

Home to Home

The potential for conflict between parents can be great when children are transitioning between the parents' home. The following suggestions can ease the conflict as well as make a home for your child.

Five BIG Questions

Provide answers to these questions as your child prepares to go between homes:

1. WHERE am I going?
2. WHO TAKES ME and PICKS ME UP or HOW DO I GET THERE?
3. WHAT TIME?
4. WHERE DO I GET PICKED UP or take transportation?
5. WHAT STUFF DO I NEED?

Going Back and Forth

- The exchange: Consider making the transition between homes at a natural transition time like after school or after work. Make sure everyone is at the same place at the same time. If the parents can't be together; find a neutral, safe place to make the exchange.
- Traveling time: The time spent traveling between homes can be a great time to talk about what has happened since your last time together as well as what the plans are for the future.
- Feels like too much. For some children, the packing and traveling and the unpacking just seem too much sometimes. Watch for signs that your child is overwhelmed and talk with him/her about what can be changed.

Creating two comfortable homes

Your child should feel comfortable both in your home and in the home of the other parent. Making sure that each home contains familiar items will help your child feel secure and at home in both places. If possible, work with your child's other parent and include the following items in both households:

- Favorite toys and games
- Basic school supplies (paper, pencils, scissors, etc.)
- Clothing (underwear, socks, pajamas, jeans, etc.)
- Toiletries (toothbrush, hair brush, deodorant, etc.)
- Favorite foods
- Photos of all family members
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Caring for Children

- Consider keeping many of the pre-separation parenting responsibilities and caregiving arrangements in the beginning to provide stability and consistency.
- Find ways to strengthen the attachment between you and your child. You may even create new rituals and traditions.
- Adjust your caregiving skills to meet the individual needs of your growing child.

Staying Connected

Many children find that staying connected with parents can make the changes easier. Communicating helps them figure things out, make good decisions, and deal with their feelings. Use:

- Phones and voice mail
- Regular mail
- Pictures by mail and email
- Notes left for a parent to read later
- Tape-recorded messages
- Private times to talk---like an appointment
- A special spot---cubby, box, or envelope---where you put things you want your parent to read or have
- Saving jokes to share later or mail
- An activity, music, or sport you play or enjoy together
- A picture of the other parent at each home
- A journal of your thoughts that you may want to share
- A regular 'date' with a parent every week or two for uninterrupted time alone together
- Video hookups with a camera where you can see each other when you talk on the phone or computer
- Cell phones, text messaging, email instant messaging---for older kids with permission from their parents

Divorce is a difficult adjustment for children and parents. All family members must deal with a wide variety of emotions and make changes in the way they live. However, despite their own struggles in the divorce process, parents still have an obligation to provide their children with love, nurturing and a sense of stability. With time, patience and creativity, children and parents can successfully work through the effects of divorce together.

References:

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