



Children's Needs While Going through a Divorce/Separation

Acceptance

This will be a child's greatest need because their self-concept is very likely in a fragile and formative stage, especially if they are at a young age. They will try to gain approval because their sense of belonging to the family has been shattered. Children also tend to personalize things and blame themselves. If mum and dad are fighting and divorcing, they personalise it. They think, "If we didn't make so much noise. If we didn't need shoes..." They need acceptance. They need to know that they are important, that they are a priority. They will try to gain approval because their sense of belonging to the family has been shattered.

Assurance of Safety

Parents need to go beyond normal efforts to assure their children that although the family has fragmented, their protection is solid. The key is to maintain a normal pace, boundaries and routines. They need to know that their world is predictable and that it's not going to change on them.

Freedom from guilt or blame for the divorce

Children often shoulder the blame for the dissolution of a marriage. They personalise their part in the divorce because they know they misbehaved, and they feel that they're somehow being punished for it by the breakup of their parents. Be conscious of this and assure your children they're blameless.

Need for structure

With the loss of a family leader from the home, children will check and test for structure, so be sure to give it to them. They need structure more than any other time in their lives, because this is when things seem to be falling apart for them. Enforce discipline consistently and with the right currency for good behaviour. They need to see that the world keeps spinning around, and they're still an integral part of what's going on.

Need for a stable parent who has the strength to conduct business

Whether or not you feel brave and strong, you have to appear to be the best for your children. They're worried about you and about your partner, especially if there's an apparent

crisis. Do everything possible to assure them of your strength, and in doing so, you make it possible for them to relax. Show yourself to be a person of strength and resilience.

Need to let kids be kids

Children should not be given the job of healing your pain. Too often, children serve either as armour or as saviours for their parents in crisis. They don't need to be dealing with adult issues, and should not know too much about what's going on between you and your ex-spouse.

There are two primary rules to follow, especially during times of crisis and instability in your family.

1. Do not burden your children with situations they cannot control. Children should not bear such a responsibility. It will promote feelings of helplessness and insecurity, causing them to question their own strengths and abilities.
2. Do not ask your children to deal with adult issues. Children are not equipped to understand adult problems. Their focus should be on navigating the various child development stages they go through.

