



*life after divorce*  
COACHING  
*with Doreen Yaffa and Jeff Wilson*

## Ep.97 - Telling Your Child About Divorce



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**Doreen:** [00:00:00] Hey everybody, how are you Today we're gonna talk about our kids. So if you have children, you're gonna wanna listen to this episode. We're gonna talk to you about talking to your kids, but so much more. So if you're ready, Let's get started.

Are you ready to create a life that's better than ever before? We are Doreen Yaffa and Jeff Wilson, and we are here to give you the strategies you need to create the life after divorce that you deserve. And desire as partners, both in marriage and coaching. We use our

expertise as well as our own personal experiences to help you make the next chapter of your life the best chapter.

Hey, Jeff. Hello there. How are you? [00:01:00] I'm great. We're getting ready to go to Argentina, Argentina. Go visit Megan. Yes, I'm excited. Yeah, I'm excited. I'm nervous for some reason. I don't know why. I don't know. The foreign country thing. Yeah, I think just, you know, it's a long flight. What is it? Like nine hours?

Don't remind me. Just trying to get everything ready to go, but. Uh, yeah. So we're looking forward to it. But today we wanna talk about your children. Um, I have discussed a couple times in different episodes, episode 10, episode 10 was cultivating. Positive co-parenting and episode 49 was children and divorce.

So you may wanna go back and listen to those two episodes. Um, today we're gonna talk about talking to your children about divorce, but so much more that we wanna convey to you. And um, the first thing I wanted to let everyone know

[00:02:00] is that Jeff and I are not therapists. We are not licensed in social work.

We do not hold those types of professional degrees. So before you implement any of the things that we're gonna discuss today, we highly recommend that you seek professional advice from someone who is licensed in either therapy, dealing with children or those types of, um, professional licenses and just.

Kind of take what we're saying with a grain of salt, meaning it's based on our own experiences. It's based on my research, Jeff's research, and also speaking with therapists ourselves. Okay? Yep. Um, let's talk about some stats first. The, the first thing is, I, I know you love to

**Jeff:** talk about this. Yes, I do. I do.

Well, the Googles teaches it one out of every two, almost 50%. Well, I guess that is 50%. Yes, it is basically, uh, depend, uh, depending upon where you live. Ends in divorce, right? And many of those in, of course [00:03:00] include children,

**Doreen:** right? So, and again, if you're thinking that on average, and depending of course, what state you live in, what county you live in, if one in every two marriages ends in divorce, Out of, I don't have the stats on how many of those divorces include children, but I presume it's a pretty high number.

Yeah, right. It's really, really important. Um, as parents that we set our emotional issues aside. In the sense of how we feel about our ex, how we think about our ex, whatever's going on in the divorce, and we separate that from our focus, which in my mind should be the primary focus on the children. I agree.

You know, um, it's very important that you, um, try your best not to involve the children in what I like to call adult conversations. Especially about the

**Jeff:** [00:04:00] divorce, right? Yeah. Easier said than done. We know that,

**Doreen:** you know, parents, um, as obviously many of the listeners understand, and you and I haven't gone through our own divorce, divorce is devastating and it's, it's.

Difficult and challenging enough for us as adults. Right, right. But for children, um, and again, depending on the age of your child or children, um, they're confused generally confused and scared. Right.

**Jeff:** You know, they say that, uh, you know, a child sees themselves as a part of mom and a part of dad. So when this divorce, uh, happens, they usually say that there's something.

Wrong

**Doreen:** with them. Right. A lot of, a lot from what we have learned, there's a common theme that some children have a thought, at least at some time or another during the divorce process or even after the divorce, that they somehow are to blame. For the divorce. Right. And we all [00:05:00] know that that's generally not the case, obviously.

Um, in all my years over tw one of my 28 years of practicing, I've never had a child be the cause of a divorce. That's just not what happens. But children think this, you know, and they're having a hard time understanding why the divorce is happening and maybe it's best. And this, again, depends on what your therapist that they don't know.

