

## D-I-V-O-R-C-E

I remember sitting down in the park near my house one fine summer day and explaining to my eight year old that his father and I were getting a divorce. As the tears rolled down his cheeks, I said all the things I was supposed to say-- that even though the grownups were separating, we both still loved him very much and would always take care of him and protect him. I also told him it wasn't his fault, that is was something that grownups had to deal with, not kids. All in all, it was not a pleasant hour. When I got done, I realized that it all needed to be redone, but how could my old heart stand it? Then I had an inspiration-- BOOKS! I would let the books speak for me. So I went to the bookstore and for the next five months read the same titles over and over to my son. Here are some that were most helpful.

DINOSAURS DIVORCE by Marc Brown, illustrated by Laurie Krasny Brown (Little Brown) handles all the basic questions and fears, using Brown's endearing dino-characters instead of people. (Kids tend to distance themselves from human protagonists in high stress situations, but they identify strongly with animal heroes.

Neil Kalter in GROWING UP WITH DIVORCE (Ballantine), while not for kids, has lots of tips on how to help kids through the treacherous waters with the help of storytelling, books and discussions. His greatest insight--that when you talk about YOUR divorce to YOUR child, the little curtains come down in their eyes and they tune you out--is followed by this fantastic suggestion: talk about "Some People", not you, not your ex, not your kid. This distancing helps the

child the same way in Marc Brown's use of dinosaurs instead of human protagonists helps them.

The big issue of "where is home" was addressed gracefully by *A HOUSE IS A HOUSE FOR ME* by Mary Ann Hoberman, illustrated by Betty Fraser (Puffin) and *THE RUNAWAY BUNNY* by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Clement Hurd (HarperCollins), which I read aloud about a hundred times each. Another favorite story, unfortunately out of print, was Margaret Wise Brown's "Remarkable Rabbit" in *ONCE UPON A TIME IN A PIGPEN* with its reassuring message that no matter how severe the adversity, with love the human soul can endure.

You have to tell kids about five thousand times that they are loved, that they will never be divorced from you or abandoned, and that they are not at fault. Start with good old Mr. Rogers *LET'S TALK ABOUT IT--DIVORCE* (PaperStar) and move on to *GUESS HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU* by Sam McBratney illustrated by Anita Jeram (with a little huggable nutbrown hare, Candlewick). Another good book to show that moms can do it alone is Harry McNaught's *ANIMAL BABIES* (Random House) in which all the lions and hippos and giraffes (just moms and babies) survive quite nicely.

Make time every day to read one or two books, to make time to talk about the divorce, to bring up fears and treat them with stories. From time immemorial, humans have told stories of how the wounded heart mends, stories we know now as fairy tales. Do the Grimm versions, don't cute them up, and don't be too shocked if your child asks for the most gruesome tales to be told again and again. It's how they get a handle on the imaginal world, according to Bruno Bettelheim in *THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT*.

I remember reading almost a hundred books, many of them dozens of times and then one wintry day in the park, my child saying "Gee, mom, can we let that go now? I don't need to hear any more about the divorce." Mission accomplished.

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