

Checklist for Divorce Conversations

By Dan Berstein, mediator and mental health expert

Conversations about divorce can shape a child's perspective. Here are some reminders to reduce the amount of scrutiny, confusion, blame, or disempowerment they may feel.

Scrutiny (Will your child feel examined?)

- Will your child's behavior be discussed by the parents as part of their conflict?
- Will this situation be examined by attorneys, the court, or a mental health expert?
- Can you help your child feel free of being monitored or audited?
- Can you be transparent and proactive to prepare your child for people talking about this?

Confusion (Will your child be left confused about what's true?)

- Will your child be exposed to multiple versions or perspectives of what is happening?
- Is your perspective purely objective or is it affected by your own biases?
- Will you have the opportunity to help clarify confusing issues?
- Can you help your child make their own decisions about what they believe (as opposed to just convincing them of your beliefs)?

Blame (Will your child end up feeling blamed or blaming others?)

- Who is being blamed, based on the way you are sharing this information?
- Is there a way to describe this situation without blaming anyone?
- How can you prevent your child from feeling blamed?
- How can you manage when people are blaming you?

Disempowerment (Will your child feel like they don't have choices?)

- Have you considered how this situation could deprive your child of some choices?
- Can you present information to your child in a way that still makes them feel like they have choices, so they can feel in the driver's seat when possible?
- Can you help your child feel empowered and respected even when they do not have choices?
- How can you help everyone remember your child's choices?