



**DIVORCE**  
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**WHAT - WHEN - HOW**

**3 Questions**  
**Children of Divorce**  
**need answered !**



# WHAT - WHEN - HOW

Questions asked about Divorce that your children need Answered!

The Questions of "**What**", "**When**" and "**How**" come from both the parents and the children's point of view and form part of many other questions,

The basic goal here from the parent's side is to ask yourselves **When**, being when do we tell the children. **What**, being what do we tell them and **How**, how do we tell them.

For the children, the "What" may come as "what is going on?" or "What happened?" "What did I do wrong?" Even, "what can I fix?" "What must I do?" There will be many "what" questions? The "When" for them will relate to when will this happen? When will dad or mom go or when will we move? The "How" will involve them, How will things change for me? How questions will be about the impact it will have on them.

Let's begin with how you as a parent tackle these 3 Questions. They may emerge in a different order as all families are unique and so are the children.

One crucial point to remember is that you cannot change what you don't acknowledge and acknowledging that the children need to be part of the process, for them to be able to walk this road, is vital from the very beginning.

The best place to start, as we take a look at the Questions facing the parents, will begin with "**WHEN**". So when should you tell the children about the impending separation or divorce?

Well as you already understand, there are a lot of factors influencing your present situation and they all carry varying degrees of impact on both the adults and the children. The character and personality, as well as the age of the children, make this unique. You may find a more mature child asking directly about what is going on and if the family is breaking up or about having heard the word "Divorce" being used and is that a possibility. At that moment it's best to come down to their level and to be honest. This doesn't mean there and then unpacking things but rather

acknowledging their question and need for clarity. Nor is it a time to deny things and this can swing back later and impact on trust levels between you and the child. So it's then about stating at their level of understanding that you will have a family meeting to talk about what they have just asked so that the whole family is on the same page. If you find the children aren't asking questions affords you more control of the timing and your readiness for the process.

Dealing with "**WHAT**" you may find on one hand you want to have enough information to informatively address questions the children may ask. One of the main questions asked by the children is they will continue to live in the home (security and stability are what we thrive off). You may however not be able to address these kinds of questions but what is key is to clear any murky water that creates fear, blame, and anger. The children don't always want the full details but the bottom line of how it is going to impact them and how their world will be rocked. This is all in line with their developmental phase as children are egocentric and everything revolves around them. They also think because they are the center of their universe that whatever happens may be their fault. Dispelling the myth that the breakup of the family is the children's fault is vital for them during this time. So in summary, you may not have all the answers but if you suspect there is a need for clarity then do, Remembering that this is not their fight and they have a right to the truth, not the detail, the truth!

Just a few things to ponder on as to look towards dealing with "When", are :

- It may not yet be time for full-on details to share with the children. Some plans are not yet concrete and could change and that last thing we want is to yoyo the kids up and down with forever changing information.
- To be remembered is that as time goes by, more and more people will know about the separation or upcoming divorce including family and close friends. You can run the risk that the children get info and possibly the incorrect info from elsewhere. That in their heads may take some time to work through and as they did not hear it from you there is a sense of betrayal.
- Also if you begin to sleep in different rooms or a move out of one party is looming, then talk to the children before the other walks out and the door is slammed in the kid's faces.

So now we look at **How** should we tell the children and the best answer here is for the parents to tell the children together. This is not an easy time as you sit looking into the eyes of the ones that never asked for this to happen. So yes it will be emotional but you will need to try to be strong so that they can get the facts and to the emotion (that will come). Try to provide reassurances to the children as this is a time where the very foundations they have been building on are being shaken. Choose the time wisely, no just before bedtime or leaving for work or school. Possibly over a Saturday morning, in the comfort of their home, leaving the weekend for them to process things and even ask more questions. It may take them time to digest the information and try to deal with their emotions. A reminder is not to tell them in their bedroom as this is their safe space, rather in the dining room or family room so that they have a place to go afterwards and begin to process all they have just heard. Always make sure all the children are together to avoid a broken telephone as messages pass between them. If there has been volatility in the home the children may feel relieved that this may decrease if one parent is moving out. Even if the talk seems to go really smoothly be aware that these children may still have negative feelings about the divorce and anger outbursts may occur.

We now approach the What should we tell the children? Children understand and more than we think and you can't fool yourself that they have not picked up on things happening in your relationship. For most age groups, their concerns will revolve mainly around their own needs. The security of their world has just been shaken. They will want to know how the divorce will impact them. Do they have to move? Are they going to lose their pets? What about school? Do your best at being as clear as possible regarding how the divorce will affect their day to day lives. Remember in the 'saying' there needs to be an ability to do the 'hearing' and at different ages, children are in different places developmentally. The impact on them will differ and you may see age regression in a younger child. No response from another that drives into academic work with all their might or another showing deep sadness. You will need help in assisting your children with this walk. As you recover they too need to recover and you cannot do this alone. The children need time to process their grief. There will be a time of them hoping and even trying to patch things up for their parents. This is all part of the process and they will have

to walk the recovery walk just like an adult will but at their own level and pace.

The greatest gift you can give your children at this stage is to shield them from adult issues regarding the divorce. They don't need all the facts and dirt and anger. This is not their war and the other parent will forever have that role of being their mom or dad whom they love. We cannot take that from them. If there is however abuse or things of that nature we can deal with them according to the law and professional intervention. You don't need to share the un-necessaries now as time will tell and as the children grow so will their understanding of how things really went down.

Assisting children during the divorce is a whole other topic that I will cover. There is a short **E-Book** on "**What Happens to the Kids?**" and in that, I deal with what the children are going through in greater depth.

So for now should you be at any place in this unfortunate journey remember the **WHAT** - **WHEN** - **HOW** questions the children need answering and remember a very important fact "You cannot change what you don't acknowledge!" This is a tough journey, especially with kids, so let's assist you with recovery for yourself and guidance with the children or a support structure as you walk ahead.

"I've been there" - "Done that" and "yes have the T-Shirt". Walked the walk, so yip, together we can talk the talk. Drop me an email.

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