



Grandparenting

Here for You Always: Supporting Your Grandchild Through a Parental Separation or Divorce

Separation and divorce can be a painful and stressful experience for all members of a family. Often this time is even more difficult when there are young children involved. Grandparents must cope with their own sense of loss while also supporting their adult children and grandchildren through the divorce. There is a lot that grandparents can do to comfort a young child as his or her world is changing. Here are some ideas:

- **Let your grandchild know that you will always be there for him.** Offer the same consistent, loving care you always have. Consistency is *key* for children whose parents are separating. The more your grandchild's life can stay the same during this time, the more safe and secure he will feel.
- **Find out what your grandchild knows about the divorce.** Ask your adult child what your grandchild has been told so you can help her understand what is happening if she asks.
- **Acknowledge your grandchild's feelings about the divorce.** This helps him learn to manage his strong emotions. You might say, "It's okay to feel angry (or sad/confused/afraid). You can always tell me what you are feeling. I am here for you."
- **Expect changes in behavior.** Even babies sense tension between the people they love and know when a significant change is taking place. Because they cannot express their feelings in words, they express themselves through their actions. Children might be cranky, fearful, or clingy. They may become more aggressive or more withdrawn. There may be changes in their eating, sleeping, and even toileting patterns.
- **Avoid speaking negatively about the child's parent.** This is even the case if the parent has not been a positive presence in your grandchild's life. Children need to feel they are able to have a relationship with both parents without "betraying" one or the other (or a grandparent they love).
- **Take your grandchild's tough questions seriously.** For example, if your grandchild asks you why her parent doesn't visit her, it is important to answer honestly in a way the child can understand. Young children often blame themselves for issues out of their control, such as when a parent doesn't maintain visitation, so it is very important to help them make sense of this. You might say, "Your mommy is not able to visit you right now because she is getting help to stop drinking things that make her feel badly. She loves you very much and will visit you when she can. It's not your fault." You should also check with your adult child to hear his/her thoughts on how to answer this question.



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