They don't need to know all the gory details, right? So I'm gonna talk about what, what my ex, um, Sam and I decided to do as a beginning thing, um, to think about. And it worked for us. And I'm not suggesting it works for everyone, but when we decided to get divorced, um, you know, we had been in therapy for a while.

Um, and we just realized that moving forward, although we were friends and we cared about each other, we just were not a good match. To stay married. [00:06:00] Um, and I don't feel it's necessary to get into the details of that, but when we decided to get divorced, we also spoke to the therapist. Um, his name is Mark.

Unfortunately, he's passed. Um, so you know, rest in peace. Mark, he was, was an amazing man. Um, but we spoke to him about how to tell the children. And one of the things I recall specifically is he said not to make it a big deal, like not to call a special meeting, you know, where you're sitting in, in the living room that you never use or some something like this.

And to make it like. This is something that is out of the ordinary in the sense of, um, uh, leading up to it, meaning, you know, so when we told the children, we basically did it at the table at dinner and explained that, you know, the kids already knew that mom and dad had been [00:07:00] living separately for some time.

And they also knew that we were in therapy together. Not that they understood the nuts and bolts of that mm-hmm. As to what that meant. But, um, they, they were aware that there were issues, so we let them know, um, at the dinner table that we hadn't made a decision to get divorced. And we also, of course, let them know that this, this.

Was not a result of anything they did that we still cared about them. We would always love them. We would maintain as much co-parenting, you know, as we could that they would see us. We didn't say too much though. We kind of like, just like, Hey, pass the salt. And by the way, things will be the same. Like, in other words, you'll have your same school and you'll have.

Your same activities and things of that nature. Now, of course, Sam and I had decided that that was the case. Meaning we had decided that the, we wanted to maintain as much, um, [00:08:00] continuity and similarity for them that we could. Knowing that the divorce was going to change their life. So when we, um, we reassured them that they would be in the same school, they would have the same activities that they would see each of us, those types of things.

But it wasn't a long conversation. These conversations from what, um, I was. Told, um, by the therapist, by Mark was not to make it a long drawn out thing to kind of just approach it and then to let the children, um, ask further questions. And of course, to be honest and direct with them as much as we could, depending on the question asked.

Right? Yeah. Your experience I think was different, right,

**Jeff:** Joe? Uh, it's black and white. Yeah. Totally different. Um, If I could have done ever anything wrong, I probably did it. Uh, we never even discussed, uh, how to get divorced with a son. Uh, we argued in front of him, we, we did a lot of wrong things and, [00:09:00] uh, I wouldn't say we badmouthed each, stutter each other in, in front of him, but we did.

Um, and we, when looking back at it, I can see a lot of issues today or in the, since teenager with, uh, with our, our son that, uh, played into what happened with the divorce. In other words,

**Doreen:** I think what you're saying is maybe, but you know, no one knows for certain, some of. The challenges that that Spencer has had might be a result of what happened with the divorce and how you and your ex co-parented, you know, that was, I mean, I'm sure we'll talk about it more, but Yeah.

I mean, I

**Jeff:** wouldn't even say co-parenting was, was there, I would say it was more of a. The, uh, a big battle of two separate households and, uh, almost putting Spencer in the middle. Yeah, it was, it was, it's very

**Doreen:** sad, but that's why we're talking about it today because we know how [00:10:00] important it is and how vital it is to do your very, very best.

To get along with your ex. Um, you don't have to like them outside of being a co-parent, but if you're having challenges dealing with how to deal with your ex and think about your ex and you're having challenges maybe with anger towards your ex as an example, that's where coaching comes in. Yeah. That's where you learn your thoughts, create a feeling action result in your life and.

