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Telling Your Children You're Getting Divorced

Divorce applications have recently increased but it's simplistic to put that down to the pandemic. The reality is that the decision to divorce is many years in the making. Covid-19 may have been a catalyst for some couples, and understandably so given the increased pressures of spending months at home and increased amounts of time together, but the underlying cause of a couple's decision to separate is likely to be much more multifaceted than just one reason.

Divorce numbers are up from last year, this is partly due to the courts being shut for several months, causing a backlog for couples wanting to separate. What is really interesting is the change in approach amongst the couples looking to separate. Perhaps it is a by-product of living through a pandemic, and the perspective that has given us all, but couples are increasingly approaching divorce as a life-change they want to navigate well. They have no interest in stigma, or blame, and are looking to get through the process in a way which does not further damage their relationship with each other, or their children, or their own mental health.

It may seem straight-forward but the way in which you tell your children that you are getting divorced is hugely important as it will frame how they view this life change you are about to embark upon as a family. Approaching a life changing topic can be overwhelming for parents and navigating these problematic discussions is something that Samantha Woodham and Harry Gates co-founders of The Divorce Surgery have helped many clients to overcome during the last three years. For most couples, the priority is to ensure that children are protected from any fallout, although of course this is easier said than done. So, what are Sam and Harry's top tips for breaking the news?

Agree on a narrative

Agreeing on how and when you're going to tell your children that you're getting divorced is vital. Many couples understand the need to agree a script ahead of the conversation as the objective should be to diffuse any distress, agreeing the narrative takes the heat out of the situation at the earliest stage.

What you've achieved and what won't change

A bombshell as big as divorce often needs breaking down and explaining step by step. It's important to illustrate to your children what's been achieved over the years, the memories you've built as a family and that you've given each other strength to be brave to try new things alone. You are still very much a family – just reshaped.

Reassurance is key

Your children will need lots of reassurance that the divorce is not their fault, stress that nothing they did could have caused or prevented what is happening. Since there are many unknowns at the start of a separation, don't make promises you may not be able to keep. Reassure them that it may be hard for a while but that it will all be okay after getting used to new arrangements.

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