

DIVORCE SUPPORT TOOL BOX


Parenting

during separation, divorce
& beyond



Naomi Douglas

Introduction



Parenting is a challenge at the best of times, during separation and divorce, when we are at an all-time low, it is a daunting task. It also requires a set of skills that are unfamiliar to us. It is important that you understand the essential factors of parenting during these special circumstances. This guide will cover the basics. I assure you that at a time when you feel you have nothing left to give, and you already have more on your shoulders than you can cope with, these parenting skills will not only get your children through this difficult time, they will get you through it as well.

CHAPTER 1

Taking Care of You



As a parent, it is normal to put everyone else first. Sometimes this means ignoring your own needs. During a crisis, it is more important than ever to make sure that you are ok, so that you can provide the care and the environment that your children need to adapt and adjust to the changes in their lives. You know that you have to put the oxygen mask on first, or you won't be conscious to put on theirs.

Parenting During Divorce: Getting the mindset right

Regardless of the specifics of your circumstances, a marriage break down is an upheaval of the greatest magnitude. Your emotions will be intense at times, your issues complex and the stakes high. Whether you are experiencing anger, fear, depression, or grief, the most vulnerable parts of you are hurting and de-stabilised.

By providing the right environment for your children, you will actually provide the right environment for yourself. You need to create an environment in your home which is a sanctuary from the drama and tension of the divorce process. In order to do this, you need to consciously structure your life so that you are receiving the right support at the right times. Times with your children are times out from adult problems, for them *and for you*.

Drama can be a temptress that draws us into her spell. Although her influence can be unhealthy and cause our emotions to escalate and our thinking to lose its hold on reason, we are often compelled to turn again and again to her embrace. Part of the cause of this is that drama provides a strange buffer from the real pain that is lurking within us, threatening to overwhelm us with its brutal force.

We can get caught up in conflicts that steamroll over feelings, confusing the power to conquer with true strength. Often unnoticed, our children hold the keys to a higher path. Our children, no matter how old they are, will be at risk of being deeply hurt during divorce. This guide is to teach you how to protect them from that. Do not underestimate the potential for older children, and even adult children, to get hurt. If we commit to creating a safe haven for our children, the side effect will be an environment in which we can heal ourselves..

Children need to be allowed the privilege of their birthright to live in the realm of childhood. This means that they get to live mostly in the present time, they get to think about children's business, and they get to live in the almost dream like state that comes from being connected to a state of wonderment and joy of the magic of life's existence.

Q- What does that look like?

A- They talk mostly about the things that pop into their minds, not the things that adults impose on them. They have enough structure in their lives to be free from worrying about, or even considering, the big picture. They get to be silly. They get to be playful. They get to let their feelings out without worrying about whether that bothers someone else. They get to love both of their parents unconditionally. They get to receive love from both parents without doubt and without guilt



The Child Friendly Environment

The best thing you can do for yourself and your children is to turn your home, and all the time you spend with your children, into a child friendly environment.

Instead of talking about adult matters, and instead of focusing on painful thoughts and feelings, a child friendly environment is playful and filled with a sense of wonder and a sense of fun.

Your children are the best experts to turn to for learning what childhood is all about. Let them guide you. Find out what they think is fun and what they think is interesting.



Children also thrive from structure and routine, so a child friendly environment is not a free-for-all.

What are some activities that you and your children enjoy doing together?

Some ideas:

Reading Books

Cooking and Baking

Swimming

Sports

Drawing

Telling Stories

Telling Jokes

Decorating

Making Things

CHAPTER 2

The Do's

It is important to familiarise yourself with the “Do's” of parenting during and after separation and divorce and to practice these skills. Although they may seem obvious, when you are in the midst of such difficult changes in your own life, it is all too easy to lose sight of these principals. Remind yourself of them often, and when in doubt, get some assistance.

