



Helping Your High-Functioning Autistic Child through Your Divorce

DIVORCE IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT ON EVERYONE, BUT for special needs children, it is especially hard for many reasons and in many different ways. I have two degrees in special education and was a behavior specialist, so I have seen firsthand how divorce impacts these children. I hope this list of suggestions helps you and your child navigate this period in his/her life a bit more easily.

At Home

- » Use a picture book about divorce to guide discussion.
- » Monitor the child's frustration level.
- » Make transitions as smooth as possible from house to house.
- » Keep household rules the same at each house.
- » If working with incentives, keep them the same at each house.
- » Work with a co-parenting coach who has experience with high-functioning autistic (HFA) children.
- » Hire an attorney that has experience with special needs.
- » If needed, have your child see a therapist trained in special needs.
- » Be aware that the child's anxiety will escalate.
- » Work on the parenting plan with someone who understands HFA children.
- » If needed, get a guardian ad litem to advocate for the child.
- » Equip both homes with a set of books and school supplies.
- » Encourage extracurricular activities.
- » Have a visual visitation calendar in the child's room that shows with pictures the days the child will be with Mom or Dad and activities.
- » Use the tools of scripting and/or cartooning.
- » Take care of your own needs.



At School

- » Meet with the school counselor and teachers to notify them of the divorce and go over possible resources.
- » Monitor the child's frustration level.
- » Review classroom setup to ensure child is sitting in the best possible place to feel secure.
- » Discuss having a "social buddy" or aide.
- » Have ongoing communication with the teacher about home and school behaviors.
- » Brainstorm how transitions will be handled in the classroom.

Although this list can be helpful, remember your child is unique and what works for one child might not work for yours. Nothing can replace patience, love and understanding on your part as a parent.

DEBBIE MARTINEZ, M.A., Ph.D., is a certified life coach specializing in divorce for over 14 years. As a Florida Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator trained in collaborative divorce, Debbie gives clients the tools they need to successfully untie the knot and stand strong in the wake of adversity. You can reach Debbie at 305.984.5121, transformation@mindfuldivorce.com or debbie@transformationmindfuldivorce.com.

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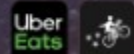
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