

## **Guidelines for Parents in the Midst of Separation or Divorce**

### DO

- Do let your children know that you care. Show them your love through words and actions.
- Do listen to your children. Encourage honest, open expression of their feelings without judging or trying to change them.
- Do tell your children the separation or divorce is not their fault. Adult choices are never a child's fault.
- Do reassure your children that they are safe and will be provided for.
- Do let your children know that it is OK to love both of their parents. Support your children's relationship with their other parent.
- Do maintain consistent discipline and structure in their lives. Re-establish their sense of security.
- Do be dependable about keeping promises to your children. Maintaining your children's trust is important.
- Do inform your children's teachers about family changes. Update emergency contact records.
- Do seek professional help for yourself or your children if needed.
- Do keep your sense of humor. Laughter can lighten stress.
- Do work on establishing new family traditions and activities.

### DON'T

- Don't argue, blame, or criticize the other parent in front of your children.
- Don't use your children as messengers or spies.
- Don't leave children in the dark about the details of their future, such as custody arrangements.
- Don't use visitation or child support as bargaining tools with the other parent.
- Don't expose your children to adult information such as intimate relationship details, financial concerns, or child support and court matters.
- Don't allow your children to become counselors or confidants for your problems. Seek adult support from friends or professionals.

- Don't allow your guilt to interfere with parental responsibility. Try not to be overprotective or use material things to compensate for their loss.
- Don't expect your children to choose sides between parents.
- Don't make your children responsible for making adult decisions.

Getting Yourself Together When Your Family Comes Apart: Coping with family changes.

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