

INFORMATION FOR CAREGIVERS

ON NAVIGATING DIVORCE OR SEPARATION



WHAT TO EXPECT

Increased anxiety: A new schedule, new living arrangements, and new family dynamics can often cause kids to experience anxiety. This can show up as fear, irritability and outbursts, being uncharacteristically clingy, trouble sleeping, and physical symptoms like stomachaches or headaches.

Withdrawing: Does your child seem unwilling to talk to you or spend all their time in their room? Withdrawing from friends, family and activities is one way kids cope with this new adjustment

Outbursts: The opposite can also be in true. In an effort to regain a sense of control or attention, your child may start to act out.

Regression: Depending on the age of your child, they may require more support from you on things they had mastered before. Sleep, potty training, and self-care habits may require extra parental support and attention.

Guilt: This one probably does not come as a surprise. Your child may be concerned the divorce is their fault.

Divorce or separation is a difficult and complicated adjustment for any family. As a parent or caregiver, you are likely concerned about how best to support your child during this time. It is important to allow your child to not be okay, and to support them as they learn to navigate this new normal.

RESOURCES

Please visit essexpediatrics.com/resources/ for links and additional resources.

Two Homes by Claire Masurel

What Can I do? A Book for Children of Divorce by Dawn Lawry.

My Parents Are Divorced Too by Melanie Ford

Was it the chocolate pudding? A story for little kids about divorce by Sandra Levins

It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear by Vicki Lansky

Dinosaurs Divorce by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

Unruffled with Janet Lansbury: A Podcast About Helping Your Child Through Your Separation

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Stick to a predictable routine and help your child understand what their new schedule is going to look like. Talk with them in detail about where they are going and what their new living arrangement will look like. Both parents can post a calendar somewhere in the home that allows your child to see where they will be each week. It is much easier for your child to adjust to this new situation if the new routine is consistent with their old routine. Co-parenting can be challenging, but the sooner parents can agree on a consistent schedule the better. Use supportive language when possible about the other parent.

Give your child space, but check in regularly. Plan a special day with your kid in which your focus is entirely on them. If your child does open up and want to talk, make sure you listen attentively.

Work to create a structured and consistent environment for your child. The more this can be cohesive between households, the better! Setting clear expectations and sticking to them can help your child feel safe. Model remaining calm during this difficult time.

Be patient, and offer your child the additional support they need. Remember how little control kids have over their own lives, and how scary that can be. Let your child lead any conversations by using reflective listening skills. For example, try to repeat back what you hear, and validate any emotions they share with you.

Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal communication. During times of transition, our children pay attention to more than we think they do. Refrain from using negative language about your new co-parenting situation, and do not discuss challenges you may be experiencing where you could be overheard.

Call the front office to schedule a [parent consult clinic](#) with a member of our mental health team. At this appointment, we will discuss additional ways you can support your child through this transition.