

Parents and children must work together to form a new kind of family.
Let it be one that is built on peace and understanding and nourished by love.

Kids Want Parents to Know...

BY NANCY LEE GREENFIELD

Kids need to feel loved.

- ▶ Tell your children you love them.
- ▶ Make sure your children know it's OK to love the other parent.
- ▶ Be willing to talk about your children's feelings or encourage them to talk with a teacher, baby-sitter, or family friend.

Kids need answers.

- ▶ Answer their questions honestly while avoiding unnecessary details about your relationship with your ex-spouse.
- ▶ When you make a mistake or lose your temper, admit it and tell your children that you can and will do better tomorrow.

Kids need reassurance.

- ▶ Reassure your children that they are not to blame for the divorce.
- ▶ Include the other parent in your children's school activities and special events.

Kids need consistency.

- ▶ Be on time when picking up your children. Make every effort not to cancel plans. If your plans must change, always give your children and the other parent as much notice as possible.

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Kids don't need to know everything.

- ▶ Be responsible and prompt with child support and don't discuss support issues with your children.

Kids need two parents.

- ▶ Tell them they are loved by both parents and they always will be.
- ▶ Give your children permission to have a loving, satisfying relationship with the other parent.
 - ▶ Establish a home in which your children feel comfortable and secure.

Kids need to know the rules.

- ▶ Make every effort to agree with your ex-spouse about discipline. This will help your children feel more secure.
- ▶ Develop a workable and cooperative parenting plan that gives your children access to both of you.

Don't

Don't argue in front of your children.

Don't pump your children for information about the other parent or use your children to carry messages back and forth.

Don't speak negatively about your former spouse in front of your children or discourage their communication with the other parent.

Don't put your children in the middle of your problems or ask them to take sides.

Don't make promises that you can't keep.

Don't use your children as confidants.
Let your children be children.

Don't ask your children whom they want to live with. That issue is for you and your spouse to solve; it is too much of a burden for children.

Don't compare a child to your ex-spouse. Remember, your child is an individual. You may like or dislike certain qualities about your ex-spouse that you see in your child, but such comparisons can be harmful and painful for children.

If You Have Shared Custody...

- Consult your children about trading days and changing the schedule. Last minute changes are hard on everyone.
- If somebody calls your child and he or she is not there, refer the caller to the other house.
- Try to live near the other parent so that day-to-day juggling and life in general will be easier for your kids.
- Be understanding of kids' confusion about different rules in different households.
- Minimize stress for everyone by ensuring, as much as possible, that daily necessities (clothes, school supplies, computer access and resources, etc.) are readily available at both houses.
- Make a list of the important things that your kids have only one of and have a plan for retrieving them when they are left behind at the other parent's home.