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# How Should Parents Tell Their Children About Divorce?

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**A weekly question/answer column**

**How Should Parents Tell Their Children  
About Divorce?**

*Glen Jenson\* answers:*

Approximately 45 percent of all children in the United States will experience the marital disruption of their parents, according to Census Bureau statistics. A study of children of divorced parents shows that approximately 80 percent said they were completely unprepared for their parents' separation. It was frequently mentioned that a parent just disappeared during the night or while the child was away. To help alleviate some of the stress and fears children experience during this time, consider these ideas.

- Most importantly, be sure you have tried some good, professional assistance in repairing the marriage before calling it quits. Divorce will likely not be easy on anyone and if the marriage is repairable, good counseling can help.
- The more amiable the divorce is and the events leading to it, the easier it is on children. If possible, parents should meet together with the children and tell them of their plans to separate. This should be done in advance of the separation and in a very calm setting. Explain why the breakup is happening and what has been explored to prevent it.
- Reassure the children that they are not responsible for the breakup, but that whatever they do or say is not likely to restore the relationship. Thank them for their concern. Apologize for hurting them and causing the disruption in their lives.
- Discuss the changes that will likely come into their lives, and how everyone in the family should be kind and may have to even be brave in facing these changes together. Reassure the children that they are still loved by both parents and give them permission to love both parents.
- After the separation, it is important not to put the children in the middle while handling differences. Do not quiz them on the whereabouts or behavior of the other parent. It is not fair to the children to try to get them to tell on their parent. Refrain from making derogatory comments about their other parent.
- After the separation occurs, it is important that both parents spend time with the children. Invite the children to discuss their feelings and questions about the divorce, as the occasions arise, for the next several years.
- Finally, it is important to note that there seems to be little relationship between how children react at the time of the divorce and how they will fare later in life.

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\* Glen Jenson is Utah State University Extension Family and Human Development Specialist