You don't want to have the result being that your child's affected. Yeah, and I

**Jeff:** don't, um, I don't want to play the, uh, the role of uh, I guess thinking backwards, but, uh, I really do think it's important that you find help and, and seek some counseling and therapy and however you want to do it, but, Professional help, because not knowing what you're doing [00:11:00] is, uh, is really, uh, the wrong thing

**Doreen:** to do.

It is the wrong thing to do. And if you, let's say you are, um, a listener out there and you, um, have a challenging ex, um, who doesn't want to co-parent, who is doing everything to make your life difficult and maybe even unfortunately using the child as, um, towards that goal, you can learn. How to talk to someone.

Your ex in a way that can maybe turn that around. You certainly are not going to speak fire with fire, right? If you respond anger with anger towards, with a text or a verbal conversation, you're just heating into it. You're just, you know, adding fuel to the fire. There are ways, there are books, there are therapists that can help.

There are coaches like us that can help. Coach you on how to develop a co-parenting better co [00:12:00] parenting relationship even with someone who's challenging, right? Yeah.

**Jeff:** And don't, don't wait. Don't wait until it's too late. You know, you can't go backwards in life. And you know, there's a lot of things I wish I could have done and wish I should have done.

And especially having, uh, my beautiful wife now. I've having raised and a good friend Sam, her ex, uh, having raised three great daughters. There's a lot of things, and not just with them, but with the other kids that I've met, uh, having been taught so many kids, martial arts and everything, uh, that I should have done different.

**Doreen:** Yeah. All right. So. Let's talk about some of the points, and we have quite a few and we'll see how many you know we're gonna go through. Some of them are gonna overlap, but first of all, like I said before, children don't understand divorce generally and are looking for guidance as to what it means to their parents and also to them.

Some children think or may think that they did something wrong, like we said. Um, so. [00:13:00] The first thing, like we've, I think, made clear is talking to your child about the divorce, um, with advice, likely from an expert as to what would be appropriate given their age, given their emotions. You know, every child's unique.

And the next one. You wanna talk about something? Well,

**Jeff:** you don't wanna keep it a secret, obviously. And I know kids probably can sense it anyway, but don't wait for the last minute Right. To, to

**Doreen:** talk about it. Right. You don't wanna, you don't wanna tell them the day that dad's moving out. Right. Right. That's just not appropriate.

And kids are so. So smart. Even when they're young, they're very, very intuitive and uh, they pick up on things. Yeah, they do. So we talked a lot about age appropriate discussion. The next one we wanna talk about is unify if Abel. So if you can have the conversation together, both parents in the same room, face to face as the initial [00:14:00] way to talk to the children about the divorce not speaking to the child independently.

That's unif, that's being unified, right? That's showing the child that you are together in this, that you are still a family. Right. Right,

**Jeff:** right. And I would also edify their feelings and let 'em know that, you know, there is sadness. Is is okay. And you know, it is a challenging time, but everything is gonna

**Doreen:** be okay.

Exactly. Um, keep the conversation simple. Right. Keep it simple and only give them what's needed. You don't have to, again, get into all of the explanations. Just keep it super simple. What's that expression? Kiss. Kiss. Keep

**Jeff:** it short

**Doreen:** and simple. Think about kiss. Yeah. Okay. The other thing is, um, be up front that this will be sad, like you said, and that it's challenging, but that things will be okay.

Right. Right. Let them know that it will be okay and guess what? Your [00:15:00] kids will be okay.

**Jeff:** Yeah. But it's very important to reassure the kids that they had nothing to do with it. Right. You know, it's not their fault and we, we both love you and you know, we'll be there for you, but it's not your fault.

**Doreen:** Correct.

The next one is don't badmouth. The other parents. Ooh, big. And that's important. That's important. I know you touched on that, Jeff, in the beginning, talking about how parents identi, I heard this from Mark, um, the therapist. He had told me once that the parents, the child, uh, identifies as being part of both parents.

Yeah. So when you talk bad, this is what Mark told us. When you, when you talk bad about your wife or your husband or your ex, they see it as like you're talking bad about them too. You don't wanna do that. So really learn to use constraint. Kind of makes sense, doesn't it? Yeah. The other thing I wanna talk about also is be aware of, look, you have a right to, to talk to anybody you want other than children about your ex, [00:16:00] um, about the divorce, um, all of that.

