

## HOW CAN I...

# Help my child with difficult experiences such as divorce or separation?

## Advice for Parents and Caregivers

- **It's important to provide stability and structure when your children are with you.** Create consistent routines, like bedtime stories and family dinners, that offer predictability and comfort. Fill your time together with positive activities, from board games to bike rides, that build happy memories and strengthen your bond. Set clear and consistent expectations for behavior, chores, and homework.
- **Whenever possible, you and your former partner should give information to your kids together.** Taking the time to discuss something and present it as a team can create a sense of stability and security for your children. This is particularly important when it comes to co-parenting. Discuss the details of your arrangement and make sure you are on the same page before you share them with your kids. This helps create consistency and avert future confusion. Having agreed-upon strategies will make parenting a little easier, and more effective, for both of you.
- **There will likely be some conflict between you and your former partner — just try to protect your children from it.** Avoid arguments in their earshot, especially during transitions or on phone calls. Don't make kids messengers between homes, and don't bad-mouth the other



**Scan to watch our video on this topic.**

parent when they aren't around. Kids' ears are like sponges, and negative talk can breed negative feelings. Your kids should know that it's okay to love both parents, even if they aren't together.

- **Nurture your individual relationship with your child.** Their world has changed and become more complicated, which adds to the stress of growing up. Giving them a listening ear for their feelings and experiences is a powerful way to show your support — and your reward is that sharing and listening brings you closer together.

## 8 Tips for Supporting Kids Through Divorce or Separation

1. **Present a united front.** When talking with your kids, it's important for you and your co-parent to put aside your differences and present a united front. Focus on the wellbeing of your children and agree on some key talking points about the separation, whether you are speaking with them together or individually.
2. **Reassure them.** Remind your children that they are loved by both parents and that divorce or separation doesn't change that. Let them know that it is in no way their fault.
3. **Be civil.** Do your best to avoid speaking negatively about your ex in front of your children.
4. **Seek professional help.** This will be a major event in your children's lives. They will get through it, but some extra support can go a long way. Let the school psychologist or social worker know about the separation. You might also consider finding a therapist or support group.
5. **Listen.** Give your children space to respond in whatever way feels appropriate to them and encourage honesty. They might be angry or sad but as painful as those reactions might be for you, validate their emotions rather than trying to fix things. Let them know that whatever they are feeling is okay.
6. **Stick with routines.** As much as possible, try to keep your kids' day-to-day lives consistent. They may have to switch between homes but knowing some things will stay the same will provide some comfort.
7. **Focus on what you can control.** If your ex really isn't willing to be a cooperative co-parent, do your best to set routines and expectations for your home, since you do have control over that.
8. **Keep an eye on them.** It's natural for your kids to experience a range of emotions and behaviors, including guilt, anxiety, regression, withdrawing, or trouble focusing. They may try to test boundaries and need extra support. It will be helpful to maintain some structure in their home life and set clear expectations — plus plenty of love and patience.

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

[Supporting Kids During a Divorce](#)  
The Child Mind Institute

[Tips for Divorcing Parents](#)  
Nemours Kids Health

[Family Resources to Address Divorce](#)  
Sesame Workshop

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The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We've become the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.