

What do Children need from their parents?

Divorce can be a difficult process for both parents and children. It is important for parents to be aware of what their children need in order to be happy and healthy.

- **Children need reassurance**

Children need reassurance from their parents that they are safe and secure. When one parent is planning on leaving the home, encouraging words can help to soothe children. It is important to be up-front with children about the changes that they are experiencing. Children handle uncertainty better when parents are honest with them. Children need to be reassured that the divorce is not their fault.

- **Children need a conflict-free environment**

Conflicts between parents create stress for children. Parents should avoid power struggles over money and living arrangements, and focus on the children's best interest. High levels of conflict often forces children to choose sides. Avoid putting children in the middle and asking children for information about the other parent. Avoid arguing and speaking negatively about the other parent.

- **Children need positive transitions**

Positive transitions between homes helps children cope with the change. Children experience less distress when their parents cooperate during transition times. Smooth transition times let children know that their parents care about them.

- **Children need to be close to both parents**

Children prefer for their parents to live close to each other, so they can spend time with both parents. Distance between parents' homes impact the amount of time a parent and child can physically see each other. Distance can be especially disturbing to adolescents because they are becoming more independent and want to spend time with their friends. Teens want to see their noncustodial parent, but do not want visits to interrupt their social lives. If parents live far from their children, it is important for them to keep in touch through phone calls, e-mails, or letters.

- **Children need rules and routines**

Working around visitation schedules, work schedules, and school schedules can be challenging for parents. However, if rules and routines stay consistent between both households, children receive the same messages from both of their parents. Establishing or strengthening family rituals, customs, and rules is important for children. Following a divorce, children have more power in their parents' relationship. When parents agree on the same rules, they can reduce children's ability to manipulate their parents.

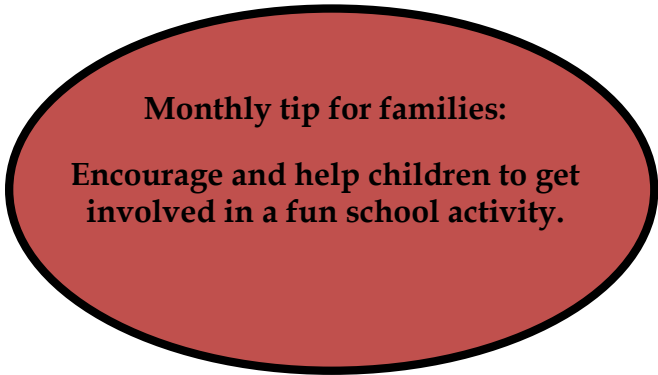
In this issue:

- What do children need from their parents?
- When the future is uncertain....
- Planning schedules



When the future is uncertain:

- Children need to voice their concerns and share their viewpoints.
- Children can sense when their parents are worried. When parents share their concerns, children are more likely to share their feelings.
- Parents should use words that match their actions and follow through on their promises.
- Parents should tell the truth and be honest with their children.
- Children should be included in the process of building a new life.



Additional Resources:

- www.extension.usu.edu/stepfamily
- www.healthyrelationshipsutah.org
- www.strongermarriage.org
- www.stepfamilies.info
- www.twoofus.org

Children can play a part in planning schedules

- Children need sufficient time with both parents to sustain a meaningful parent-child relationship.
- Children are individuals, so siblings might have different schedules.
- Children can make a list of their current interests and what they would like to try in the next few years.
- When children’s interests, goals, and activities change, both parents should be notified of schedule changes.
- Planning time to help children with their homework will help them with their academics.



For more information, contact:

Shannon Cromwell, M.A.

Extension Assistant Professor

Utah State University Extension

435-283-3472

shannon.cromwell@usu.edu