

How to help your children through your divorce

A family lawyer interviews a therapist on how to help your children through divorce by channeling their sadness and anger into something productive and keeping their families as intact as possible.

By Michael Craven Updated: August 18, 2014

Categories: Coping with Divorce, Divorce Therapy

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Dr. Cassandra Friedman, a therapist who helps those going through the trauma of divorce, was interviewed by Chicago family lawyer, Michael Craven, on how to help your children get through your divorce. Her main focus is to help families going through divorce channel their sadness and anger into something productive, and keep their families as intact as possible.

She answers some questions below that are important for parents going through divorce to know.

Q. I often hear from clients that their kids are doing well, but if I ever talk to adults whose parents went through a divorce when they were younger, they often say that that time was very traumatic. Are the parents misreading their kids? Is it because counseling wasn't as readily available ten, twenty, thirty years ago?

A. You're right, resources such as the internet, support groups, and individual psychotherapy were not as readily available to children going through divorce back in the day. Such resources have greatly reduced the trauma of divorce.

These very same resources have greatly increased the parent's ability to avoid costly mistakes in parenting during divorce. Another huge factor, due to the rise in divorce rates, is that children no longer have the label of coming from a broken home. Additionally, they now have more peers that they can relate to. There is less shame associated with divorce, which will definitely help the children of divorce look back on that time in their lives with less anger and less trauma.

Q. What do you recommend telling the kids and not telling the kids?

A. What you decide to share will depend on the age of the child. My mantra is: share only what is age appropriate. What you share with a five-year old child differs greatly from what you share with an adolescent. Your child will verbally and non-verbally express what they want to know in regards to what is happening, and always make sure to address their concerns. Most importantly, when your child asks a question, answer honestly.

Q. How does speaking negatively about your spouse affect the children?

A. Speaking negatively about your spouse has a huge negative impact on children of all ages. Children caught in this dangerous web often tell me they feel like they have to choose sides. In time they lose respect for the parent that is bashing the other parent.

Q. What are the kinds of things can parents do during a divorce to bring the children to counseling?

A. I always tell parents, it is not divorce that is the problem, rather it is the WAY divorce is handled. Children hate when parents overly involve them in the specific details of their divorce. They also hate when one parent tries to force a child to take a side and choose one parent over the other. Children also hate when during or shortly after the divorce too much change occurs.

Children need time to adjust to their parents divorcing. They cannot handle changing homes and or schools too soon during/after the divorce. Lastly, children hate when the parent they are living with substitutes the child for the absent parent. Children need to continue to do things that are appropriate to their age. Do NOT ask your children to take on adult responsibilities!

Dr. Cassandra Friedman, Ph.D., LCPC, CADC brings 30 years of experience in speaking, teaching and private practice to amuse, challenge and motivate others to achieve more.

Chicago family lawyer Michael C. Craven represents clients in all areas of family law including divorce, property division, custody, child support, paternity, domestic violence, and the preparation of prenuptial and postnuptial agreements. He draws on his previous experience as a tax attorney to negotiate and litigate complex financial issues in matrimonial cases.

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