

Talking to kids about your separation from them

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Separating from your partner is a hugely traumatic experience not just for you, but also for your children. They've been used to having two parents around, and suddenly that security is being ripped away. One of their parents, which in most cases means you, the father, will no longer be around every day. Their world is going to be shattered. So how do you explain it all to them?

Preparation

If possible, you and your partner should sit down together and decide what to tell your children. **Don't Argue In Front Of The Kids** – the less poisonous the atmosphere, the better for everyone.

Children are smarter than many believe. They'll have a sense that things aren't right, even if they don't understand exactly what's happening. You should strenuously avoid saying negative things about your partner in front of the children (this applies all the time, not simply during the separation process).

If at all possible, sit down with the children and explain things a little while before you move out. Give them time to adjust to the idea rather than presenting them with something as it occurs.

The Most Important Points

It's impossible to stress it enough, but make sure that you tell the children that the separation isn't their fault. It's common for children to feel responsible when their parents split up, so emphasise often that the reasons have nothing to do with them. When explaining the situation to your kids, the two of you should do it with respect for each other. Accusations and shouting will only upset your children even more.

As part of that, reiterate often that both you and their mother love them, and want the best for them. Encourage their questions, and give the most honest answers that you can (at the time it's often not possible to know exactly what you're feeling).

It might not be possible, but the best scenario is if you and your partner can sit down together with the children and explain the situation to them. With young children, going into any kind of detail is pointless, as they won't understand. Older children will almost certainly have friends with separated or divorced parents, so explain the circumstances to them.

If living conditions are going to change for your kids, tell them. They might be moving to a new house or a new school. Tell them as far ahead of time as possible. This will be a stressful time for them, and they'll need the support of both parents even if you're not together. Make sure you're available to them, in person, on the phone and by email, when they need you.

The Problems

Of course, with some splits the parents find it impossible to sit down together for an explanation to the children. When that happens, sit down alone with your kids, tell them you and your partner are separating and that you have to move out. However, make sure you tell them where you'll be, and explain to them the ways they can get hold of you (phone, email), and that you will see them regularly and always be available to them.

Take care, too, not to bad-mouth your partner, however you feel. It serves no purpose, and forces your children to take sides, one parent against the other, making them pawns in a game which leaves them in a very uncomfortable position.

Remember throughout that both you and your partner want the best for your children. Whatever your situation, keep that uppermost in your mind.