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Tips from the
Divorce Support Club

How to tell your children
that you're getting divorced

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1 You **have** to tell your children

First thing's first – you do have to tell your children. It may sound obvious, but people do sometimes wonder if they have to tell their children, they think they can carry on and their children will know no better.

If you don't tell your children what's going on, they will start to make up their own stories in their head. Children pick up on more than we know, they will sense something is different and they will write a story that isn't based on logic or fact.

They will often centre this story around themselves e.g. mum and dad are breaking up because they don't love me, or because I'm naughty. Then they start thinking about how they can fix it e.g. if I'm really good mum and dad won't split up.

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2 Plan and keep it simple

It's important to plan what you're going to say when you tell your children. Going into the conversation unprepared may mean you end up saying things that aren't beneficial.

> Choose a time when you won't be interrupted or need to rush off.

> Talk to your children together if you can, present a united front with your partner – even though we aren't together, we're still your parents and we love you.

> Keep the conversation simple and use language that suits their age. What you say to a 14 year old will be very different from an 8 year old or a 4 year old.

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3 Reassure them and be honest

Be very honest about what's happening. Don't sugar coat it. Let them ask questions, and be honest with your answers, even if that means telling them you don't have an answer right now.

Reassure your children that this isn't their fault and that they've done nothing wrong. It's an adult problem that only adults can solve. Reassure them that you love them and will always be there as their parents.

Make sure you tell your children what will change and what will stay the same, so that they can process the possibilities.

4 Be prepared for their reaction

Children can act differently to one another when hearing news like this. You might be surprised by their reaction.

> Some children may be sad and cry, some will become angry and storm off, some might not believe you, others may appear not to have any initial reaction and some might even be relieved.

> Don't expect both or all of your children to react in the same way, you never know how they will take the news. Be prepared to deal with different reactions from different children.

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5 Avoid the blame game and don't make false promises

Don't blame the other parent for the split. Children will be conflicted between the two of you and feel like they have to pick a side.

You once loved this person enough to have a child with them, you don't want to put a strain on their relationship with your child.

Try to find positives, even if it's just one. Maintain some stability and routine so that the children feel safe and reassured that the adults will work it out.

Don't make promises that you can't keep. You can promise that you'll always be there for them and love them, but you can't promise things like being able to stay in the family home, or that nothing will change.

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6 Everyone makes mistakes

No one is perfect, and no one expects you to be perfect when going through something you've never experienced before.

> There may be times when you speak to your children about things that would be better discussed with your ex partner. That's okay, what's important is to recognise your mistake, and correct it where possible.

> Apologising to your child not only lets them know that you made a mistake, but it also sets an example to them as to how they should deal with their own mistakes.

> Don't beat yourself up. Learning from your mistakes is a part of life, and can even be useful.

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Resources

Living with Mum and Living with Dad: My Two Homes

Two Places to Call Home

Everything Changes

My Family's Changing

The Suitcase Kid

It's Not the End of the World

The Split Survival Kit

Writing to Children: A Judge's Toolkit

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