Do Create Stability

You need to create a structure in their lives so that they can go about their business without too much disruption. Create temporary arrangements that can provide stability until long term agreements can be made.

Now is not the time to make things perfect, it is a time to make things manageable. Minimise disruption to their lives. Keep your children engaged in their normal activities. Allow them time with family members and friends who they are accustomed to seeing.

Do Establish Routines

Routines are a fantastic source of stability, structure and security, especially during times of change and upheaval. Create strong daily and weekly routines that will carry your children, (and you!) through the most rocky of times. Routines are an amazing antidote to chaos. The simplest routines can provide certainty through uncertain times. Look at morning routines, meal times, meal planning, household chores, and bedtimes. Look at quality time together. I recommend reading to your children if they are receptive to this. Make it a part of your routine. Planning a weekly menu can make shopping and cooking easier during stressful times. Use the same menu each week, or have a few that you rotate. Be as consistent as possible with regards to who does what, when and how.

Do Reassure Your Children

Children need a lot of reassurance. They need to be reassured that you love them, that they will be looked after, that this is not their

fault, that things will be ok. Let them know that change is difficult for all people, but once you get used to the changes, life will feel normal again. Behave in a reassuring manner. By addressing your problems at the appropriate times and with the appropriate people, you will be able to be more positive for your children.

Do make your home a child friendly haven

This, I think, is the key to protecting your children while also giving yourself the best chance to recover, heal and build a good future. I wrote about divorce being a marathon. The best way to make it to the finish line is to recharge your batteries in a peaceful home environment. This means a big time out from discussing your problems and from arguing. This means spending quality time with your children, getting into the joy of being with them. Play games, read books, watch movies, be silly, make cupcakes. Do whatever works to keep you all focused on the present and engaged in child friendly activities.

Do listen more than talk

Yes, provide simple explanations to your children about the changes that affect their lives, but do this without overloading them with information they do not need to, and maybe should not, hear. Then, rather than questioning them, or raising a lot of serious discussions, allow them to talk about what they want to, when they want to. Follow their lead on this, and when they do want to talk: *listen to them more than talk.*



Do allow them to express their feelings

This is a rough time for them too, and they may feel angry, sad or frustrated. Let them vent their feelings, even if they do it about seemingly trivial matters, or seemingly directed at you. If you stay calm and are sympathetic to what they are going through, they will be able to unload the burden of their troublesome feelings.



Do keep a positive attitude

While you may feel that the end of the world has arrived, it is best not to communicate that to your children. Providing them with a positive attitude will help you to also gain some perspective. Let them know that change is a part of life, and although it is always difficult at the time, once everyone has adjusted, life will feel normal again.



Find adults to confide in

In order to keep your children shielded from the adult dramas that are ensuing around them, be sure to have adults around you whom you can confide in. You need to share your sorrow and your fears, and it is important not to rely on your children as sounding boards.



Protect your children from conflict

The most harmful thing for children of divorce is exposure to conflict. It is top priority for you to protect them from this. Good ways to do this is to conduct all conversations about the matter when the children are not present. This includes phone conversations. These should ideally be had when the children are not home, because you may find yourself raising your voice or being overheard without intending it. Also, your mood will be affected and it is better to spend that time creating a relaxing and peaceful atmosphere in your home.

CHAPTER 3

The Don'ts



It is so important to understand the don't of parenting during divorce. These don't are things that all parents can easily find themselves doing in the heat of turmoil. Don't deplete yourself by feeling guilty about things you have done in the past. Focus more on what you can do now and in the future to help your children to have a happy and healthy life.

X Don't expose your children to arguments

Experts around the world agree that it is conflict that is the most harmful to children of divorce. Do not expose your children to arguments, either face to face or on the phone. Do not expose them to arguments third hand, by discussing them with someone within hearing of your children.

The most common time for children to be exposed to arguments is at drop offs and pick ups. This situation needs to be closely controlled. Drop offs and pick ups should be all about the children, and creating a peaceful atmosphere for them. If you cannot do this, you need to find another method, such as having someone do the drop offs.

