

**SUGGESTIONS FOR TALKING
WITH
CHILDREN VICTIMIZED BY ABUSE**

- ❖ Be warm and empathic. Use “reflective” listening technique.
- ❖ Don’t react with shock or disgust no matter what the child tells you.
- ❖ Encourage the child to share all feeling with you, even the negative ones. Give the child the chance to express his/her feelings.
- ❖ Listen to the child. Don’t disagree or argue. Interrupt only when you have to in order understand what the child is saying.
- ❖ Talk with the child in a private place. The child may feel much more comfortable if others aren’t around to hear.
- ❖ Tell the child that he/she is not the only child who has had this experience.
- ❖ Allow the child to express feelings of guilt. Emphasize to the child that it is not his/her fault. The adult is the one with the problem.
- ❖ Talk in language that the child can understand. Give accurate information when it is needed. Ask the child to repeat things back to you to make certain that he/she understands.
- ❖ Emphasize that “talking” about the abuse/neglect was the right thing to do.
- ❖ Answer any and all questions honestly.
- ❖ Do not treat the child any differently after he/she has talked with you. This only communicates that you think he/she is to blame or did something wrong.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

**“Children of Divorce: What they need from parents”
(Utah Chapter for the Prevention of Child Abuse, 1993)**

If you could hear the children, this is what they might say:

- After the divorce, I need both of my parents to stay involved in my life. I might think you don’t love me anymore if you don’t come see me.
- Please don’t fight in front of me. I feel helpless, it hurts my feelings, and it scares me. I feel worse about myself when my parents hate each other.
- Please let me love both of my parents. Sometimes I worry that one parent will be jealous if I want to spend time with the other parent. I don’t want to take sides.
- Please don’t say bad things about the other parent in front of me. I don’t want to get caught in the middle.
- Please don’t make me spy on the other parent. It makes me feel guilty.
- Please don’t make me send messages back and forth between parents. Tell them yourself so I don’t have to be the bad guy.
- Please pay child support so I know you care about my needs. If we can’t pay our bills, it stresses our family and we have more problems
- Please let me have regular visits with other parent. I am the one who loses out if you change your mind.
- Please help raise me. Sometime I need my Dad to help me with homework and sometimes I need my Mom. I need advice and guidance from both of you.
- Please let me talk about my feelings. Sometimes you act like my feelings are not important when you say, “Oh, you shouldn’t feel that way.” I do feel that way...I just need you to listen.

The following chart presents common reactions of children to divorce in broad terms. Some reactions may overlap age groups.

Age Group	Common Reactions
<p align="center">BABIES AND TODDLERS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trouble sleeping Afraid to leave parent; clinging Crankiness Crying Slowing down in learning skills
<p align="center">CHILDREN AGES 3-5 YEARS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blame selves for divorce and feel guilty Confusion Fear of abandonment Aggression, temper tantrums Return to security items Lapses in toilet training Try to convince selves all is OK Emotionally needy
<p align="center">CHILDREN AGES 6-8 YEARS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sadness Crying and sobbing Feel abandoned and rejected Loyalty conflicts Sense of helplessness Hope parents reconcile Anger
<p align="center">CHILDREN AGES 9-12 YEARS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep anger Physical complaints Sense of loss Shame Resentment Fear of loneliness Divided loyalties-anger toward parent they blame for divorce
<p align="center">TEENAGERS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feelings of betrayal Anger Embarrassment Resentment Hard to concentrate Chronic fatigue May feel hurried to achieve independence May be overly dependent May test parents' concern for them May align with one parent Worry about survival of relationships Money worries

Language Development Characteristics

Preschool Children	School-Age Children	Adolescents
1. ...Think you already know what they know	1. ...Still believe adults in general speak the truth.	1. ...Still may have many school-age characteristics.
2. ...May supply answers to every question-regardless of knowledge	2. ...Still may be easily confused by complex negation. For example, "Are you not going to draw today?"	2. ...Still may have difficulties with complex negation.
3. ...Often answer <u>yes</u> simply to indicate cooperation.	3. ... Still may have difficulty with pronoun reference.	3. ...Still may not have good narrative skills.
4. ...May not understand reciprocity or kinship relationships. For example, "Mother's mother" may not be connected to Grandma."	4. ...Still may not organize events in their minds or in the telling into adults story structure.	4. ...Still may be confused by linguistic ambiguity such as is found in newspaper headlines, some ads, metaphors, idioms, proverbs, and jokes.
5. ...May not be able to provide definitions well even for words they understand.	5. ...Still may make errors with the difference between <u>tell</u> and <u>ask</u> .	5. ...May not understand time as both a historical concept and a day-to-day concept that affects their lives.
6. ...May focus on only one aspect of a situation or a question at a time.	6. ...Still unequipped to deal with adult insincerity in speech acts. Examples: sarcasm and irony.	6. ...Still may benefit from psychological distancing to recount traumatic, embarrassing events.
7. ...May not be good at collecting things in categories.	7. ...Still may have difficulty with complex verb phrases that include the past perfect tense. Example, "Where would you have been when that would have taken place?"	7. ...May not understand time s both a historical concept (one that goes on without them) and day-to-day concept that affects their lives.

Source information:

Walker, Anne Graffam (1993). Report on language issues: For consideration as part of the National Training Program on Effective Treatment Approaches in Child Sexual Abuse. (Unpublished response to questions focused on NTPETA learning objectives.)