

Blog

What Should We Tell the Children?

September 10th, 2019

by Williams Family Law, P.C.

Separation and divorce are difficult enough, but when children are part of the mix, it adds another layer of complexity. The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML) offers a [guide for talking to children about separation and divorce](#) as well as plentiful resources on its [website](#). While this information isn't a substitute for legal advice or mental health counseling, it is a good starting point for parents navigating this tumultuous time.



"Many parents find it very difficult to tell their children that they are separating or divorcing," noted Jeffrey M. Williams, immediate past president of the Pennsylvania chapter and founding and managing partner of [Williams Family Law](#). "This guide provides a framework so parents may thoughtfully consider their approach. It cultivates years of experience addressing the 'pain points' with practical advice that helps families to ease the transition."

According to the guide, "surprisingly few parents sit down together to announce and discuss their pending (or recent) separation with their children, explaining what is happening, describing how things will change, encouraging questions and feedback." There are several reasons for this: feelings of guilt, fear of being blamed for the divorce, and concern about angry or inappropriate comments are all reasons why parents delay the discussion.

However, taking the time to talk with children helps them better understand the situation and process the changes on their level. While fear, anger, sadness and anxiety are common reactions to the discussion, parents who prepare what to say beforehand often find a script can make the discussion easier. Of course, this may not be possible in cases of domestic violence, child abuse, or mental illness

The guide does offer one caution. The discussion "should never be used as an opportunity to degrade or destroy the children's relationship with a parent, no matter how angry you or your partner is or what either of you have done." It recommends parents "be factual but not emotionally harmful." Remember, this is an issue between adults and has nothing to do with a lack of love for the child or children of the marriage.

In terms of timing and *when* to tell a child that a split is imminent, the guide suggests telling older children two to three weeks before the separation so that they may prepare emotionally. For preschool and young children who may not understand the passage of time, parents should wait until four to five days before the separation.

If you have questions about child custody issues or other issues related to divorce in Pennsylvania, we can help. Call us at 215-340-2207, or email info@bucksfamilylawyers.com.