



Divorce and Parenting – 10 Steps to Make it Successful From Your Child’s Point of View

by STEPHEN F. MCDONOUGH on AUGUST 1, 2010

For children – no matter what age – divorce can be a major source of distress. The article below was written by Betsy Ross, an experienced therapist and divorce coach from Sharon, Massachusetts. At [The Divorce Collaborative LLC in Franklin, MA](#), Betsy is frequently part of the mediation process for couples that select the firm’s comprehensive fixed-fee mediation program or a collaborative divorce. Betsy wrote the article below from the child’s point of view – a point of view that should be of paramount importance for divorcing or post-divorce couples. I hope you find the article helpful, and thanks to Betsy for sharing it with our readers.

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From Your Child's Point of View: 10 Steps To A Successful Massachusetts Divorce

By Betsy Ross, LICSW, CGP

1. Focus on the present.

Being stuck in the blame game or trying to hurt each other for what happened in the past only makes it harder for you two to reach an agreement. Having you come to an agreement would mean that we can all move ahead with our family life (and try to put this mess behind us)...this is one of the only things that keeps me going these days!

2. Think about and plan for the future.

Please keep in mind that my needs will be changing over time as I grow. So, when you both talk about custody and visitation schedules and finances, remember that what works for me now may not work for me in the future. I may be happy to alternate weekends at Daddy's and Mommy's for now, but when I am a teenager, that idea may not be so appealing. Also, before long I may need hockey skates, a Girl Scout uniform, a trumpet, a few weeks at summer camp, or a fancy outfit (for my confirmation or prom) so please plan for these expenses too.

3. Try to put yourself in my shoes.

Remember that your 'spouse' is also my parent. It would help me if you could remember that I need you both to parent me and love me. I want both of you to get what you need to be happy and healthy so you can do a great job at taking care of me!

4. Don't say mean or critical things about my other parent.

They are the world to me, just like you are. Don't ever make me take sides because even if you think that I am taking your side and you have 'won', I will lose! Nothing should get in the way of my good feelings about my Mom or my Dad if you want me to grow up healthy and strong.

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5. Leave me out of your dating/social life.

I don't need to know right now about whom you are seeing or what you are doing. Even if it looks like a serious, healthy, and long lasting relationship has been established, please think long and hard before you drag me into it.

6. Hold up your end of the bargain.

If you said that you would pick me up from school on Tuesday or that we would spend the afternoon together on Sunday, be sure to keep your word. Life has become unpredictable and scary enough for me so please don't make it even more difficult by disappointing me.

7. Be patient with me.

The breakup of our family is scary and hard for me because I won't ever fully understand how a thing like this could happen to us. Even if divorce means our lives will be better in the future (and I sure hope it does), change can be very frightening for me and I need some time to get used to things.

8. Remember to tell me this isn't my fault.

Divorce is rough on kids. Don't make it worse than it has to be.

Even though you both know that I had nothing to do with your marriage, I get confused sometimes and I will probably blame myself for having some role in your breakup. Don't ever stop telling me that you love me and that it isn't my fault. I need to hear that from you both.

9. Encourage me to talk about how I am feeling.

I have lots of feelings about this whole situation and I need a place where I can talk. Please keep asking me how I am even if I don't have an answer. Please consider offering me an opportunity to talk to a professional so I can say what is on my mind without having to worry about hurting anyone's feelings. It's not a good idea for me to hold this all in.

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10. Pay attention to me.

Am I eating regularly? Sleeping well? Moody? Withdrawn or hyper? Have I changed my friends? How are my grades? School attendance? Hobbies? These are some of the clues that will communicate to you how I am doing (when I may not be able to put these things into words myself).



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