

Tips for Parents: Divorce, Separation Not Excuse for Abandoning Child

Divorce or separation can be painful, but shouldn't be a reason to ignore—or abandon—a child. Children typically are more likely to flourish when they have the support of both parents.

Setting aside anger and hostility can be difficult, but doing so will benefit a child and, in the long run, his or her parents, as well. Tips to consider include:

- Look forward, rather than dwell on past hurts and disappointments.
- Schedule a meeting in a neutral place—a coffee shop, rather than a residence, for example—and limit talk to the topic that needs to be discussed.
- Strive to be matter-of-fact. Be respectful, and keep emotions in check.
- Don't put a child in the middle by asking questions about a former spouse's new life.
- Don't make a child choose. Comments like "If you invite your father, I'm not coming" set the stage for loyalty battles that damage relationships, including your relationship with your child.
- Don't use money or gifts for leverage.
- Single or joint custody? Neither typically entitles a parent to act as a gatekeeper.
- Be fair—think how you might feel if the roles were reversed.
- Fulfill your share of the responsibility, whether paying child support, supplying medical insurance or such.
- If a child divides his or her time between two residences, make the transition as easy as possible: Keep personal items such as toiletries, clothing, toys and books at each place.
- Try not to cancel visitations. To a child, such cancellations seem like a put-down or lack of interest. Canceling also isn't fair to the other parent, who deserves some downtime, too.
- Let a school know both parents' telephone numbers and addresses so that each can be informed about school conferences and activities.
- If or when one or both parents remarry, birth parents typically should still act as a child's primary caregivers and representatives at parent-teacher conferences, medical appointments, etc.

Separation and divorce are painful, but time can heal. Time also can be an asset for stepfamilies, who grow into new relationships and establish new patterns.

One caution: Don't rush from one relationship to another. Take the time to identify problem behaviors that damaged a previous relationship and address them before seeking a new relationship.

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