

# Family Fundamentals

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

## Things for divorcing parents to keep in mind

Several of our children's friends' parents are divorced. Some of them seem to work through parenting issues easily, but others seem to have a lot of conflict. What's the most important thing for parents to focus on as they separate and divorce?

Focusing on children's well-being is, of course, something that every parent should keep in mind, divorced or not. But that's only part of a much bigger picture.

Today, family relations professionals recognize that divorced parents need to not only take care of the children's needs, but they need to be sure they take care of themselves, too, both physically and mentally. All adults require some time and energy to put toward themselves, but in stressful situations, it can be easy to forget that. Eating properly, getting some exercise, and regularly spending time with friends, family or even a good book can do wonders for a person's outlook. And that will have an effect on all sorts of relationships, including potentially difficult ones.

In focusing on the children, parents need to recognize that they also experience lots of stress and emotional ups and downs during and after their parents' breakup. Parents can help by trying to be more available to spend time with them, both to talk and to listen. Depending on the children's ages, parents with limited custody arrangements can often keep in contact by becoming involved in their school or extracurricular activities, or calling, emailing or texting on a regular basis. It's important for both parents to be reliable and consistent in maintaining a relationship with their children. The children's world has changed enough due to their parents' breakup: Parents need to do what they



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can to stabilize their children's lives as much as possible.

Finally, parents need to spend some time and energy focusing on the new co-parenting relationship with their former spouse or former partner. This can be hard, no matter what the circumstances. Even married couples often experience difficulties due to differences in communication and parenting styles. Add to that the stresses related to the divorce, and things can easily deteriorate. Divorced parents need to set aside hurt feelings and personal affronts, and approach the relationship with their former spouse in more of a businesslike way. Keeping things professional, not personal, will help parents focus on successfully working together to parent the children in a loving way, minimizing the negative impact on them and promoting their positive development.

Of course, many times, all this is easier said than done. Many communities offer co-parenting classes, designed to equip divorcing couples with the skills and strategies they will need. For example, more than a dozen counties in Ohio offer a Successful Co-Parenting program through Ohio State University Extension. For more information, see the program's website at [fcs.osu.edu/family-life/successful-co-parenting](http://fcs.osu.edu/family-life/successful-co-parenting).

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**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Jim Bates, Ohio State University Extension's specialist in Family Wellness.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*

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