



What to Tell the Children

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1. At all times remain reality based. Do not compound the problems by hiding or evading. Don't sugar coat the situation or mislead the child in any way.
2. Specific questions should be matched with specific answers, remaining age appropriate.
 - a) Children 6 and under should be given concrete, non-detailed answers: "I had a relationship with another person. I hurt your mommy/daddy." Younger children should be assured that they will be cared for, that they have a home, and that the parent(s) will be protecting them.
 - b) Children 6-12 can be given more information, maintaining non-detail: "I had a relationship with another person that got too close. It was more like a marriage relationship." The question of "Did you have sex?" or anything similar should not be evaded. However, once again details can be left out. Some examples: "The relationship included mommy and daddy type touching." "We did get too close physically and emotionally." Children closer to 12 may press with a follow-up, "Did you have sex?" The second time the question is asked simply respond with a "Yes."
 - c) Children 13 and up should be given straightforward, non-disguised answers. Time frames can be included. For example: "I had a relationship with another woman/man. We became too close emotionally and physically. It started X weeks/months/years ago."
 - d) Children in each age group may also ask questions about housing, school, income, friends etc. as these things are impacted by the fallout from the affair. Custodial parents should give the best answers they can, while being honest about unknowns. For example, when separation or divorce is occurring housing situations are impacted and often change. The custodial parent might say, "I don't know where will be moving to yet, but I am working on figuring that out. We have several possibilities and I will find us a place. I'll tell you just as soon as I know. You can ask me again any time you like."
3. Encourage direct communication between individual family members, avoid triangulation
 - a) When children ask one parent questions about the other parent, the child should first be directed to talk directly to other person.
 - b) If the child attempts to communicate directly with parent "A", and it appears that parent "A" is avoiding or not answering, then parent "B" can try to give the answers as best they can. However, at no time should they criticize or leak bitterness into their comments, and they should continue to encourage direct communication.

4. Process emotions – validate child’s feelings.
 - a) The child will be feeling angry, scared, upset, betrayed, hurt, anxious, depressed, abandoned, cheated, furious, rejected, and confused. It is of utmost importance that these feelings are validated and valued. Each parent should encourage the expression of these feelings.
 - b) The non-offending parent may feel confused or hurt when these feelings seemed to be aimed at them. They should try to remember not to take it personally, but to allow the child to express. This is a normal part of the resolution process.
5. Maintain patience with the child’s journey through this, it will take months or years for them to reach any significant level of resolution.
 - a) The child’s life as they have known it has changed. While the parents are indeed hurting, they must make attempts to put the children first with regards to having patience with their feelings.
 - b) Resolution will come in stages, and in a sense will be ongoing for years. What a child accepts and understands at age 8 will change at age 14 and they might become angry or hurt again later, after the parents believe it is all resolved.
6. The children should not be exposed to new parental romantic relationships for at least 12 months after the divorce is finalized.
 - a) New relationships should be kept out of sight of the children. Visitations during separation should not include the romantic interest of the parent visiting.
 - b) Keeping a relationship out of sight includes keeping pictures, new belongings, gifts, and anything else that is a product of the new relationship out of view.
 - c) If a child asks about new relationships (and they exist), then straightforward answers should be given, following the guidelines given above.
 - d) Even if the child knows about a new relationship, the child should be spared having to deal with it. Again, confine the relationship to non-visitation or non-custodial time. This is good practice for the parent to keep the child first.
7. All parents should be responsible for handling their own emotions.
 - a) Parents’ feelings should not be processed with the children. The parent might state “I am feeling sad” or “I am very angry” or “I am upset right now” but at no time should those feelings be processed with the child, elevating the child to friend, peer, or counselor status.
 - b) The parent can be genuine in stating that they have the feeling, but they should express and process with a friend or counselor.