



## Good Kids in Tough Times: Discipline After Separation

How easy can discipline be if dozens of books are written about it every year? Add the complication of separation, and the temptation can almost be to throw up our hands.

Having no such good sense, we offer here a few thoughts.

- (1) It's doubly important now to remember that discipline isn't punishment. A good clue is that "discipline" shares a common origin with "disciple" (*disciplina*—Latin for "teaching").

Children are raw and their hearts broken by all the losses that go with their parents' separation. And these losses aren't one-time events for children, but instead lifetime losses.



It's a time to be gentle.

- (2) Your children probably don't need more pain. They likely need:
  - ✦ a return to orderly routine in their lives,
  - ✦ a chance to speak over and over about their hurt,
  - ✦ understanding from everyone who can give it—and, most important, from their parents,
  - ✦ reassurance that things will be better—backed up both by what you say and what you do,
  - ✦ courteous interaction between their parents, even if there are disagreements yet to be worked out.
- (3) Children's misbehavior always has a strategy, and it will help if parents can slow down and decode that strategy.
  - ✦ Do your children feel they have an alternative to acting out to stop fights between their parents?
  - ✦ Do your children feel they have some way besides acting out to take your minds off your troubles or quarrels with each other?
  - ✦ Do your children feel they have some way besides acting out to express their deep hurt, anger, and worry?

- ✚ Do your children feel they have some way besides acting out to see if their parents can be united for them?

(4) Probably no parents are at their best during breakups.

Children aren't the only ones who need extra attention, the chance to slow down, and the ability to picture a better future. Parents are good disciplinarians (teachers) when they are self-disciplined (emotionally wise).

Are you taking care of yourself, reaching out for whatever help you need, and setting reasonable expectations for yourself?

(5) It bears repeating that many children in modern society suffer from A.D. (Admiration Deficiency). Overwhelmingly, children misbehave for the same reason adults misbehave: they don't feel valuable or valued.



- ✚ Are your children hearing at least five compliments about them from you every day?
- ✚ Do your children hear their parents saying good things about each other? (Remember, there is no way to successfully admire your children if you are running down their other parent.)
- ✚ Most children feel embarrassed, sad, worried, and even personally responsible for their parents' separation. Could this be the perfect time to turn up the volume on your admiration of them?
- ✚ Few children (or adults) try to sink a boat that's holding them up and that's filled with people who let them know they are glad to have them aboard.

Try admiration and gentleness with yourself *and* your little treasures.

That you have read these suggestions already shows you care deeply about those little treasures.

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