But please, please be aware of where your children are when you have these conversations. I have to remind certain clients, cuz I can hear the children in the background when they're talking to me about the divorce. I can hear them. Mm-

hmm. Sometimes even parents call me from the car and the children we're on speakerphone.

Oh my gosh. I mean, no, don't do that. Okay. Find a place where you can have complete privacy if you wanna share your thoughts. With an adult and that's okay. Also, I wanna say what goes hand in hand with that is be aware of things you might leave around. Um, you know, nowadays things are really mostly on computers, and that's where you get your records from your, you know, divorce papers and maybe, you know, things like this.

But if you print something or if you leave your computer open, please, please be aware that your children might. Look. Yeah. Leave your

**Jeff:** cell phone lying

**Doreen:** around. [00:17:00] Yeah. Be, be aware of that. They're gonna look, pick up your phone and look at text messages and things. Maybe not, but presume they are. And just be really aware of that.

**Jeff:** Yeah. The other thing I think is very important, let 'em know that there are activities, uh, after school, their school, their friends. Uh, everything is gonna remain the same.

**Doreen:** Yeah. We talked about that a little

**Jeff:** bit at the beginning. Yeah. Yeah. That's very, very important that they know that they're gonna have that continuity in life.

**Doreen:** But make sure before you do that, that you are in check with your, um, co-parent. Yeah. You don't wanna say that the child's gonna, Hey, and by the way, you're gonna continue at the same school. Don't worry if you haven't discussed that with your co-parent. Right. Um, because sometimes, sometimes in divorce, as we know, school districts change because maybe there's a move and no longer, you know, are you in that?

School district, or maybe it was private school and now it's not affordable. Don't, don't tell them tr things [00:18:00] that aren't yet, um, agreed right to by the other parent, because that's really, that's really putting them in a position where then they're not gonna be able to trust. True.

**Jeff:** You know, I, I think it's very important that you also let their teachers, coaches, and other people aware of what's going on because it's very important

that you be aware of the child's changes and attitudes and any kind of distress that they're going through.

Behaviors. Uh, so they may need to seek professionals as well.

**Doreen:** Well, that's true. And you know, it takes a village, but you wanna let those. People in their life, like a teacher, like a coach? No. But only after you've told your child. Right. Okay. Because you know, and maybe talk to the coach for example, about, hey, you know, we spoke to our son about that we're getting divorced and he's still gonna be part of the team, but we just wanted you to keep an eye on him.

You know, if something comes up, if you feel like he's struggling in any way, if you could let us know. Cuz that's the next thing. Watch your child. [00:19:00] Look for signs of stress. This might include things like they have sleep disorders, um, maybe nightmares. It could be that they're withdrawn. It could be that they're acting out, um, in grades, school grades, school grades.

Yep. Yep. Just be very aware what's. Going on in their life and very in touch and share that information please with your co-parent if you see something, if that, um, you know, is concerning you. That's part of, in Florida what we call shared parental responsibility. And I'm not talking about every little detail of the child's day with you, but the big things, you know, um, Such as a bad grade, you wanna let the other parent in on that?

Yeah.

**Jeff:** It's also important that we, we, well each parent encourages time sharing cuz there are, there are situations where the child may not want to go with the dad or may not want to be with the mom. And it's important that you have that conversation with them and, and be [00:20:00] very loving about it to understand that they support the child's feelings.

However, you know, you want to support the

**Doreen:** time sharing. Right. Um, and, and I'm talking, we're talking about situation with two healthy parents, okay? Right. Generally, you know what I'm saying? Not if there's a concern as to physical health, um, uh, safety, those types of things. That is not what we're talking about.