You can explain how important this is to your ex and suggest that the two of you schedule appropriate times to discuss your matters, when the children are not present.

If you find that you are not able to control yourself or the other party enough to keep your children out of harm's way, you need to seek the assistance of a professional, to work through your issues and reduce the conflict and heightened emotions.

X Don't speak badly about the other parent

Children need to feel unconditional love for their parents. It hurts them to hear you speak badly about their parent. No matter how bad the conflict is, *and even if they are speaking badly about you*, never speak badly about them to your children or in front of your children. If they are doing bad things, or if they are abusive, seek professional help. Speaking badly of them will not improve the situa-

tion and it is hurtful for your children. There are much more constructive things you can do, and a professional can advise you about this.

X Do not discuss adult matters with your children and do not turn to them for emotional support.

Beyond information that is necessary and relevant to their lives, children should not be exposed to your problems and worries. They should not be expected to reassure you, offer advice, or sympathize, particularly about how their parent is treating you. Make sure you are sourcing emotional support from appropriate adults and discussing your problems with adults who are in a position to help you and guide you.

X Don't put children in a position of taking sides

Children should not have to take sides or feel in any way obligated to take sides. They should never be made to feel badly about wanting to spend time with a parent, or feel love for a parent. Be very careful what you say or expose them to and think about whether this could cause them to feel obligated to take sides or demonstrate allegiance. If you believe that your ex is causing them to feel this way, it is worth your while to get professional guidance on how to handle this situation.

X Do not use your children to gain information about your ex

Children should not be turned into spies, informants or messengers. You need to keep them out of your affairs with your ex and find another way to get information and communicate with your

ex. When they spend time with their other parent, especially if you are in conflict with that person, you need to let go and allow the other parent to have that time without interference. Do not question your children when they return. If they have something they want to tell you, they will. If you have something you want to communicate to your ex spouse, use phone or email or make an appointment to meet with them. We live in an age of technology, there is no reason for your children to have to pass messages back and forth, either written or spoken. If there is something you want to know about your ex, you either need to communicate directly with them or let it go. If you are obsessing about something that regards what is going on in their home or their life, you may need to speak with a counselor or coach and work out what is driving these thoughts. If you are concerned about what your children are being exposed to at the other parent's home, you may need to get a coach or mediator involved. If you have serious concerns that someone is in real danger, you need to seek professional help.

X Do not respond to their anger with anger

While it is important to retain good boundaries with your children, that is not the same as being angry with them. If your children express anger, it may trigger your pent up feelings. Do not respond to their anger with anger. They need to feel safe to let some of that anger out. You also may be feeling sensitive about whether they still love you as much as they used to. Of course children love their parents, they do not need to prove that to you. If your emotions are affecting your parenting, it is a good idea to get some

counseling to help you through this difficult passage of life. Your children need clear thinking and calm parents now more than ever!

X Do not get overwhelmed by guilt

You may be feeling guilty for not having done the "do's" or having done the "don'ts". You may be feeling guilty for the divorce and for the changes in your children's lives. It can be so difficult to resist the guilt, but there is nothing to be gained from it. You need to come to terms and accept the past and focus on the present and the future. If you allow guilt to consume you, it will be difficult to provide structure and clear boundaries for your children. If you try to compensate for the divorce by spoiling them, you are not doing your children any favours. It will only give them a false understanding of what love is and encourage them to be manipulative and entitled.

X Do not turn your children into messengers

When you are having difficulty communicating with your ex, it is tempting to ask your children to convey messages on your behalf. This is not fair to them and puts them in a very uncomfortable position. There are far better alternatives such as email and texts. You can also set up systems such as a shared Google calendar for the children's schedule.

