

Title: Children's Emotional Needs During Divorce and Beyond

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When parents are caught up in the drama of divorce it is easy for them to forget the innate emotional and security needs of their innocent children. The following are a list of questions and comments that remind parents about the most fundamental needs of every child in order to experience psychological well-being.

They are provided by Dr. Paul Wanio, one of the contributors to my new ebook, *How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?* These concepts are particularly significant for your consideration when your family is experiencing the challenges and upheavals connected to divorce or separation. With this in mind, Dr. Wanio suggests you not only consider these questions, but actually take the time to answer them for yourself.

1) How can I help my child to develop a sense of security and trust in him/herself, in people, in the world, and in getting his/her needs met?

A child needs to feel loved and a sense of belonging. They need to feel important ... to know that someone is there to help ... that their needs will be recognized ... that there are a set of standards to live by -- as well as values like kindness, courage, honesty, generosity and justice.

2) How can I caringly protect my child from excessive conflicts and frustrations at home?

Children cannot handle as much as adults. A child must have a feeling of safety and protection at home ... know that someone is in charge who will not allow overwhelming emotions or situations to occur ... will set limits with fairness ... will listen compassionately ... and explain confusing situations to alleviate any fears.

3) How can I help my child not to feel guilty or ashamed about mistakes, accidents or failures?

Children need to learn from their mistakes, not feel put down or be punished for them. They need to believe in themselves ... to know that it is okay to make a mistake ... and that you still love them and believe in their potential. Especially now, they need to know that your divorce is not their fault.

4) How can I assist my child to feel a sense of self-esteem and encouragement?

Children need to feel that their self-worth does not merely depend upon accomplishments, but upon who they are as individuals and because they are your children. They need to feel accepted by you even if you or others do not always approve of their behavior. At this time, knowing that they are loved by both parents is especially important. Putting down the other parent is like putting down a part of your child since he/she is a part of that parent. Avoid disparaging remarks about the other parent even if you are angry.

5) How can I encourage independence and a feeling of competency in my child?

In general, children need a sense of their very own achievement, even if it means possibly being wrong or different. They need to handle some things on their own or with minimal assistance, to be given choices [even if limited] and to feel some sense of being trusted and capable. During the time of divorce, your child may become more vulnerable and regress to an earlier stage of development. Do not demean your child for this, but understand that he/she may need to feel more "like a little kid" than "Mommy's/Daddy's big boy/girl." If handled with compassion, this should be a temporary situation. If long-lasting, it may represent undue emotional stress.

6) How can I discipline my child without having him/her develop a negative self-image?

Simply put: Limit your child's behavior, but not your child's thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings are not "bad," though behavior may be inappropriate. Seek to influence thoughts, to understand and accept feelings and to improve behavior. True discipline is not thought of as punishment, but a lesson to teach your child about Life.

7) How can I help my child to feel good about him/herself, being male or female, secure when away from me and curious about life?

Children need to develop a sense of identity, to begin to answer the question, "Who am I?," and to find satisfaction in being oneself. The more loved, understood and trusted they feel, the more secure they will be in their self-discovery. Your example and relationship with your child will have a very powerful influence in this regard.

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