

How to Tell Your Kids That You're Getting Divorced

So They Can Get
the Support They Need

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Introduction

How and when do you tell your kids you're getting divorced?

This can be one of the things that parents worry about a lot, and because of this they often wait too long or don't handle it very well. Children are very perceptive and will likely know if things aren't going well between you or if things have changed between you. So not saying anything about it simply allows them to worry more. The older the kids are, the more important it is to have a conversation with them as soon as possible - because if you don't, they will want to know why you kept it from them and they may feel betrayed.

This report will explain:

- when to tell your kids
- how to tell your kids
- what you should make sure you say
- what you should make sure you don't say

The most important thing to remember as you go through this process is to talk openly and often with your children, allowing them to share their thoughts and feelings without criticism. Keeping the lines of communication open and letting your children know that you are there for them, will pave the way for your kids to adapt and adjust to their new life more smoothly.

How To Tell Your Kids

The ideal way to tell your children is together, both parents with the kids, both parents talking about it. This reassures them that you are in agreement, that it's not the other parent's fault and that you are both still going to be there for them. When one parent tells the children, the kids may assume that the other parent is guilty in some way and that's why they aren't there, or they may wonder if that parent cares as much about them, or wonder if the other parent thinks it's the child's fault. So it's best to put all of those concerns to rest by being there together and addressing those issues.

Also, choose a time that makes sense, when there will be some time for your kids to take in the news, sit with it for awhile, ask questions, etc. Don't tell them before school in the morning, or right before they go to a practice, or right before bed, or on a holiday or the day before their birthday. Choose an ordinary day, maybe a weekday when there's nothing planned all evening, or a weekend day when there's nothing big planned. This way they really have time to deal with this information. This will be a very big deal to them, whether they show it or not, and they need the space to process it in their own way.

If possible, tell your kids before one of you moves out, so they still have some time to process and ask questions and see that you're both still there for them, before everything changes. This is important, because if one of you moves out immediately (or even before you talk to the kids), the children may feel abandoned by the parent who's gone. Regardless of what

you say, they may feel that you've left them, and often children think it's because of them. By telling them ahead of time, they know what to expect and you can let them know that you will still see them often.

What To Tell Your Kids

So what do you tell your kids? Well, you want to be open and honest with them so they feel they can trust you and they feel included in the family. But you don't want to give them too much information that can confuse, overwhelm or hurt them. Of course their ages are important to consider as well and I'm going to give examples for various age groups.

If your kids are very young (before kindergarten age), then you can have a very simple conversation with them and you don't need to give them as much lead time as older kids. Just keep it very basic and focus on the fact that you love them and will still take care of them and spend time with them. You could say something like "Mommy and Daddy love you very much and we always will. Mommy and Daddy are not going to be married anymore, so we are going to have two houses – one for Mommy and one for Daddy. You will have your room at Mommy's house and you will have your room at Daddy's house, and we will both take care of you."

For all school-age kids, be sure you make the following clear:

- It's not their fault in any way. Nothing they did or said has anything to do with your divorce.
- It's okay to feel sad or mad, and okay to share those feelings.
- They will always be safe and loved, and always be taken care of.
- They will be with both of you a lot (if this is true).
- You understand that it's tough getting used to new things and that you'll do what you can to help them through it.

- They will still see their extended family (grandparents, cousins, etc).
- You know they might wish you could stay together (or get back together), but you've thought this over very carefully and you've decided not to be married anymore. You think this will be best for your family, even though it might be tough or scary right now.
- You will always be their mom and dad.
- You know that they love both of you and you don't ever want them to feel that they need to choose sides.
- You are not against each other. You're going to be working together as their parents.
- You're sorry that this is going to affect them, and you don't want them to feel caught in the middle.

If your kids are 6 to 8 years old, they may cry or want to sit with you, or just be by your side. Children in this age group typically are very saddened by divorce and want consoling, and they won't usually blame you for the divorce.

If your kids are 9 to 12 years old, they may show anger or they may act like they've just been told what's for dinner. Reactions may vary, but anger and indifference are the most common.

If your kids are 13 to 17 years old, they may get angry and be very verbal, or they might be quiet and withdrawn. They may prefer to talk to their friends about it than talk to you, and that's okay. Their friends are very important to

them at this stage and they are often less comfortable showing vulnerability or affection with their parents. This age group is more likely to blame you for the divorce, to feel as if you didn't try hard enough or could have prevented it. Often they are concerned that this means they will have trouble with relationships themselves.

Regardless of your children's outward reaction, they are processing and feeling inside, so be observant and be available to them. They will be watching you, too, looking for signs of change. Allow your children to grieve and to show their emotions and share their thoughts, even if it makes you uncomfortable. If you try to suppress them, they will hide their feelings from you, but this doesn't mean they're really gone. They will internalize these feelings and may express them in other arenas, like at school or with their siblings. This can be very detrimental to their well-being and to your relationship with your kids.

If your children are reluctant to talk openly with you about their feelings, especially if they are older, you might suggest that they write you a letter explaining how they're feeling. Then you can read it privately. This could be easier for them than telling you face-to-face. After you've had time to absorb what they've written, you can discuss it with them in a very casual setting. Be sure to address their concerns and do what you can to assure them that you hear them, understand their perspective, and will be there for them.

Having just one conversation is not enough, but it's a start and lets them know what's coming. Continue sharing with them as you know about upcoming changes, so they won't get caught off guard, and this will help them to feel included. Do not ask your children who they want to live with because this puts a lot of pressure on them. They may tell you of their own accord, and that's fine, but do not ask them or tell them that it's their choice. This is an important decision with many factors to consider. Sometimes, in the case of older children (16 and up), the parents may feel that it makes sense for the child to decide. I caution you to only do this if you both agree that you will not argue over their choice and that you will not hold any negative feelings toward your child if they pick the other parent's home. But even older children often cannot make the best choice for themselves, because their perspective is very narrow at that age. They may be thinking more about slacker rules or more junk food than things like proximity to school or help with homework.

With older children, be very specific about the custody arrangement and schedule with each parent. Let them know that you will be flexible about special events, such as ball games, school functions, etc. This will be a big concern for them.

Also make it clear that the divorce is between you, the parents. Tell them that you will let them know what's happening that affects them, but some things will just be between you (the parents). This is an important boundary to set and stick to.

It is not a good idea to confide in your teens about the details of what's going on between you and your spouse. They may be very interested and questioning and may seem mature, but they are still children and are not capable of truly understanding all the complexities of an adult relationship. If there has been infidelity or some other betrayal, this should not be shared with your children. It will only confuse and upset them, and could make it difficult to trust you. They might become very protective of the parent they feel has been wronged, but this is not their job - they are the ones that should feel protected.

Conclusion

Telling your children that you're getting divorced is not an easy task, but it is incredibly important. By being upfront with them and including them in what's happening in the family, you are building trust and strengthening your relationship. It may not seem like it at first, as they go through the range of normal emotions and reactions to this major change in their lives, but the ultimate payoff will be huge. As you continue to have conversations with your children throughout the divorce process, they will feel more and more secure and comfortable, knowing that you care about and respect what they are going through.

Be gentle with your children and be gentle with yourself. There is no perfect way to talk to your kids about divorce, and there may be times when you wish you could take something back or say it differently. Don't beat yourself up over it. Just keep the dialogue going. What matters most is that you're talking to each other and sharing with one another. The more open and loving you are, the better the outcome.

Keep telling your kids you love them...