to resolve conflicts in a healthy, civilized way, finding a win-win solution that works well enough for the parties concerned. If they see parents unable to communicate respectfully or to resolve their differences in a healthy, dignified way, then that is likely to be the level of functioning that they will achieve. Keep in mind that professional help in learning the skills of conflict resolution and love-enhancing communication is much, much cheaper both financially and emotionally than divorce and its life-long after-costs ever will be.

My respects if you've read this far, because this point of view is tough to take when you're feeling hopeless and desperate and all you want to do is to get away from the person whom you promised to love until death did you part. Yes, of course there are legitimate reasons for leaving a spouse. Among them are chronic abuse, violence, drug use, irresponsibility, lying, illegal behavior betrayal and refusal to do whatever it takes to change these behaviors. There are indeed things that you and your children are better off without.

When this is the case, it is important to minimize the damage to your children. It means walking a fine line between communicating truthfully with them and not being disrespectful of their other parent, whom they in most cases will need to continue to love, flaws and all. It means never, ever using the children to manipulate or avenge your spouse. Such behavior may work in the short term, but will boomerang in the long term in the form of your children's anger and disrespect towards you.

If you have determined after long and careful evaluation and counseling that you are truly unable to bring your marriage to a level of functioning that is at least somewhat healthy for you and your children, then attempt to divorce as civilly and with as much support as possible. Make custody and visitation arrangements that give your children as much access as is healthy for them to both parents. Make housing, school, financial and social decisions again from the point of view of what the children need. This does not ignore your needs as parents, because the children will need for you to function well enough to take the best care you can of them. Use third parties to help you negotiate these arrangements if need be. Very often divorce counseling can resolve issues much less expensively and with more input from the divorcing spouses than is the case when the authority to make these decisions is given over to the court.

The decision to divorce is one of the most serious ones you will undertake. Give it lots of thought, consult with the family, friends or professional advisors whom you trust and respect, and do

absolutely everything you can do before taking the final step, so that whatever your decision, you will have peace of mind about it in the future.