



TELLING THE KIDS YOU'RE SPLITTING UP

June 2010

One of the hardest things about splitting up can be how and when to tell your children. There's no easy answer, but here are some guidelines.

Give them definites not maybes. Your children shouldn't need to know "your father and I are thinking of splitting up". It will only worry them. When you make the decision, tell them then. If possible the two of you should tell them together, not separately.

Don't give specific details about why you're splitting up. If you say, for example, "I'm splitting up with your mother because she spends far too much money" you may find that your children go and fetch their piggy banks! It is enough to say something like, "you know your mother and I haven't been getting on very well lately and so we have decided ...".

Reassure your children that you both still love them, and that your decision to split up has nothing to do with them.

Tell them what the immediate arrangements are going to be. Tell them, for example, "you're going to be staying in the house with me and your Dad's going to stay at grandma's. He'll pick you up from school on Tuesday and you'll spend the night there".

Don't argue in front of your children or within their hearing – they will hate it if you do.

Don't criticise the other parent to your children or use them as confidantes. Whatever you may be feeling about your ex, your children need to be free to have their own relationship with their other parent. They will still love their Mum or Dad. While this can be extremely hard at times, you will be doing your children a huge favour. Confide in other adults or, better still, talk to a professional counsellor.

Try to keep everything else in the children's lives as stable as possible. The familiar is comforting. Separation is not the time to introduce new rules or make any changes in their lives.

As time goes on and the situation settles, you should ask their views about their care arrangements. But you need to make it clear that while their views are important, and you will take them into account, it will be you and their other parent who will make the final decisions about who cares for them and when. Children can feel overburdened if they feel they are being asked to choose between their parents.

Last but not least, in the hurt and chaos that go along with separation, it's not always easy to be a perfect parent. Do your best, but don't be too hard on yourself. And remember, you can't be both a mother and a father to your children. You can only be the best mother or father you can be...

For more information, please contact one of our offices.

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