

I still need more emotional security

When their parents separate, children feel that their world, their security and the stability that they have always known is falling apart. They are going through a huge emotional process and experience so many different feelings during the journey of living with two parents and then having to live with one. They may worry that their parents don't love them anymore; they can feel abandoned, anxious, very scared and insecure.

Children generally do not have any say in the decision of the separation or divorce, and more often than not will not have a choice in the events that follow. This powerlessness that the child has really interferes with their sense of security, which then lowers their self-confidence. Children, like adults, need and like to feel they have control over their lives and have a choice in what happens to them. So how can we make them feel more emotionally secure?

Sharing of Information

Share information with your children as they want to know what is going on with you and mum/dad but give them as little or as much information as they need to know. As the parent you may know very little about what is going to happen in the future but you can make them feel more secure by telling them if the separation is temporary or permanent and that no matter what you will always be there for them.

Living Environment

There may be a lot of change going on around them and your children may be frightened about how its going to affect them. Tell them about the future living arrangements and the practical, immediate changes. If you can keep as many factors the same in their life. Try and avoid changing their school, environment or disrupt their routine. Instead give them time to adjust to the single parent environment and the visitation schedules etc.

Rules

Talk to your children simply and repeatedly about the separation so that they fully understand and if possible maintain the family rules. Some parents find it tempting to relax the rules during and after separation because they know their children are going through a hard time. But changing the rules may well make the children feel less secure and children need security especially in this situation.

It may also be tempting, on the other hand, to become more harsh and disciplinarian. If you felt that in the family setting there were not enough rules and boundaries you may feel that now is the time to have the stringent rules that you wanted previously. Parents who feel overwhelmed by the separation may want to have more control over their childrens movements and behaviour. This can make children more anxious and frightened.

Inclusion

Children will want to be included in the discussions about the new rules, the changes in lifestyle that are going to occur and parent visitation. Even though adults usually have the final say, children feel valued when their wishes are heard and taken into consideration.

Decision-making

A good way to help children feel secure is for them to continue making their own decisions and giving them choice. By letting them choose what they want to eat, to wear, or how to spend their allowance will help them feel that they do have some control over their life, which in turn will help eliminate their feeling of helplessness.

Whispering

Children can often feel awkward and insecure during the handing over process from one parent to the other. They want the transition to be smooth and civil words spoken. However, instead they get you talking about them and what happened during the visit. They would prefer it if you spoke about the 'visit' after the handover.

If you can, discuss details about the children when they are not around. Whispering, low voices or asking the children to leave the room so you can discuss how their weekend was can make the children feel awkward and also make them feel that you are hiding something.

If you are going to ask them to leave the room when you discuss finer details of the visit then relay to your children what you are doing. Children need to be informed otherwise they come to adverse conclusions.