

## ADOPTION & DIVORCE: A Parent Checklist

By: Jean MacLeod



- 1) What is your behavior modeling for your children? How are you "teaching" them to handle adversity/sadness/anger?
- 2) Are you expressing YOUR feelings in a healthy way?
- 3) Are you age-appropriately HONEST with your kids about your divorce? Do you answer (or bring up) questions in a straightforward manner, without getting overly upset?
- 4) Do your children truly understand that THEY had nothing to do with YOUR divorce?
- 5) Are you allowing your children to mourn the loss of "how life was" with two parents (even if the ex-spouse was a schmuck)?
- 6) Do you give spoken/unspoken permission to your children to love their other parent, and do you reinforce that relationship?
- 7) Do you validate your children's emotions?
- 8) Are you showing them how, in spite of divorce-loss, to be happy?
- 9) Are you allowing guilt over divorcing one of your child's parents to immobilize your good parenting (setting boundaries, enforcing house rules, etc)?
- 10) Can you put your adopted children's emotional needs as your HIGH PRIORITY over everything else, for at least the year after your divorce?

\*Understand that you and your spouse are the marriage role models that your children internalize and replicate. Divorce is a sad solution, but worse, is staying in a bad/sad/mad marriage and allowing your children to understand your relationship with your spouse as "normal". Your marital relationship could become THEIR family structure as adults.

\*You *cannot* be the parent you need to be for your kids IF YOU ARE CHRONICALLY UNHAPPY or in a dysfunctional relationship. Get help or Get out.

\*Avoid building a loving, fantasy parent out of an absent-by-choice ex-spouse. You don't want your child to be hurt by a parent who shows little interest in visitation or who "abandons" your son or daughter, but it is better to place an honest, *\*non-denigrating\** explanation where it belongs (on the absent parent's personal problems/sad choices, for example), and to help your child deal with this loss upfront. Covering for an ex-spouse in order to protect your kids' feelings will eventually come back at YOU.

\*Normalize therapy for your kids: Therapists are Feelings Doctors and we all could use a tune-up. If you are seeing a marriage counselor or individual therapist, tell your kids in a serious, but matter-of-fact manner. Talk about why smart people seek help. Your normalizing therapy as a healthy choice will go a long way in helping your child see a counselor, if it is indicated.

**\*Divorce will trigger an adopted child's loss issues.** It is an opportunity to identify and talk about the core issue of loss, validate feelings, offer empathy, and help build your child's resilience with coping skills. An adopted child's awareness of his feeling that divorce = abandonment, and WHY he feels the way he does, is a huge step toward him being able to successfully deal with this life change.

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