

Why can't parents behave like grown-ups?

Arguments and tension between parents can make children feel guilty, angry, and alone. Trying to make the children take sides or turn against the other parent creates confusion for the children and places them in the middle of an adult struggle. It is important to let the children make up their own minds about their parents. Children generally want to make both their parents happy - don't make them choose.

Parents may be tempted to use their children to pass messages to each other or complain about the other parent - don't - they don't want to know and aren't interested. Occasionally one or both of you might question your child about what the other parent is doing in their life or who they like the best. It is not a competition – they love you both for different reasons. Children should not have to listen when parents say bad things about each other or take sides.

Children want to know that:

1. Both parents love them and that they will try not to put them in awkward situations. If they do they must tell you. Think about what you are saying to your child and think, 'Should I be telling them this' or 'Asking this question?' 'Am I being fair to them?'
2. Explain that separation/divorce is new for you as parents and that they are going to make mistakes whilst getting used to the new situation.
3. Ask your children to tell you if they are doing things that are upsetting and hurting them.
4. If they will not talk to you get them to write a letter to you. Sometimes children find it easier to get their feelings down on paper without having the embarrassment of emotions getting in the way of what they want to say.
5. Tell them you are not interested in what dad/mum is doing but if they want to tell you then that's okay. The same goes for if they had a great time with the 'other' parent.
6. When you both (parents) are together behave well towards each other when your child is around. It does not take much to be civil and polite.
7. Talk to them about spending time with both of you as you are still their parents despite not being together. You divorced each other you did not divorce the children.

It is especially hard when one parent is sad whilst the other one is happy. Children will find this tough and feel sense of loyalty to the one who is not happy. There may be many reasons why one is happy and one is sad. Try to be your normal self and not put troubles and moods onto you child as they often reflect them. You don't want them to feel sorry for you and treat you anything other than their parent.