

Helping Kids Deal Divorce

In a perfect world, maybe we wouldn't need to talk about this. But we don't, and stats tell us that 50 % of marriages end in divorce. The stats for Catholic Marriages aren't much better. Parents play a significant role in how their children adjust to life after divorce. Children will grieve differently than adults when a marriage is ended. The more both parents nurture an emotionally and spiritually healthy environment, the better the kids will do. Even when both parents agree on this, almost without exception, children will need help in adjusting to this new family way. They need to be able to tell their stories to someone they don't have to worry about or try to protect (their parents). Some universally accepted ways that I've read about to help:

- 1) **Allow them to express their feelings:** Talk out, instead of act out! Allow them (encourage them!) to express the bad feelings that your divorce is causing them. Don't silence them, criticize them, or reprimand them for expressing those bad feelings. Don't minimize their pain by saying "I know how you feel" or "you should be stronger than that" or "it's better now than it was". Instead, say "I know this whole thing is very hard on you" or "I wish I could take this pain away" or "What can I do to help you?".
- 2) **Respect your children's relationship with their other parent:** Even though your marriage is over, the kids still need a relationship with both parents. Even if you think the other parent will let them down, don't interfere.
- 3) **Never speak badly of the other parent:** If you speak badly about the other parent your kids may feel even worse about themselves because they feel that part of that parent is in them. This may make them feel pressure to take sides. Don't do it, no matter what.
- 4) **Schedule time to be a family:** Regular family time doing things you enjoy together. This is time almost always sacrificed in a divorce.
- 5) **Attend Mass and Church events with them:** They must rely on the strength and direction that God will provide to heal. God is here to help them through whatever happens in life.
- 6) **Continue to discipline and maintain the parent/child relationship:** Don't try and buy their love or loyalty with gifts. Maintaining parental parameters gives them a sense of stability, helps them learn personal responsibility and appropriate behavior.
- 7) **Keep them active!** Exercise, draw, write a journal, play on a team. They have to learn to express their anger in a non hurtful way.
- 8) **STRONGLY consider a support group or a counselor who specializes in family and children support:** Kids want to fit in and they will feel the divorce makes them different. They need a safe place to express those feelings and a group they can be real in and understood in.
- 9) **PRAY! Pray! Pray!**