X Do not discourage the children from having a relationship with their other parent

Children have the right to a loving relationship with both parents. Their love for their other parent has nothing to do with how much they love you. If you feel wronged by your ex, their love for their parent is not a betrayal. If you believe that your ex poses an actual threat to your children you should seek professional help. If you struggle to remove your emotions from interactions you have with your children, then you should get some counseling to help you to process these feelings and move beyond them.

CHAPTER 4

CoParenting



Even when a marriage ends, parents still have the important and cherished job of raising their children. Parents all face challenges when raising children and co-parenting presents new challenges that require knowledge, skill, strength and commitment to meet effectively. Your children are precious and they need you to learn how to be a good co-parent.

Movie 4.1 The Importance of Building a Healthy CoParenting Relationship



This video provides an overview of the mindset needed for laying the right foundation for becoming a co-parent.

Different Types of Co-Parenting Relationships

The types of co-parenting relationships range in direct proportion to the amount of conflict between the parents. On one end of the spectrum are the low conflict parents who have a high level of cooperation and then on the other end are the high conflict parents with no ability to cooperate.

Although it is always worthwhile to work towards reducing conflict and increasing cooperation, it is also important to acknowledge where you currently stand and make the best of that situa-

tion. For example, if you are in a high conflict situation, it is unrealistic to expect that there will be a lot of agreement between how things are done within the two households. Low conflict parents might collaborate on many issues, such as bedtimes or how much time is spent on computers. High conflict parents however will probably find it difficult to communicate and agree on such matters. It is far better to accept that the household will run differently from each other than to argue constantly about these things.



Remember: It is conflict that is most damaging to children of divorce.

Food for Thought

Nobody wants to be involved in a high conflict divorce, but if you are you need to understand where the priorities lie. While under ideal circumstances you may feel that the amount of vegetables your child eats, or the amount of television they watch, for example, is of top priority. In your circumstances, reducing conflict is the top priority.

What this means is, if it is causing tension, you simply need to stop worrying about what goes on when the children are not in your care! (Unless, of course, they are in danger.)

Four Versions of a Co-Parenting Relationship





Make Changeovers **Child-Friendly-Times**

Guess what? Changeovers are not about you, they are about the children... and nothing but the children. 100% of your attention needs to be on making your children feel comfortable, confident and at ease during changeovers.

It is often very tempting to focus on your ex partner during changeovers, and take the opportunity to communicate with them, or even attack them. You need to make it very clear to yourself, and your ex that this is NOT ON.

Tips For Child Friendly Changeovers



Focus entirely on the children



Behave in a calm and cheerful manner



If you are the one saying goodbye, act like you are happy for them to be spending time with their other parent. Tell them to have a good time with a smile on your face.



Be organised. Have all the things that they need and any logistical information required for their upcoming activities.



Use good manners when speaking to your ex. You are a role model! And your children love both their parents!



If you have things to discuss with your ex, make sure to schedule another time to do it - not during changeovers!



If you cannot control yourself, or if your ex cannot control him or herself during changeovers, arrange for someone else to do it.



If you cannot control yourself, or if your ex cannot control him or herself during changeovers, see a counselor, or better yet, a divorce coach!





Naomi Douglas

Naomi is a Divorce Coach, Marriage Coach, Family Mediator (FDRP) with a Masters Degree in Social Work.

Naomi has a background in counseling and personal development therapies gained well over twenty years.

Naomi also has a diploma in Early Childhood Education and has worked with both children and parents with her passion for providing

children with the best pathways to healthy and happy lives.

She has developed a coaching method for both divorce and marriage reconciliation which is based on leading edge knowledge in personal development. Her clients are able to make rapid and profound changes that allow them to live better lives. She also provides this same dedication and commitment to the clients who come to her for mediation and parenting plans.

"Naomi gets what being a divorce coach is all about." Stephen Page, Family Lawyer

DivorceCoach.com.au

0421 421 757

Coaching can be arranged from all time zones/countries by Skype/Phone