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SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR PARENTING DURING DIVORCE PROCEEDINGS AND COPING TECHNIQUES

Divorce is emotional and traumatic for the whole family. Children can sense the tension, uncertainties, and feelings of what is going on between the two parents. How the child processes this stressful time could have a significant impact on the remainder of their life, whether they are only two-years-old or eighteen-years-old.

The following suggestions are made to help you and your children cope with the stress of divorce:

1. Before speaking or acting in a hurtful way, think of your children's present and future emotional well-being. This will be difficult because of your own feelings, needs, and emotions, but try by taking some deep breaths and slowing things down mentally.
2. Try to keep a good, positive, and upbeat attitude in front of the children. The children see your attitude and it is reflected in their attitude to some degree. You don't want the children to associate when they stay with you as when things are negative and stressful and fun and happier with the other parent.
3. Give your children time to readjust. Spend time doing activities with them that they truly enjoy that will give them a reprieve from an emotional process, such as divorce. Maybe even find activities that both you can enjoy and both find a reprieve from the divorce.
4. Don't give any reason for your children to believe they are the reason for the breakup. Assure them they are not to blame and that they are not being rejected or abandoned. Children, especially young ones, often mistakenly feel they have done something wrong and believe the problems in the family are their fault.
5. You may have feelings of anger and bitterness, try to not let those emotions linger and fester. Don't let those feelings make you lose your cool, especially in front of the other parent as maybe they relish in that and fuel their bad behavior. Allowing those emotions to stay with you can only do continuing harm to you and the children. Nelson Mandela said "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." The faster you can let go of any resentment, the better off you and the children will be.

6. Do not force or implicitly encourage your children to take sides. To do so encourages frustration, guilt, and resentment.

7. Children need continuity. Try not to upset the children's routine too abruptly.

8. Be direct and honest with the children about what is happening and why in a way that the children will be able to understand and digest depending on their age and comprehension. Trying to keep it secret or hidden from the children makes the child feel as if he or she cannot talk or even think about what he or she sees is going on which can create an inner turmoil.

9. Don't allow the divorce to interfere with good parenting and disciplining. You may feel guilty about the divorce and not want to further harm the child, however, the child needs consistent control and direction. Over permissive or indecisive parenting allowing the child to control based on their whim and impulse interfere with their healthy development. Healthy parenting is letting the child know clearly what is expected of them. Children need leadership and sometimes authority. Parents must be ready to say "No" when necessary.

10. Remember that there is no such thing as a perfect parent. You are only human and don't get down on yourself if something doesn't go quite right. Also important, is to remember that the other parent is not a perfect parent and is only human. If they have failings, try to think about whether it was accidental, simple oversight, and/or a one-time incident. If it was more, we can talk about how to work certain provisions into a parenting plan to address the issues.

11. If you are a survivor of domestic violence, we suggest speaking with someone qualified to give support. Domestic violence is complex and we suggest working with a professional to help you through this difficult time. We will advise you with how domestic violence affects your case. There are domestic violence professionals and if you need resources, let us know we can help you find some.

12. I have made many admonitions that are easier said than done. How you put these suggestions into practice is a personal choice. Some have found that daily meditation works well to slow down impulsive reactions and release past anger and resentment. Meditation should not be confused as anything spiritual or mystic. It is, in its simplest form, exercising breathing and slowing down the mind. If you are religious, prayer has been found to activate the same brain regions as meditation. Other suggestions include finding activities that bring you joy such as yoga, painting, or volunteering. Therapy and counseling are another option for both you and your children to help cope with the emotions and trauma. Discover what works for you.