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Child Friendly Divorce

A checklist for parents to help foster your children's long-term adjustment to divorce.

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There is much parents can do to foster children's long-term adjustment to any major change in the family. If relationships are close, nurturing, supportive and dependable, they can buffer children from many of the blows inflicted upon them by stressors in their lives. Divorce is no exception.

We must remember that our goal as parents is not to prevent or protect our children from experiencing any stress, but to help make the stressors our children face moderate enough so they can tolerate and overcome them. This fosters the resilience that they need and we, as parents, seek to help them achieve.

There are four key ways to do this. These involve building good relationships with your children, developing open communication with them, stabilizing the home environment and limiting the amount of change in children's lives. The third, stability, is by far the most crucial to their long-term adjustment.

Build Good Relationships with Your Children

- Spend Time Alone with Your Children
- Show Children Empathy and Respect
- Reassure your children
- Be interested in their activities
- Support your children's relationship with their other parent
- Build your own support system

Create an Atmosphere of Open Communication with Your Child

- Listen to your child
- Put yourself in your child's place
- Tune into divorce related questions
- Accept their feelings
- Use emotional regulation to help yourself and your child
- Encourage them to talk
- Engage your child in an activity
- Stay available
- Share some of your own feelings
- Use a children's book to give them information about the divorce

Create a stable Home Environment

- Set up regular, organized routines
- Established rules and limits
- Seek out other support people for your children
- Resolve the issues of custody and placement as quickly as possible
- Take children's developmental needs into account
- End parental conflict
- Support children's relationships with their other parent
- Encourage your child to assume age-appropriate responsibilities
- Resolve the reconciliation question quickly
- Get counseling for your child if necessary

Limit the Amount of Change in Your Children's Lives

- Give your child six months before making additional changes
- Make changes gradually
- Allow six months between major changes
- Continue familiar routines
- Give children time to prepare for changes
- Provide a positive focus

Guilt

Guilt is common in the divorcing parent. It may be comforting to know that children often emerge from their parent's divorce with greater psychological strength. Research is showing that the most effective way to foster that resilience in your child is not to shelter them from stress, but to allow them to encounter stress in doses that are moderate enough for them to handle and overcome successfully. This resilience will serve them throughout their lives.

Take some time to go over the above checklist and think about how your children have been affected by your separation and divorce. At that point you can make some decisions about changes you need to make to enhance their long-term stability and security.

*This article was excerpted with permission from the book *Child Friendly Divorce* by Diane M. Berry, MSW, LCSW, JD, published by Blue Waters Publications, LLC. Diane M. Berry, is a former family law attorney turned psychotherapist. She owns and operates a mental health clinic, practices therapy and, has been teaching the four-hour Parenting Through Divorce training, now required in Manitowoc County and many other jurisdictions before a divorce may be granted.*