

## Protecting the Innocents: Keeping Kids out of the Divorce

October - December, 2011

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In American society, 50% of marriages end in divorce. Divorce is difficult on everyone, but children even more so. They are the innocents. Kids caught in the crossfire or put in the middle may suffer from long-term emotional harm and show scars of the war between the parents long after the battles end.

When divorce involves hurt, anger, and revenge, parties involved may find it difficult to rise above those emotions. To get back at a former partner, kids are often the ammunition to hit at what the other parent values the most.

If you are a divorcing or divorced parent, you are still responsible for the emotional, spiritual, physical, and financial well-being of your children. Put your kids first and work together because of the mutual love for your children. Children do better and tend to successfully emerge through the divorce process when their parents are able to work cooperatively on their behalf. Think like a business partner in your approach. Rise above the hurt,

the resentment, and the desire to retaliate and separate your duties as a parent from your former relationship. Ask yourself: "Do I love my children enough to put them first and work together through this divorce for their sake?" Here are some tips to do that:

**Protect the innocents.** Never force them to choose sides. Don't put children in the middle by implying that they should feel more loyalty to one parent or the other. Don't make them feel bad for loving both of you. Children need the love and support of both parents. Without that, children are the ones who lose. Emotional problems are greater if the children lose contact with one parent.

**Don't use your child for emotional support.** Get adult help for that. Don't play the victim or worry them about legal, financial, or other adult problems.

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## Be Your Own Healthcare Advocate

Speak up, ask questions, and be an active participant in your healthcare. Write down your questions before doctor visits to avoid leaving things unasked. Ask for a simple explanation when you don't understand the medical jargon or treatment plans. Repeat your questions if need be. If your doctor gives you special instructions, ask for them in writing or take notes yourself. It is easy to forget once you leave and it also helps keep your family in the know.

Don't blindly accept decisions made for you. You have the right to ask: "What will happen if I don't choose this treatment or take these medications?" Discuss costs and alternative, even nonmedical, treatment choices. Ask why certain tests are being ordered, if they are necessary, and about possible risks.

Know what medications are being prescribed, what they are for, and ask if they have any long-term side ef-

fects. At the pharmacy, don't decline a pharmacist consult for a first time medication.

Remember, you know your body. If you feel something is wrong and the doctor doesn't find anything, hold your ground and ask to get a second opinion, ask for a specialist, or ask to be seen at another hospital or treatment center.

And most of all, know what your healthcare insurance covers and the steps you need to take to meet the plan requirements. Some plans require pre-approval for you to be reimbursed.

Another important consideration is to name a durable power of attorney able to make healthcare decisions if you are unable to yourself. Many people today have living wills stating their wishes if faced with a terminal disease. These are easy to complete and can save a lot of angst and confusion over decision-making for your loved ones.

**Do not draw the children into the conflict.** Don't fight in front of them over visitation, child support, or finances. Don't verbally assassinate or discuss character defects of the other parent or their friends and relatives. Don't blame the other parent for the divorce or tell the children all of the horrid details.

**Help your child grieve and mourn the loss of the family they once had.** Normalize their feelings by encouraging them to talk about them. Say: "I know this hurts and it's okay." Tell them: "Your anger is understandable and normal." Or say: "It's okay to cry because you miss..." If you feel that your child needs professional help, get it.

**Communicate openly and honestly, and don't lie.** Children are not good interpreters of reality. They will create their own truths to unspoken questions about the divorce. Sometimes, the answers they create are more frightening than the actual situation.

**Reaffirm your love and support.** They need it more than ever now. A child's self-esteem can be seriously affected during a divorce.

**Share accolades and successes.** If your child accomplishes something noteworthy, praise him or her to the other parent in front of the child.

**Continue to participate in their activities.** It is important for both parents to continue participating in the child's activities. When you and your divorced partner are both attending your child's event, don't pretend that you don't know each other.

**Don't use visitation as a contest.** Cooperate with the process and try, for the kid's sake, to be flexible with fixed schedules. Things come up, work demands change, and vacation plans go awry. Don't block phone calls or listen in.

**Free them from blame or guilt.** Let children know that the divorce was not caused by them.

**Don't use your child as a "middle man" or communication conduit.** Communicate directly when you need to inform the other parent of something happening or if you have a problem with the other parent.

**Keep structure and rules in place.** Agree on major limits or rules that need to be followed no matter where the children are staying such as use of the internet, texting, safety rules, homework, TV parental controls, curfews etc.

**Agree on disciplinary tactics and enforce them.** Let the other parent know if you grounded the child. Once at your house, don't revoke that ruling. Don't let them get away with things as an attempt to appease your guilt.

**Do not play the 'Quiz the Children' game.** Do not ask questions such as: "Who is dad seeing now?" "Did mom have a man stay over?" "Is your dad/mom still drinking too much?" Don't ask them to spy for you, and don't ask them to keep secrets from the other parent.

**Do not insist that the toys/gifts/clothes you bought for them have to stay at your house.** Allow your children to take their gifts and other belongings back and forth if they choose to.

**Don't allow children to play one parent against the other.** Don't accept "But Mommy/Daddy lets me do this," or "said this is okay." Respond with: "I'll check it out with dad/mom before I make a decision."

If you see signs of serious distress in your child, seek help from your company's Employee Assistance Program or other support system.

For more information, visit: [www.kidsfirstoc.org](http://www.kidsfirstoc.org)

## **EAP Can Help!**

Your EAP is a confidential, assessment, short-term counseling and referral program for you and your family members. It is a free benefit provided to you by your organization.

**1.800.769.9819 ~ TTY dial 711 for TRS then dial 800.769.9819**

## **Online Work/Life Services**

If your organization offers Online Work/Life Services, visit our 24-hour internet resource for information, advice and support on a wide variety of issues. Contact your human resources department for a company code then check our Work/Life Services at [www.affiliatedeap.com](http://www.affiliatedeap.com)

