

## **Parenting for the Children During and After Separation or Divorce**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Divorce and separation are challenging times for all parties involved, especially children. When parents get caught up in animosity and bickering, they frequently cause harm to their children, making them collateral damage. As divorcing individuals grapple with their own tumultuous emotions regarding the relationship, future, other relationships, and their position in the world, they can easily disregard the emotional needs of their children.

One of the significant conflicts that often leads to separation and divorce is parenting disagreements. The longer these conflicts persist, the more opposed parents become in their approaches, and the more confusing it becomes for the children. When parents disagree on childrearing principles, philosophies, and techniques, it's easy to see how these differences could translate into inconsistency and confusion across households. Children may be subjected to two sets of rules and standards, leading to stark "black and white" differences. Finding a middle ground instead of getting caught up in fighting is essential to moving forward healthily. The decision to separate or divorce is difficult. However, everyone concerned has a range of emotions, from anxiety to depression.

Unfortunately, as individuals deal with these feelings, their insecurities are acted out by vying for the children's loyalty, affection, and positive emotions. It can be very damaging when parents use their children as an object for their gain. The non-custodial parent may attempt to win the children's affection by becoming the "Disneyland parent," providing endless entertainment and doing special activities during weekend visits. Additionally, some parents buy their children gifts to show love or remorse

about separation and divorce. Often, the other parent feels resentment, believing this to be an attempt to "win over" the children and engage in contests to assert their affection. Through all this, it's easy to see how children may become confused, enjoying extras but experiencing only temporary relief from the pain of the separation. Despite the animosity, both parties must work together to provide for the best interests of their children.

Although divorcing parents may have issues and unresolved relationship problems, they must cooperate on logistical matters for the children. Everyone must communicate and cooperate regarding school activities, homework, extracurricular engagements, etc. Children, being children, cannot serve as a conduit of information between their parents. Parents must have a child coordination plan before separation or divorce, using available communication methods such as email, phone calls, online calendars, fax, voicemail, face-to-face conversations, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, and other "private" platforms. Choose a method that ensures comfort and reduces conflict for everyone.

Despite the best efforts of all parties, issues that might necessitate a change in plans do arise. It's essential to be flexible and thoughtful of your children before any other action. Regardless of whether parents believe that someone has violated their rights, the children's best interests. After all, flexibility when transitioning and adjusting equates to smoother experiences and transition periods for the children. Parents must remember they're not the only people in their children's lives. Children may have maternal and paternal grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. They must have communication and time with these people. Any other accommodations that can reduce changes in their lives could benefit children. Please leave them in the daycare they have attended since infancy or make another arrangement to ensure minimal disruption. For a long time, divorcing parents must make decisions in their children's lives. It's crucial to do so collaboratively and cooperatively. Divorced parents who refuse to speak to each other make their children's lives unnecessarily difficult. Don't bring your children into any unresolved hostilities towards your ex-spouse. Be respectful, civil, and optimistic

about the other parent, no matter what you think of them. Even if you believe your children "know" what a low-life scum your ex-spouse is, please don't tell them. What seems evident to you is not a universal truth. It's best to avoid making negative comments to your children about your ex-spouse, even if they're making nasty statements about you. Take the high road, put your children's interests first, and avoid the compulsion to make yourself understood by your children. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2013 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy."**



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