But, um, you know, kids. Don't wanna leave a home generally for some reasons, or go with another parent. Doesn't mean the parent is in some way negative

towards a child. It means that maybe they just like their room at at one house or, you know, um, There's an animal there that they're gonna miss or their friend lives next door.

You know, don't, don't read into it. Don't ask them why they don't wanna go. Um, if there's a concern, then you wanna approach it appropriately after you speak with a therapist. Yeah. But definitely could you wanna say, [00:21:00] Hey, you're gonna go have a great time, you know, I'll see you on Sunday for your game, or something like that.

That's another thing. You know, there's nothing wrong, at least in Florida, even though it's dad's weekend, if your son has a baseball game, you go to the game, right? Why not? You wanna show that you're there. It doesn't mean that you can't be there cuz it's dad's weekend. You have a right to be there and watch the game.

Um, and let me talk about something else when it. When it's things like that, um, we, meaning Sam and I made it an effort that when we went to activities for the children, we tried to number one, um, greet each other. So because of children, they're watching, right? They may not see every move, but if you go over and say hello to the other side, the other side to the co-parent, they, they see that as unification.

And even if you can go as far as sitting together, I know for many listeners out there you're saying, [00:22:00] no way. And I get that and that's fine, but at least show your parent or show your child that you somehow are united and they're the pleasantries of how, you know, we expect children to. To behave. They're watching us.

There's this expression, um, what is the

**Jeff:** expression? Yes, children learn by what we do, not by what we say. Right?

**Doreen:** And, um, so just be aware of that. The other thing, um, is don't use a child as a messenger. Oh boy, that's, yeah, that's important. You don't wanna say, Hey, tell your dad that, blah, blah, blah. Or even, um, You know, I, I question whether or not it's even appropriate to like say, Hey, give this to your dad when you see him.

Maybe it's a letter or something. I don't know. Again, now, nowadays there's no need for children to be messengers, cuz we can certainly communicate directly

in so many means. So many ways. I'm [00:23:00] sorry, with, um, with our co-parent. Right.

**Jeff:** And also it's important that you say kind things to, to the, your, your, you know, to your children about your ex-spouse.

Right. You know, let them, uh, you know, don't lie because there's, I'm sure there's gonna be something you can find that's nice about the, I

**Doreen:** always about your ex. I always say, you know, that's one of the things I ask in depositions. Tell me everything good about, you know, Your wife as a parent, tell me everything you think is questionable.

Yeah, there's always something good, you know, even if it's that your dad's a good provider or your mom is very kind, you know, she works very hard. I mean, there's so many nice things. And when you do that, just out of the blue, how do you think your child feels? Yeah. Kind of like relief, right? Yeah,

**Jeff:** definitely reassuring and very comfortable.

**Doreen:** The other thing is, um, to. You know, this is really a coaching thing, but to help them to understand their feelings. Jeff, you spoke about this earlier in the episode today. Yeah. About, it's okay to be [00:24:00] sad. Mm-hmm. It's okay to feel hurt. It's okay to be scared. Let them work on their feelings. We talk a lot about buffering and, um, you know, which is basically trying, doing something else to avoid a feeling.

And we don't want our kids to buffer. Um, we want them to experience the feeling, even though it's a negative feeling, and to let it, what we call, like run through their body so they can get to the other side of it. We don't want them to, if they're crying, you know, we, we want them. To have the ability to understand it's okay to be sad, it's okay to cry and that's okay, honey.

Yeah. We're here for you. Right? Yeah. There's expressions. Oh my gosh. There. That concern me. That you know, I be a

**Jeff:** man. Don't cry. Yeah. Or real men don't cry. Right. Or, you know, those

**Doreen:** things like that. Yeah. Yeah. You wanna be careful with those types of expressions. There's quite a few that in society encourage non feelings.

Right. [00:25:00] Yes.

**Jeff:** You know, and the other thing is, we talked earlier about, you know, nothing's gonna change about school and, and activities, but I think routines and discipline is extremely important

**Doreen:** at this stage. Yeah. We struggled with that. Yeah. With, with, um, your son. With our son. Right. Because I think you had so much guilt.

