



Divorce Prerogatives: 10 Ways to Prioritize the Needs of Your Children

Divorce is never easy, and when there are children involved, it can be even more complicated. Due to the nature of divorce, it can be intensely personal and emotional, which often makes people make bad decisions on how they act and what they do. While understandable on one level, it should be avoided whenever possible because the real victims of this type of behavior are all too often the children.

Learn about some proven things that you can do to help minimize the unwanted impact on the children. They won't all be easy, but in the long run it will be much better for your kids, and you'll be very glad that you made the effort.

Don't Tell the Kids Too Soon

Many parents make the mistake of telling their children that they are getting a divorce before they are certain that this is the case. Kids don't need to have this type of added stress put on them unless you are 100% positive that a divorce is imminent (or one of the parents must move out). If you tell them too early and then decide to attempt to work things out, it can give them a false hope down the road once it really is time to move forward with a divorce.

Seek Professional Help

Divorce has been shown to be one of, if not the, most emotionally difficult events anyone can ever go through. If you try to suppress your emotions throughout the process, you are much more likely to 'let them loose' when your children are around, which may be difficult for them to handle. Having a professional therapist to talk to can let you work through your emotions in a safe and healthy environment, as well as teach you how to respond to the parental challenges inherent in divorce.

Let the Kids Seek Professional Help

Your kids will also be going through a lot of emotions, and depending on their ages, they may not be equipped to handle them in a healthy way. While they should always be encouraged to talk to you and your spouse, it can be helpful to schedule some time with an experienced child therapist. This can give them a safe place to process their emotions with the help of someone with lots of experience in this area.

Minimize Major Changes, But Encourage Adjustments

Whenever possible, you will want to minimize major changes like switching the school that the kids are in or forcing them to move out of a home they were used to. If they are involved in sports, clubs, or other activities, try to keep those as close to the way they were as possible. On the other hand, don't hesitate to start new traditions and make adjustments to the new way of life. Having a nice balance of maintaining important things from before the divorce while still moving forward is a healthy way to facilitate the adjustment for your kids.

Explore Alternative Dispute Resolution Options

Many people think that divorce always ends up in the courtroom battling it out in front of a judge. In reality, however, a large percentage of divorces can be completed using mediation strategies rather than litigation. In Utah, mediation is a great option for getting everyone on the same page, which results in far less stress and uncertainty for the children. It will also help to shield your children from some of the nastier details and conflicts of your divorce. Keeping your divorce out of the actual courtroom, or minimizing what needs to take place in court, is a much healthier way to resolve disagreements.

Never Talk Bad About Your Spouse

Whether before, during, or after the divorce, you should never talk bad about your spouse (or ex-spouse) to your children. In addition to being unhealthy for them to hear, it won't likely accomplish the goals that you are hoping for. Kids naturally want to love and be loved by both of their parents, and they are very willing to overlook even serious problems in order to maintain a good relationship. When one parent talks bad about the other, the kids are likely to be resentful toward the parents.

Don't Start New Romantic Relationships Too Soon

In your children's eyes, mom and dad should always be together. It will take some time for them to get used to the idea that their parents will be living apart. Even once they have adapted to this change, however, they likely aren't ready to see one (or both) of their parents being romantically involved with someone else. Give your children time to adjust slowly. Even if you do start dating, your children don't need to know about it for quite some time. Of course, the specific timing will depend on your specific situation and the age of your children. Try to be attentive to their needs in this area, and make decisions based on how you feel your children will react.

Don't Spoil the Children

While there are many things you need to do differently to help your kids adjust, you also want to be careful not to spoil them or let the kids run things. Many parents feel guilty for the impact their divorce had on the kids, and some kids will use that to their advantage.

Just because your marriage didn't last, doesn't change the fact that you are in charge of the house. Don't let the kids try to change that.

Avoid 20 Questions After Visitation

One of the hardest things to adjust to after a divorce is that the kids will likely be spending a significant amount of time at the other parent's house. When they return, it can be tempting to interrogate them to see what was done. While it is good to express interest, don't press them for information. Let them lead this type of conversation, and unless there is something that is dangerous or harmful, make sure to be supportive. Both parents should encourage their children to have a good time at the other parent's home.

Try to Set Consistent Rules

Finally, while you are no longer living together, it is a good idea to have consistent rules at both houses. Working with your ex to determine things like bedtimes and other routines can be very helpful for children. Of course, there will have to be some variation, but keeping the differences to a minimum can be comforting.

We hope you've found this resource useful, and we encourage you to share it with friends or loved ones whom you believe could also benefit from its contents. Please Contact Topham Family Law, PLLC with any questions you might have.