



# How to Respond to Your Child's Questions

- Provide limited, age appropriate information without giving adult details or placing blame
- Tell them that you and the other parent can no longer be together
- Acknowledge the child's feelings; they may feel mad, sad, etc.
- Tell your children they didn't cause separation and they can't fix it
- Reassure the children you both will love and care for them and you are working on a plan



# CHILDREN'S FEARS WHEN PARENTS SPLIT



- Where they are going to live and if their basic needs will be met
- Whether they will be able to attend the same school and have the same friends
- If they will have to choose which parent to live with and whether they will be separated from siblings
- If they'll lose contact with extended family members and family traditions
- Wondering whether one or both parents will stop loving or wanting them
- Worrying that their parent will not be okay, or will be lonely while they're gone
- **Believing they are at fault for the split**

# Risks for Kids:

- Parents are so emotionally empty, they are often not available to support their children nor help them process changes
- Children may become emotional supports for their parents
- One parent leaves the home and disrupts the parent/child bond and the routine the child had with that parent
- Even under the best circumstances, children can feel guilty loving both parents and have problems with loyalty and trust
- Conflict between the parents during and after separation may interfere with the child's healthy development
- Fighting between parents could reinforce children's wish for parents to reconcile
- Children lie - tell parents what they think the parents want to hear, or will help the child to avoid starting a conflict



# Families and Domestic Violence

## ■ What is Domestic Violence?

- Physical abuse (punching, choking, slapping, pushing, breaking objects)
- Sexual Abuse (rape, sexual acts without mutual consent)
- Verbal or emotional abuse (yelling, cursing, blaming, constant insults)
- Stalking, following, spying
- Threats, coercion, and intimidation
- Isolation (prevent leaving, working, making calls, seeing friends/family,)
- Economic abuse (limiting access to funds and accounts, taking money)
- Power and Control over choices

■ **If you are hurting or being hurt – THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO GET HELP AND BREAK THE CYCLE**

## What does it do to kids who see, hear, or know of it?



## ■ Out of Control Emotions

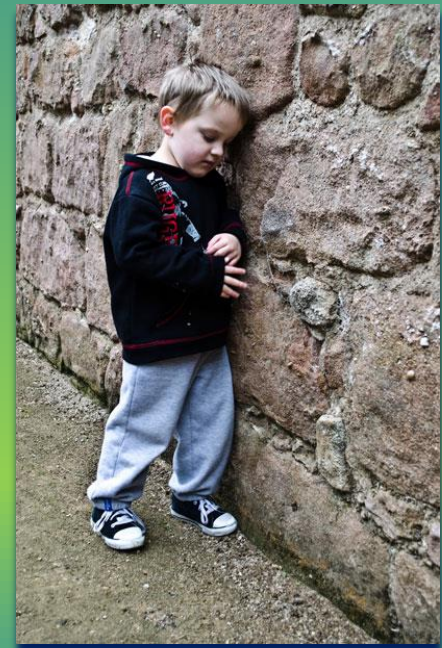
- Anxiety and Depression
- Helplessness and Fear
- PTSD reactions, symptoms

## ■ High Risk Behaviors

- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Aggressive behavior, Suicidal thoughts
- Have school and health problems
- Might become Perpetrators or Victims of abuse now and/or in adulthood

# When to Consider Counseling

- It is normal for everyone to have some mild behavioral and emotional problems for a while
- Counseling may help parents or a child under any stressful circumstances. Children can react to parent's stress in addition to their own normal feelings. If the parent is acting out, the child will pick up on that
- Therapy might help families when kids shut down and won't talk to their parents or for strained parent-child bonds
- Counseling is important if you or your child:
  - Experience severe problems (i.e. substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, any type of abuse in the home)
  - Have any of the signs of stress previously listed
  - Are stuck in a stage of grief (i.e. depression, anger)
  - Experience changes in behavior that don't go away nor improve after several months



# Research Findings

## Children:

- Need to be emotionally and physically safe from parental conflict, information of custody or money disputes, what is said in Court or Mediation, and their parents' stress & emotional reactions
- Having both parents actively and regularly participate in their lives is crucial to a child's healthy development
- Do better when they know when they will be spending time with each parent

