

BE YOUR CHILD'S HERO

I'm tackling all the challenging aspects of parenting, as put forward by the readers of the Sunshine Coast in a 12-part series. One prevalent topic is supporting children through separation and divorce.

Dependent upon their age, children cannot always communicate with words to express possible confusion or grief. Their responses to separation may be expressed in behaviour. Some children become very withdrawn. Younger children may become very clingy, for fear of losing their remaining parent. Others may regress in behaviour and toilet training. Some act younger than they did before the separation. Nightmares are not uncommon, as well as rebellious or aggressive reactions to other children or their parents.

While parents are grappling with their own difficult emotions, it's imperative to remember children might be reacting with distress and need your special attention. With time and attentiveness, these behavioural problems disappear. If there has been abuse or their reactions persist over a long period, it is best to seek professional help.

Children are not immune to the effects of

A TWELVE-PART SERIES THAT TACKLES CONFRONTING PARENTING ISSUES WHEN DEALING WITH DIVORCE AND NEW PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

WORDS: JOANNE WILSON

parents' anguish. The resulting toxic atmosphere of arguments can be fuelled by hurt, sadness, possible guilt and feeling a failure. As the adults gradually accept the separation, the children are more likely to do the same. Despite the enormous difficulty, there are immense benefits for the family to forgive.

Numerous studies have shown that when we don't forgive and revisit our memories of the supposed wrongdoing, a fear response is produced in our amygdala (the part of our brain responsible for our emotions). This response causes a release of stress hormones, which increases our heart rate and blood pressure. If we keep holding on to our

betrayals and anger, this response remains active, putting us at risk of developing stress-related illness, both mentally and physically. Forgiving is not easy. For the sake of your own emotional wellbeing, as well as that of your children, it's worth it.

The most important gift you can give your children is to remind yourself, you're both their heroes. The biggest reason not to criticise the other parent in front of them is not to steal an important aspect of themselves – the person who created them. We underestimate the terrible effect of openly discussing how bad the other parent is. This can create serious disharmony as they navigate relationships as an adult and



develop unhealthy attachment styles.

Ensure they feel absolutely loved and connected to both partners where possible during the separation. Ensure your children know you both still love them and that this will always be the case. While you might be frequently falling apart on the inside, attempting to create a safe and stable environment is paramount.

Many grown children of divorced parents reflect that they appreciated being prioritised when living arrangements changed and normalised they weren't the only children who didn't live with both parents.

You can make peace for your children by knowing that your decision to divorce was considered carefully and over a long period of time. After knowing you gave the marriage 100 per cent to rejuvenate and repair it, even without success, you will look back with less regret.

Joanne is a neuro-psychotherapist and relationship specialist at The Confidante Counselling. Email jo@theconfidantecounselling.com or visit www.theconfidantecounselling.com

A fund of
CH 1827

IFYS Ltd

100% of all
money raised is
donated directly back
to the
Sunshine Coast
& Moreton
Communities

Inclusive Kids

A Community Fund for
Disadvantaged Children

Supporting the Sunshine Coast
and Moreton Communities

Donate today to change a life.
www.inclusivekids.com.au