



Co-Parenting Together

Parents can do a lot to help their child cope and adjust to separation or divorce

▶ **Try to tell your child about the separation before it happens.** Ideally, both parents should be there to answer questions and reassure the child.

▶ **Give simple, honest explanations that your child can understand.** Give children information they need to reassure them and answer their questions. Children worry about where they will live, how their parents will treat each other, and what will happen to them. Use language your child can understand.

▶ **Provide reassurance and support.** Children create scenarios to explain what is happening, and they often imagine the worst. Many children feel responsible for their parents' divorce and carry guilt with them.

▶ **Don't sabotage your child's relationship with the other parent.** Your child has a right to a loving relationship with both parents. Do not force your child to take sides or say negative things about the other parent — ever.

▶ **Strive to provide stability and consistency for your child.** Do your best to maintain stability and structure at home, in school, and within relationships. Keep bedtime routines, family traditions, and rituals as consistent as possible. Sometimes, what adults view as positive changes, can be experienced as losses for a child.

▶ **Watch for signs of serious trouble.** If your child begins to “act out” in extreme ways, becomes very withdrawn, or is struggling to adjust, consult a professional. If your child

seems unusually depressed or anxious, or asks for help, find resources in your community to assist you.

▶ **Your child is not your friend.** Develop adult friendships for companionship and support. Talk to friends, clergy, or a support group. Avoid an “Us Versus Them” perspective.

▶ **Don't rush into new relationships.** Almost all children hold on to hope that their parents will reunite, so they may resent a new adult in their lives. Give yourself and your child lots of time before you get involved with a new partner.

▶ **Take care of yourself.** A divorce or separation is one of the most stressful times of your life, and anxiety and depression are common reactions. If you nurture yourself, you will be better able to nurture your child. Make sure you eat a healthy diet, rest, and make time to relax.

▶ **Communicate with the other parent.** Remain willing to talk through challenges and conflicts that arise during the transition. There are no winners and losers when you set clear boundaries for discussion.

▶ **Take you child's concerns seriously.** There is no “minor” issue when it comes to your children.