

Suggestions for Separated or Divorced Parents



Research shows that children whose parents divorce are more likely than others to experience divorce themselves if they marry.

They foresee the breakdown of their own marriage, and when difficulties arise, they see them as portents of failure, instead of problems to overcome.

Many try to avoid eventual breakdown by cohabiting before marriage, but other research shows that pre-marital cohabitation also makes divorce more likely.

How can parents help them? We hope these suggestions drawn from the experience of other parents who have been divorced will be helpful.

Here are some suggestions as to how parents who have been separated or divorced can help their children to have the confidence that they in their turn can have a successful marriage.

- * You must emphasise that the divorce **was not your child's fault**. Many children need reassuring about that. Where appropriate you should ask your child for forgiveness for the ways in which your behaviour has resulted in hurt. You should assure your child that you will be all the more ready to help them avoid the pitfalls in due course.
- * It is important that you should explain the **reasons for the breakdown** of your marriage to your children, sharing the blame, rather than putting it all on the other parent. You should not say, "Just as people fall in love, you sometimes fall out of love". That implies that the breakdown was nobody's fault. You should be honest in admitting your mistakes and failings and, with hindsight, share ways in which both parents could have acted differently and which could have helped prevent the divorce.
- * You need to express your readiness to forgive the other parent. If possible you should **seek friendship and reconciliation with him/her**. You can then show your child that things can be handled in a different and constructive way, in particular love and responsibility can be shown in difficult areas such as access and maintenance. Maybe the marriage might be restored one day? (Two marriage healing and restoration ministries are listed on the back of this leaflet.)
- * You can draw your children's attention to people who have had, or are having, **successful marriages**, particularly those who are prepared to admit that they have had to overcome difficulties, e.g., perhaps grand-parents and uncles and aunts.
- * Older children can be encouraged to **seek God's help** to think positively about marriage. You should also help your children to see how a person can be complete and fulfilled without a marriage partner and so to avoid the mistake of marrying through neediness and loneliness.
- * If **you have remarried**, you should to seek demonstrate in your new marriage how things can be done differently, particularly when difficulties or conflicts arise. You should be honest with your spouse and children in admitting your failures and seeking forgiveness.

* Like any parent you should encourage your children to **choose carefully**, getting to know friends well, and to **wait for sex** until marriage. Sex before marriage clouds judgement and often leads to a wrong choice. The "Living Together Successfully" page on this website should help in this.

Finally, when your child is to be married, you can encourage them to have **good marriage preparation** including finding a mentor couple and, after the marriage, to help their own spouse enjoy the marriage continually and to take part in marriage enhancement events from time to time.

Edward Pratt, with help from two divorced parents

For other material on parenting see:

Positive Parenting Website: <http://www.parenting.org.uk>