



Onward[™] Guides:

Sharing Your Decision to Divorce with Your Kids

Support, understanding, and communication from adults can significantly impact how children respond to change, and communicating with children about an impending divorce is a sensitive and important conversation.

When telling your children about a divorce, there are many variables at play, including parenting styles, the nature of your relationship with each child, and their ages and developmental stages. Each of these factors can influence how they process the news and cope with the changes. By carefully considering these elements, you can approach the conversation in a way that provides them with the understanding and reassurance they need during this challenging time.



Here are some strategies to help you approach this difficult discussion with care and compassion:

1 Plan the Conversation

Choose the Right Time and Place: Find a quiet, comfortable setting where you can talk without interruptions. Ensure that everyone is calm and has the time to engage in the conversation fully.

Decide Together: If possible, both parents should be present for this conversation. It shows a united front and reinforces that both parents still love and care for the children.

2 Use Age-Appropriate Language

Consider Their Age and Maturity: Tailor your explanation to the age and understanding of your children. Younger children may need simpler explanations, while older children can handle more details.

Avoid Overly Complex Explanations: Focus on the basic reasons for the divorce without going into unnecessary or adult details that might be confusing or distressing.

Young Children (3-6 years): Young kids need simple, concrete explanations, as they may not fully understand the concept of divorce. Reassure them that both parents will still love and care for them.

School-Aged Children (7-12 years): This age group can understand more details and may have questions about logistics, like where they'll live. They might also worry about their own routines and friendships being disrupted.

Teenagers (13-18 years): Teens may have a more complex understanding and can react strongly, possibly feeling anger, guilt, or embarrassment. They often need reassurances that they are not responsible for the divorce and may benefit from being involved in discussions about the future.



3

Be Honest Yet Gentle

Explain the Situation Clearly: Be honest and direct in language your children can understand. Keep the explanation simple, focused on the fact that the decision is between the parents, and make sure to reassure them that they are loved and were not the cause of separation.

Avoid Blame: Steer clear of assigning blame or discussing personal grievances. This conversation should center on the children's feelings and needs.

4

Encourage Questions

Create an Open Dialogue: Let your children know it's okay to ask anything they want. Answer their questions as honestly as you can, keeping their age, level of maturity and emotional state in mind.

Validate Their Feelings: Acknowledge that it's normal for them to feel sad, angry, confused, or worried. Assure them that their feelings are valid and that it's okay to express them.

5

Reassure Them of Your Love

Affirm Your Commitment: Make sure your children understand that both parents will continue to love and care for them, no matter what.

Discuss Continued Support: Explain how routines will continue, such as school, activities, and spending time with both parents. Reassure them that you will support them through this transition.

If You're Okay, They're Okay: Children often mirror their parents' attitudes and behaviors, particularly in areas such as emotional responses, communication styles, and coping mechanisms.

6

Establish a Positive Tone

Focus on Family: Emphasize that the family will still be a family, even if it looks different.

Introduce Stability: If possible, provide a sense of stability and reassurance about the future. Explain any upcoming changes in a clear and manageable way.

7

Be Prepared for a Range of Reactions

Allow for Different Emotions:

Understand that children might react in various ways—some may cry, while others may seem indifferent or act out. In some cases, kids may have felt this coming, and might feel relief. Give them space and time to process their feelings.

