

PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

for the adventure of family life



05_Separation and then?!

"There are no happy divorces," says family therapist Jesper Juul clearly and unequivocally. Separation hurts both parents and children.

Separation is always a disaster for children between the ages of two and twelve.

They feel like they've lost everything they've ever known. Children fall into a kind of shock, have a trauma - which does not have to mean traumatising, according to Jesper Juul.

Children love both parents and still hope for a happy ending. They are 'hopeless romantics' no matter how destructive their parents' relationship may be. For this reason, children do everything they can to get their parents back together. Some even become seriously ill (e.g. anorexic, etc.) or start acting out so the parents have to take care of the problem together. Others, on the other hand, become 'invisible', don't want to cause any problems and thus subconsciously want to relieve the parents, which, however, has an unfavourable effect on the child's personality development. For some young people, the separation is very sad; others are relieved.

Children need parents who treat each other with respect.

It is important that the adults take full responsibility for the separation. This means they should think about when and how to tell the child/children. What will they say and how will they prepare? Parents should be honest about their own feelings and say that they are sad. They should learn to talk about feelings by now at the latest. For many, however, this is difficult because they have not done it until now.

However, when parents can't agree and have too many destructive arguments, they need to seek guidance or help. To ensure that children are not traumatised by divorce, parents must treat each other with respect. At least as respectfully as they would treat a stranger. Power struggles and mutual denigration are a tremendous burden for children.

Children grieve differently than adults.

While mourning adults are depressed for a long time, children mourn in phases. They are sad for five minutes, then they play, are sad again, then sleep, mourn, eat...

Parents often believe the children are over it when they see them playing happily. But children need three to four years - like a death - to get over this grief.

They need understanding for their own suffering, time and space to withdraw. It may be that the child sleeps poorly, has nightmares or stomach aches, suddenly becomes childish and clingy, desperately wants food and then is no longer hungry, becomes aggressive towards one or both parents... Others are very far away and withdraw emotionally. It is important that all of the child's feelings have space and are acknowledged. You can't take the children's painful feelings away, but you can be there to support them.

During this time, the children lose their security.

They feel lonely and above all guilty. They feel they are responsible for the breakup when many arguments revolve around the children. "You always argue about me!" Sometimes you have to tell children 500 times that they are not to blame for the breakup. It is important that adults treat children's feelings with respect, talk to them, are just there and spend time with them. There is little point in getting stressed out during your leisure time together, constantly trying to distract the child or trying to make them happy with presents. This is a compensation for your own guilty conscience.

Clear agreements that parents stick to, as well as rituals, give the child the security it needs in these difficult times.

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