



Bay Brooke Center
For Independence & Wellness

Parenting and Divorce Class.com

Role Play Activity - Talking to the Children About the Divorce

Read through the scenario and practice talking to the child about the divorce. As the child, give the parents feedback on your thoughts regarding how or what they explained to you.

Divorce Scenario #1:

Consider, for example, a typical scenario of divorce. Mother and Father had been emotionally drifting apart from one another for several years. Father met an attractive woman at work and had an affair. Mother found out about it, reacted with rage, kicked him out, and then filed for divorce.

Mother, alone, might tell the children that Mom and Dad are getting divorced because their father was unfaithful and cheated on her. She might add that he spent all of his time at work, rather than with his family, and that she is tired of shouldering all the responsibilities of the family by herself.

Father might explain to the children that Mother has not shown any affection to him in two years, that she obviously doesn't love him, and he is tired of trying to get her to love him. So, he finally has decided to leave the marriage. He adds that he feels angry at her for forcing the break-up the family and making the children lose their father.

These certainly are two accurate ways to describe this divorce, as they each represent the respective emotional truths of each spouse. However, if the children were told these two different stories, they would certainly be confused and angry.

A "mutual story" of this divorce that they may agree to tell the children might be something like the following:

"We have been married for 13 years, and we both love you children very much. We used to also love each other a lot, and we still do care about each other. But, over the years, we both realized that we didn't love each other like married couples should. We have been unhappy with each other for a long time. We've tried to make it better. We even went to counseling, but it didn't help. We've tried really hard to love each other again, but it just hasn't worked. We each feel that we will be happier living apart from one another, and that we will be better parents to you if we live apart and are happier. We will both still be with you regularly and continue to take care of you, but at different houses."

Divorce Scenario #2:

In another divorce scenario, Mother feels that Father has been very controlling and very angry at her, intensely dislikes her friends, shows no affection towards her, and rarely spends time with the family. There has been a high level of overt conflict between them for many years, and the children have witnessed much fighting. Mother feels isolated and lonely, has developed her own separate social life, and she finally files for divorce.

Typically, Mother might separately tell the children: “Your father has been trying to control my life for too long, and he has hurt me terribly. He won’t let me do anything I want and he always tries to tell me what to do. You all know how he starts fights with me all the time. You kids and I are leaving him so we don’t have to take this any more from him.”

Father might separately tell the children: “Your mother doesn’t really want to be a mother anymore. She just wants to run around with her friends, go out drinking, and not take care of you. She wants to divorce me because she just doesn’t want to be a responsible adult any longer. I’ve tried to get her to listen to me and to be reasonable. I wish she didn’t want to abandon you kids. Then we could be a real family!”

A mutual story of this divorce might sound like this: “We have not been happy with each other for some time. It seems that we have grown apart and have very different interests now. We don’t make each other happy living together and, as you know, we just fight when we are around each other, and we know that you kids really hate that. We have decided that we will both be better off living apart. The fighting will stop, and we each will be happier living separately. However, we both still love you and you have permission from each of us to continue loving both of us, even if we don’t love each other enough to live together anymore.”

In summary, parents should try to give their children a basic statement as to the reasons for the separation, while sparing them the adult details about the marital relationship. Even in the most difficult and painful cases of marital separation, if the parents really want to spare their children the pain of being caught in loyalty conflict, they will figure out a way to develop a mutual story of the divorce. This story should be one in which neither parent is a “bad guy,” and each parent can continue to develop a separate and loving relationship with the children. . The specific words used in the above examples of mutual stories are just models of what are possible to say. Use your own words to express these ideas, keeping the concept of mutuality of the decision as your main focus.

After offering the mutual story of divorce, then explain to them, in as much detail as possible, how their daily routines will proceed and the schedule for how they will be sharing time between their parents. If you aren’t sure of the final schedule for time-sharing of the children after the separation, reassure the children that you two will work out these details and will let them know just as soon as they are set in place.