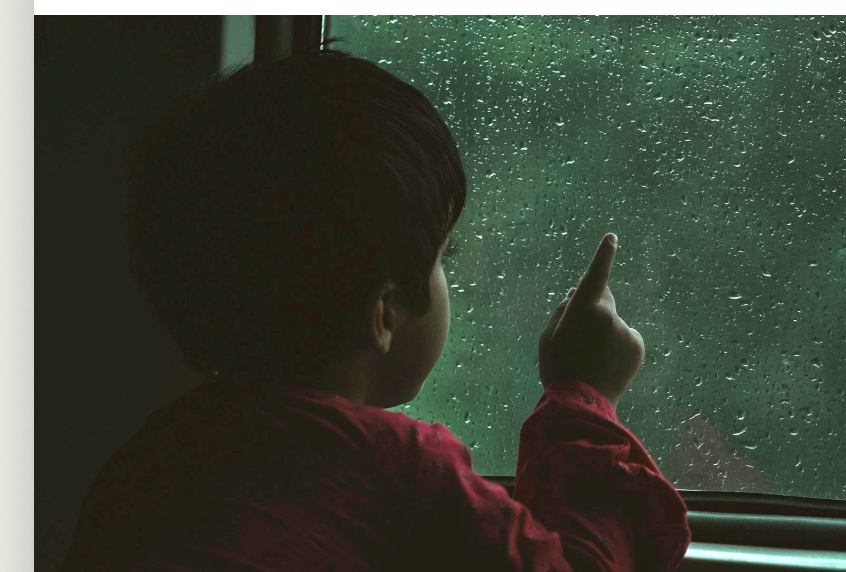
Check in Later: After the initial conversation, keep the lines of communication open. Check in with your children about how they're feeling in the following days and weeks.

8

Seek Professional Support if Necessary

Consider Counseling: If your children are struggling to cope, consider seeking help from a family therapist who specializes in divorce. They can provide tools and resources for processing these changes.

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Finding the words to begin...

There are gentle ways to begin this important discussion. These phrases create a calm, safe space while preparing children for significant news.

"We want to talk to you about a big decision we've made as adults."

"You know how sometimes people change and things become different in life?"

"We have something to share that might be surprising, but we want you to know that everything is going to be OK."

"Thanks for coming to sit with us. We want to talk to you about something."

Explaining What Separation Means

Start with clear, age-appropriate explanations of what separation actually means. Focus on concrete changes while emphasizing unchanging love.

"Separation means that we won't be living together in the same house anymore, but we'll still be your parents and always love you very much."

"Sometimes, parents realize that they are better apart than together, and it doesn't change how much we love you."

"After a lot of thinking, we've decided that it would be best for our family if Mom and Dad don't live together anymore."

Reassuring About the Future

Provide a base of support by using statements that provide security and stability during uncertainty. These help children understand they'll still have both parents actively involved.

"You will still see both of us.
We'll each make sure we keep
spending time with you."

"We'll always be here for you.
We'll figure out a new routine
together that includes both
of us."

"We're here to help you
through this change, and it's
normal to feel sad or scared."

"This doesn't change how
much we love you. We are
still a family, even if we live in
separate houses."

"Change is hard, and it takes
time to adjust. We'll listen to
your feelings and try to make
it as smooth as possible."

Maintaining Connection

Uncover ways to preserve important family traditions and relationships. These phrases help children see that meaningful experiences will continue.

"We want to keep doing the things we love together."

"We'll make sure that you both stay connected to your friends and keep doing the activities you enjoy."

"We'll make sure that the holidays and special occasions that matter to you will still be celebrated together."

"We can still have family game nights and keep those special moments."

Encouraging Ongoing Communication

Use phrases that keep the door open for future conversations. These emphasize that this is an ongoing dialogue, not a one-time announcement.

"It's okay if you have more questions later. We can talk about anything you're feeling anytime you want."

"We can always talk about how you're feeling as we figure this out together."

"Remember, we love you both very much, and we'll figure this out together as a family."

"Your feelings are important, and you can always share how you feel with us."

"It's okay to want things to stay the same. We will continue to talk about this."

