

6 Tips on How to Help Your School-Age Child Cope With Divorce

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By David Pedrazas

Every year, more school-age children suffer from added stress when their parent's [divorce](#). Though the individual circumstances are unique, a [separation process](#) that brings **permanent changes to the life of everyone involved is inevitable**. The adults involved have the benefit of much deeper emotional experience. We enter the process aware that it will be challenging and painful. We can meet with professionals and turn to family and friends for emotional support. **But our children are dependent on us for emotional support**, and the [key to helping them cope with divorce](#) lies in **working together to honor their needs above our own**. To help children cope with the divorce, parents need to:



1. Talk About it Together as a Family.

School-age children don't understand the subtleties of adult conflicts, but they can sense dysfunction. **Both parents need to sit down with them and explain the situation in a way they can understand**. They only need to hear the essential truth — full disclosure is for adult family, friends and mental health professionals. **Knowing their parents are still working together to love them and care for them is important**.

2. Let Them Express Their Feelings.

By being allowed to express themselves, **your children feel empowered which helps them cope with their complicated emotions**. Encourage children to voice their fears, concerns, and questions and to them **listen intently**; they may feel guilty because of something they said or did and **need assurance the divorce isn't their fault**. Through their young eyes, friendship is everything. They realize the close friendship between their parents is ending and may be afraid their own close friendship with one or both parents could end, too. Help them along the way. **Don't criticize their feelings**. Address their fears by expressing how you will **always be there to love and support them**.

3. Keep the Conflict Away from Them.

Seeing parents engage in unresolved conflicts leaves **children feeling anxious and insecure**. According to licensed clinical social worker [Terry Gaspard](#), "Truth be told, parents forget that children are vulnerable to feeling in

the middle between their parents' arguments." **Disagreements about visitations, finances, and arrangements should be dealt with outside of their hearing.**

4. Do Not Speak Negatively About the Other Parent to Them.

At all costs, avoid being negative about the other parent in their presence. " 'Parental alienation' is the idea that one parent can maliciously turn a child against the other parent for no good reason. [Dr. Richard Warshak](#) calls it 'divorce poison.'" **Children imbibe the negativity and behave hatefully toward a loving parent, which leads to alienation.**

5. Provide Stability in a Changing World.

Divorce brings about sweeping changes to your life and the lives of your children. The new reality will be one of the following:

- [legal and physical custody](#) is shared
- [custody](#) is shared but one parent has veto powers in certain educational and medical affairs
- sole legal and physical custody of one parent

Some children do well living with one parent and visiting the other, and some do well [living with both equally](#). Regardless of the [living situation](#), it's important for the parents to devise a **consistent arrangement for special occasions** (birthdays, holidays, graduations, etc.). You should never make the children choose. Depending on the age of the child, they may participate in extracurricular activities (student government, drama, sports, etc.). Slowly implementing logistical, [schedule, and routine](#) changes will contribute to **healthy adjustment**. And try to **be as flexible as possible**. Make changes if living and visiting arrangements interfere with a child's schedule. Their school and social activities are vital to their personal development.

6. Seek Help for Yours and Their Emotional Well-Being.

Be on alert for the **signs of stress** in your life and theirs, and get professional help. **Speaking with your therapist and your children's teachers and guidance counselors can give you the support you need.**

SLC Divorce Attorney David Pedrazas Can Help

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