

How to Keep Your Children Out of the Middle

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Ongoing parental conflict is harmful to children. The impact is even greater when the children are caught in the middle of their parents' battles. Here are some simple things you can do to help keep your children out of the middle.

Do

Discuss child-related issues directly with the other parent and when children are not present.

Talk directly to one another, without using the children to relay messages.

Encourage children to speak freely to both parents.

Keep all discussions of financial and legal matters between adults.

Don't

Discuss any issues pertaining to the children in front of them or within hearing distance.

Ask children to carry or relay messages, verbal or written.

Ask children to play "detective," meaning use them as a source of information about the other parent's personal life.

Ask children to keep secrets from the other parent.

Respond to their reports of disparaging remarks about you by the other parent to any extent. The less you say, the less you participate in putting them in the middle.

Discuss any financial or legal matters related to your divorce with the children nor have them read any related documents.

Be aware of symptoms of dangerous situations for your children:

Self Destructive Behavior

- Treats or attempts to commit suicide; cutting themselves (usually requires hospitalization).
- Eating disorders (counseling)
- Shoplifting (counseling)
- Fast driving and incredible risk-taking (counseling)
- Physical and violent encounters (counseling, removal from dangerous situations)

Behavior to Medicate Pain

- Drug and alcohol misuse (counseling)
- Promiscuous sexual behavior (counseling)

Clinical Depression (may require medication, counseling, and/or hospitalization)

- Isolation
- Exhaustion or Lethargy
- Loss of interest in normal activities or achievement (at home or school)
- Despondency
- Anxiety and an inability to relax



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Children and Divorce

Material adapted from KidWorks serving Kinds in Divorce, Larry M. Barber, LPC-S, Director of KidWorks.

Supporting Your Child



Be the Best Divorced Parent You Can Be

Realize you cannot do it all.

Remember you are one person. You cannot possibly do everything that both parents in a family do. If your former spouse is uninvolved or absent from the lives of the children, find family members and friends who can be role models of the opposite sex parent for your child.

Solicit and accept help from others. As you do accept help, you are helping to build a support system for your family. Find people who have skills and knowledge you lack.

Take advantage of community resources.

Learn to say “no” to requests from others at work or in organizations that will take away your time with your children.

Eliminate unnecessary tasks or activities from your and your children’s schedules. Limit your children’s activities to those which they love most. This includes extracurricular activities for your children such as karate, ballet, art classes, little league, soccer, etc.

Place a high priority on meeting your children’s needs.

Children want to know their needs will be addressed. Let them know they will be cared for. They will always get what they need.

Children sometimes feel guilty. **Make sure they know they are not responsible for the divorce** or the changes that continue to follow for your family. When you take out your anger or frustrations on your children, they may feel they are responsible for whatever is going wrong.

Children need to trust their parent/s. Always keep your word.

Children need role models. Being strong for your children is not as important as providing them with role models of how healthy adults deal with life situations (good and bad).

Children need security. Assure them that you (and your involved ex) plan to be with them for many years to come. Also let them know there are others who will always be present for them and you.

Unless your former spouse is endangering the children in some way, **make the time they spend with their other parent a positive and accepted part of their childhood.** They need both parents, whether you get along or not. Don’t speak badly about your ex in front of the children or use them as spies to find out “dirt” on your ex.

Children need to feel needed. Explain to them that they are an important part of the family.

When it is appropriate, ask for their opinions and suggestions on family decisions.

Children need to feel they are an important part of the family. Give them chores to do.

Give your children responsibilities around the house that are appropriate for their ages and abilities. This will help relieve you and give you more time to spend with your children.

Children like order and predictability. Establish a schedule and try to stick to it. There is security in knowing there is a schedule, there is order, and the rules of the house still apply.

Children need rituals and routines. Establish family traditions not just on holidays and special occasions, but during the rest of the year. Make a

big deal of birthdays and family activities. But don’t end up giving them “things” because of your guilt, your need to show your love, or the need to have their approval.

Make time for fun with your children.

Make time for yourself away from the children. If you are with your children 24/7 with no alone time for yourself, you may begin to resent your children and what you “have to do” from them.

Children need to express themselves and know they have been heard. Set up scheduled time for communicating with them. Family meals at the dining room table can be a stabilizing factor for your family. Set up a family communications center (cork board or dry erase marker board).

Lower your expectations. Remember a healthy family is more important than an immaculately clean house, a shiny car, the best lawn in the neighborhood, etc.

Live within the limitations of your income. Economize and only use credit cards for real emergencies. Pay off as many of your outstanding debts as you can.

