

B I L L F E R G U S O N

TIPS FOR PARENTS IN DIVORCE

DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO HAVE THE FAMILY UNIT CONTINUE. To a child, the loss of family represents the loss of security and well being. Do everything you can to heal your relationship with the other parent so you can work together for the benefit of your children. Keep the family unit in tact even though you live in different places. Attend special events together and support your children as a team. Make sure your children know that they will always be loved and taken care of.

LET YOUR CHILDREN KNOW THAT IT'S OKAY TO LOVE BOTH PARENTS. Don't make them choose between Mom and Dad. Children need to have a supportive relationship with both parents. Encourage your children's involvement with the other parent and with other significant family members. Children should feel comfortable having full access to both parents and family members through email, letters, telephone calls and personal visits. Encourage communication.

REINFORCE THE IDEA THAT YOUR CHILDREN HAVE TWO HOMES. Children should feel that they have a special home with each parent. They should never have to choose which home is better or which is their "real home". Don't criticize or judge your children's other home. Also, make sure your children have a special place in your home that belongs to them. Do this even if it's just a section of a room.

LET YOUR CHILDREN KNOW THAT YOU WILL ALWAYS LOVE THEM. Do this in both your words and your actions. When divorce occurs, children often lose their sense of security. They wonder, "If Mom and Dad can stop loving each other, they can stop loving me." Children need to know that they are loved. Tell them that the love between a parent and a child is different than between a husband and wife. Make sure your children know that they will be loved no matter what.

TELL YOUR CHILDREN THAT THE DIVORCE IS NOT THEIR FAULT. Children tend to blame themselves for the breakup. They believe that they caused the divorce. Make sure your children know that this isn't true. Tell them that the divorce is not their fault and that there is nothing they can do to change or fix the situation. Love your children enough to tell them this more than once.

MAINTAIN A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER PARENT. The single biggest factor in the well being of children in divorce is how well their parents get along with each other. Stay in communication with the other parent and do everything you can to heal your relationship, one human being to another. Don't expose your children to arguments, insults and other forms of conflict. Discuss important issues at a time when the children won't overhear.

KEEP THE OTHER PARENT ADVISED ON ALL IMPORTANT MATTERS. Don't make this your child's responsibility. Divorce is a confusing time for children. They should not be burdened with supplying information between households. Make sure you provide the other parent sufficient details regarding school functions, extracurricular activities and special events. Children need to be supported by both of you.

MAKE IT EASY FOR YOUR CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS. Let them feel their hurt and let them say whatever they want to say about their situation. Listen to them. Don't judge them, suppress them or talk them out of their feelings. Let them express their emotions and their concerns. Let them know that it's okay to feel sad and let them know that you are always available to talk.

SPEAK POSITIVELY ABOUT THE OTHER PARENT. Avoid criticizing or saying anything negative about the other person. Children literally view themselves as half mom and half dad. When children hear negative remarks about one of their parents, they internalize it. They consider it an attack against themselves. When anger makes it difficult to say anything positive about the other person, don't say anything at all. This holds true for remarks concerning step-parents, grandparents and any other significant person.

ALLOW YOUR CHILDREN TO STAY CHILDREN. Do not use your children as a source of emotional support or make them your confidant. Children should not be exposed to information regarding court matters, child support, financial concerns or intimate details regarding your divorce. Let them be children.

For more information, call 713-520-5370 or visit online at: www.divorceasfriends.com