

From the Roundtable:

FAMILY MATTERS

What to Tell the Kids

Adapted from *County Kids*

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Divorce is often frightening for kids. Here's a guide for talking with children about divorce and how to address some of their fears.

Be Honest and Up-Front. When you're ready, tell them you're divorcing. They should hear directly from you. Finding out about it elsewhere can make kids feel betrayed. Your honesty can strengthen your relationship with them.

Tell Them Together. If possible, both parents should inform the children together. This tells them that, despite the divorce, you can still function together as parents, and that their situation won't be as chaotic as they might have feared.

It's OK to be Sad. If your kids are sad when hearing the news, that's not unusual. Give them time to be sad. Doing otherwise can make them feel their emotions aren't 'correct'. Listen empathetically to help them feel heard and cared for.

We Still Love You. Emphasize that you both still love them, just as before. Clarify that you're divorcing each other, not them. This reassures that you'll always be their parents. Also let them know that they're free to love both of you and don't have to choose sides.

It's not Their Fault. Kids often blame themselves for their parents' divorce, which is a heavy load. To avoid this, tell them it's not their fault — they had nothing to do with it. Emphasize divorce stems from both parents' efforts and mistakes and not from the children.

Just the Facts. If asked why you're getting divorced, it's best not to elaborate. Sharing personal details burdens kids with adult problems they had nothing to do with, and can't solve.

No Finger Pointing. Avoid blaming each other. Blame forces kids to choose sides, which is harmful because they want to love both of you. Explain that both parents share responsibility and agree it's best to separate, even if that's not exactly as you see it.

What's Next. To feel secure, kids need to know what their future looks like. When you've outlined a parenting plan, let them know. Give details, like where they'll live and go to school. Emphasize ways to stay in touch. And be sure you can deliver on these promises.

Keep a Lid on It. It's hard for kids to see parents fight, so avoid doing that in front of them. And to minimize conflict in your divorce, consider mediation, where you both work with a professional to reach a fair settlement civilly.