

Helping Children to Grieve Separation and Divorce

In our own hurt, resentment, and fear, it's easy to forget that our children are experiencing their own absolutely huge losses--often even greater than those of the adults going through divorce.

1. Be aware of just how much your child is going through.

Children's feelings are as real as adults'—and children often don't have the life experience and other resources to deal with them.

2. Give your child less to grieve about.

Don't add conflict to children's burdens—it's kicking them when they're down.

3. Show respect for your co-parent.

All children need and deserve the shelter of a respectful relationship between their parents.

4. Let your child see your progress.

Visit “Finishing the Grieving” on the Parents Corner for some important ideas on your own hurt.

5. Let your child's needs set the pace.

It won't help a child to hear that she should deal with her sadness at a more convenient time. Likewise, it probably won't help to force a child to talk about what he's not ready to talk about.

6. Affirm what your child is feeling

A child's feelings can't be wished, scolded, or reasoned away. Think less about *fixing* your child's grief than just *showing that you appreciate how deep the feelings go*.

7. Admire your child—a lot!

As with any major challenge in your child's life, self-esteem will help. You can create it.

8. Tap into your child's strengths.

Remember that children depend on their successes and the confidence that comes from them.

9. Keep the old traditions and start some new ones.

Children will need to see that life is improving and that normalcy is returning.

10. Show your child that you are taking steps to grow stronger.

A child needs to see that Mom and Dad are growing healthier, feeling less hurt, and growing more cooperative. For some ideas, see “Some Obvious—and Some Surprising—Things to Do Instead of Battling” on our Parents Corner.