A few more things

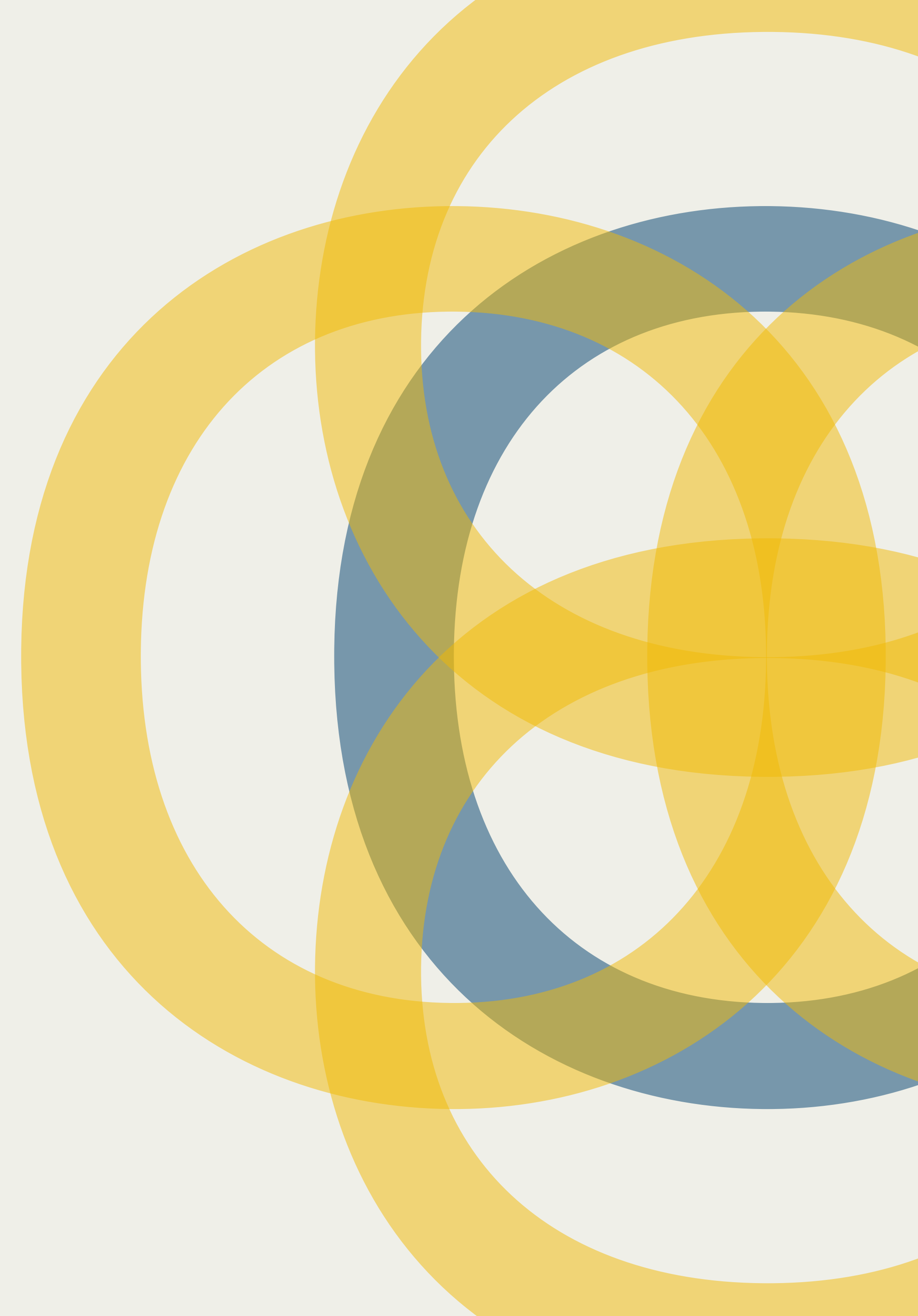
- It is essential to understand that there are many variables at play, and a variety of different dynamics present in each individual case of explaining a divorce to children.
- It's important to tailor the way that news is broken to those individual circumstances.
- It is useful to practice what will be said ahead of time and role-play it with a therapist or close friend of the family .

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Family Focus: Helpful Reads and Resources for Kids During Divorce

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Open communication is essential, and preparing yourself to face the challenges with resilience and self-awareness is critical. [Join our Onward community](#), where you will have a safe place to organize your thoughts and everything else to get you through your divorce.

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