

MSCA Pointers for Parents

Help for Parents in Changing Families

What to Do

- * Be honest in answering your child's questions. Children need the truth so they don't have to create their own answers.
- * Let your child know what things will be like when the family changes (visitation, moving, other changes) to relieve his/her anxiety.
- * Encourage your child to have a relationship with his/her other parent and/or step-parents if divorced.
- * Reassure your child repeatedly that a divorce is not his/her fault.
- * Emphasize the finality of a divorce.
- * Acknowledge the child's need to react. Don't push him/her to share, but let him/her know you are there to listen.
- * Inform teachers and school counselors and other family members of the family changes. They can be a tremendous support to your child.
- * Spend extra quality time individually with each child.
- * Structure, routine, and predictability are important at this stressful time.
- * Provide consistency in rules and expectations at both homes.
- * Keep parental conflicts between the adults.
- * Seek professional help if there is a dramatic change in your child's behavior and/or if the behavior lasts longer than a few months.
- * Find positive role models of the same sex for the child if the other parent is absent or unavailable to him/her.
- * Encourage your child to remain a child. Little man/little woman roles and excessive worrying are not age appropriate. Children need to be children before they can grow into healthy adults.

What Not to Do

- * Do not talk negatively about the other parent.
- * Do not make excuses for the other parent. It is important that children see their parents realistically and honestly.
- * Do not compare your child to your ex-spouse.
- * Do not overburden your child with your emotional concerns.
- * Do not use your child as a messenger between you and your ex-spouse.

What Single Parents Can Do

- * Find a support group to:
 - Validate you are not alone.
 - Explore new ideas.
 - Establish new friendships.
- * The stressors are tremendous. Take care of yourself. Don't try to be superwoman/man. Learn to be flexible and compromise.
- * Delegate chores. Select age-appropriate tasks for your child to do.
- * Eat healthy.
- * Take time for yourself. Nourish the soul.
- * Discuss new dating partners with your child before introducing them and reassure your child that this dating partner will not replace his/her parent.
- * Wait to introduce until the relationship is more established.
- * Remember it takes time to adjust. You have experienced a monumental loss. Give your heart, mind, body and spirit the adequate space and opportunity they require to heal.

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