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When Your Children Leave For The Other Parent's Home: Leaving Can Feel Left

When we write about divorce and children switching homes, most of the time the focus is on the children: what it is like for them and how to help them make smooth transitions. But often it is harder for the parents being left behind than it is for the children who are going to the other parent's house. It may be difficult for you when your children leave for the other parent's home for a variety of reasons: you may feel lonely, you may miss the children, you may be jealous of circumstances in the other home (a new family, a larger home, etc.), or you may not like your spouse and wish the children didn't have to be with him or her at all.

Sometimes the best thing you can do for your children is help yourself cope better. Then you can free up your energy to really focus on what your children need. And you will be less likely to impose on them your own concerns and negative feelings.

Here are some things to do or think about...

1. Before the kids leave, make your own plans for the time they are away, especially on weekends. Weekends and evenings tend to be the loneliest time for single parents. During the day you can keep yourself busy with work, housework, whatever. Try to schedule time with family or friends. If none are available, or you don't feel like being with people right now, make plans to do something you love to do...take a hike, read a good book in the tub, rent a movie you have always wanted to see.
2. Plan to spend some time with people you really enjoy or love. It reminds you that you ARE connected, you are not alone, and it helps you keep all the parts of your world functioning.
3. Treat yourself so you have something to look forward to while they are away. Buy tickets for a show, even if it is expensive. Join a gym and work out during those times. Go to a nice dinner, alone if that's not too lonely for you, or with others.
But make the time without your children special time for you.
4. Remind yourself that it is usually in your children's interests to have relationships with both parents. Even if one or both of those relationships are far

from perfect, children inherit genes from two parents, and they like to find the best sides of each parent. After all, those are their best sides too.

5. Trust your children. If you don't quite trust your spouse to do right by your kids, trust that your kids will make the best of it and be able to see the other side when they are old enough to understand more about people, and about their parents as people. Trust that your children will tell you if things don't seem comfortable or safe. If they won't talk to you because they don't want to put you in the middle or take sides, arrange to have your children spend time with another trusted person (an aunt, a teen they adore, a neighbor). Encourage your children to talk to that person when they have concerns, and be clear with that person that you don't want to hear every little complaint. It may feed your ego to hear about the rough spots in the children's relationship with their other parent, but it can also drive you crazy. But tell your child's confidante that you definitely want to hear about things that are worrisome.

6. Let go of your need to control every aspect of your children's lives. As a parent, you will find, with every passing day, less that you can control. The best we can do for our kids is to teach them good judgment, values, and decision making skills, and hope they apply them when needed. Maybe you don't like her new husband, or his new stepson, but don't focus on things you can't do much about.

Maybe you hate the idea that your children are commuting between homes. That is a consequence of the choice to divorce. Your children will handle it better if you refrain from joining them in the complaints, and work on making it as simple and non-conflictual between parents as possible.

7. Some things you can control. Have the phone numbers of where your children will be – at the other house and anywhere they visit for extended periods of time. Call sparingly, but enough to reassure yourself and hear their voices. Encourage them to call you, and give them a pre-paid phone card if the call to your home is long distance.

8. At the moment of transition, try to be organized. Have brief, warm and loving good-byes, not long languishing ones. The good-byes set up a comfortable feeling for all of you while you are away. They are important to the time away. The message you need to convey is that the children will be fine, this is a good thing for them to do, and that you are fine too. They shouldn't have to worry about you, which they will, if they see you fighting back tears, or if they know or suspect you will be very lonely. Filling your time, especially at first, isn't always easy, but the sooner you do it, the sooner you will be on the path to a new life.