Divorcing Parents' Guidelines for Interacting With Their Children
by Diane Neumann

Question: My husband and I recently decided to divorce, and we are very concerned about how this will affect our children. Our son is 11 and our daughter is 7. What should we do...or not do?

1. Feelings of anger or bitterness toward your ex-spouse can hurt your child. The way you act, and the feelings that you show, are more important than the words that you use.

2. Assure your child that he or she is not to blame for the marital breakup. Studies have found that younger children often feel that they have done something wrong and caused the divorce.

3. Children need to respect both parents. Try not to criticize the other parent. Remember, your child has two parents; disparaging your spouse is disparaging one-half of your child.

4. Do not encourage or force your child to take one parent's side against the other. This behavior is especially damaging to your child.

5. Do not cross-examine your child after a visit with your ex-spouse. Respect the position your child is in.

6. Children should not be used to deliver checks, letters, or other information between the parents.

7. When you talk with your ex-spouse, arrange to talk somewhere that is not in earshot of your child.

8. Be polite to your ex-spouse. Treat him or her respectfully. Remember, this is your child's parent. Be a good role model for your child.

9. Each parent should support the parenting decisions of the other parent. This may feel especially difficult during the initial separation.

10. Divorced parents with children often do best with a parenting schedule which provides a framework for both parents and children. Unless there is some critical reason otherwise, a child needs to spend time with both parents.

11. Call as soon as possible if you are unable to see your child or will arrive late to pick up your child.

12. Try to provide your child with some stability and continuity. It is best if children do not have to cope with too many changes at one time. Assure your child that life will get better for all of you.
A mediator can help you to consider the best interests of your children. In order to find an excellent mediator, you must do some background checking, as many mediators are not licensed or credentialed. Find an experienced mediator. Ask when and where s/he was trained? Does s/he mediate full-time? Does the mediator have a background in psychology, law and finance? Using a mediator to assist you in reaching a fair divorce settlement will benefit all, and minimize cost and trauma.