When he used to come to you mm-hmm. That you kind of let him get away with some things, you know, like you mean you mean everything? No, not everything. Cuz I was there too, right? No, but I was stepmom. You know, it's a little different, but Yeah, you kind of let him, the thought I think that you expressed was, you know, I don't wanna be so hard on him, you know, he's having challenges, but you know, the expression or the thought process that a lot of experts teach at children crave discipline.

Exactly.

**Jeff:** They really, did they say that the lack of discipline is child abuse?

**Doreen:** Well, I mean, I don't know about, it

**Jeff:** may be a little heavy, but, uh, that's heavy. But it's true. But you know, they, they not only. [00:26:00] Or craving it. They have to have it. They have to have it. You know? And discipline. I don't mean it. Some people look at discipline as a firm, you know, smack on the butt or anything like that.

No, no, no, no, no. It's just guidance, right? It's guidance in the right direction.

**Doreen:** Yeah. If you have your rules, and hopefully you and your co-parent can have. Similar, um, kind of standard things that are understood so that there's consistency within the households as to discipline. Let's say for example, you know, you can't have downtime or get on your, your, um, devices until you finish your homework, right?

Um, Those types of things, like try to be on the same page if you can. Hopefully you have some experience with each other, raising your child so that you do have some common understandings as to the rules, um, you know, that you can maintain.

**Jeff:** Yeah. You know. The next one is, uh, when a child asks questions and they will please listen [00:27:00] to them.

With love and kindness, and of course talk to them with age appropriate answers, but they definitely want to be heard.

**Doreen:** They wanna be heard, and so, you know, they may ask questions that depending on the therapist that you speak to, who could say, no, they don't need to know that. But how you address. Um, their, their questions is important to them.

You definitely don't want to just brush it off. Right.

**Jeff:** Right, right. And last but not least, let's, you gotta take care of yourself.

**Doreen:** Right. You know, that's why you Yeah. They wanna see you. Okay. Right. They wanna see that you're, you're getting past it, so you gotta take care of yourself. Yeah. Um, whatever that looks like.

Get the help that you need. Try to get your physical, physical, physical health and emotional health as best into check. And I just say, you know, divorce is a time where you try to really use as many resources as you can. I know you're balancing a budget, but you know, [00:28:00] speaking to a therapist, speaking to a

Life coach, um, getting into a good routine, health-wise, maybe joining a gym or some kind of a, you know, activity, a class. Those are important things to keep you going. Yep, I agree. All right, so anyhow, I hope we gave you some good tips today. Things to think about with regard to co-parenting and, uh, yeah, children will get through and they will see you hopefully.

When things settle, um, as, as a happier and healthier parent, hopefully with less stress. Yep. You know, after the divorce, so many people, um, well, I shouldn't say so many, but people, some people wait to get divorced because of the children, but they have these relationships as a husband and wife that. We probably wanna question is that the type of relationship that you want your child to, to think is, is a loving [00:29:00] and kind marriage.

Uh. That's a little bit off topic, but something to probably do an episode on. I agree. All right. Alright. All right,

**Jeff:** everybody. Well, I just wanted to say it was a great episode and I hope I'd love to get some feedback from anybody out there, and if you, you feel that you need some help, please reach out to us or

**Doreen:** professional.

Absolutely. All right. Be everybody. Oops, tongue tied again. That's okay. All right. Have a great week and we'll speak to you next week. Bye-Bye. Bye.

**Jeff:** You have the vision of what you want your life to look like after divorce, but maybe you just don't know how to get there. So if you're ready to take control of your life and want to find out more about our coaching, visit us at [lad coaching.com](http://ladcoaching.com). That's l a d as in life after divorce dash.

[lad coaching.com](http://ladcoaching.com).

**Doreen:** Until [00:30:00] next time, have an amazing rest of your day. And remember, yes, you can have an amazing life after divorce.