


Helping Your Child Through a Divorce



 By Patricia Bubash, M.ed, LPC for [Hope After Divorce](#)

In spite of the naysayers who were telling me to not bother spending money to see *Jersey Boys*, I decided to go see the matinee (it was cheaper, of course). And I was glad that I ignored the unfavorable critics. I thought it was an excellent movie: good acting, touching story of poor boys making it big, and music that had everyone clapping, tapping their feet, and enjoying songs from their youth. I anticipate seeing it at least another two times and even buying the DVD when it comes out.

So where does my delight with *Jersey Boys* fit into a site devoted to helping those who are divorced or contemplating the end of their marriage? Not to give away any of the story, but I need to explain how my movie going experience and divorce corresponds.

Growing up, Frankie Valli lived in a low social economic neighborhood, the tough streets of New Jersey. Through determination, grit, drive, and connections, he achieves success and recognition in the entertainment world. And, not so different from the regular guy who must make a living by working overtime and traveling, his career takes over his family time. From the all too common divorce stories, we know the toll that work takes on a marriage. The mother of his three daughters, his first true love, throws Frankie out.

Related Link: [6 Things Women Should Never Do in a Divorce](#)

Just before he packs his two suitcases and departs the family home, Frankie puts his youngest daughter to bed. She asks him

to sing to her (oh, how special would that be – a dad who sounded like Frankie Valli to sing you to sleep!). As he is singing, she interrupts him to ask, “Do you like me?”

Watching this scene, I felt a tug in my chest. I experienced flashbacks from conversations with former counseling clients, students, and my own daughters, who all shared similar deep feelings to me as I listened to their familiar, anguished words. Like my students and my kids, there was genuine confusion and puzzlement over *why* dad would no longer be living with them. Did he really have to go? And did they do something to cause him to be mad – mad enough to leave?

Young children often internalize that they are the reason for mom and dad divorcing – you know, the failed math grade, the disciplinary action for talking in class, squabbling with another student, or fighting too much with a sibling. It’s this idea that, “Had I been a better kid, they wouldn’t be divorcing.” The adults are so involved in their own dynamics, focusing on the logistics of getting out of the marriage, that the children’s interpretation of the why goes overlooked.

International star and actress Jennifer Lopez and her husband, singer Marc Anthony, went through a divorce with young twins. They have seemed to be amicable and respectful in their new co-parenting roles, keeping their focus on their beautiful children. You may become divorced from one another, but you will always be your children’s parents together. These ex-spouses set a good example for all divorced parents on how to be respectful in the essential role each parent plays in the lives of their children, both equally important. Lopez recently ended her relationship with longtime boyfriend and dancer Casper Smart. Hopefully, she was able to gently communicate and share this decision with her son and daughter, as it would have been a loss of another relationship for them as well.

When this beautiful child in *Jersey Boys* asked her dad if he liked her, I knew the why of that question. Could it be that her dad really didn't like her and that she was the cause of it? Of course, Frankie assured his beautiful daughter that he loved her. And then he was gone. For many dads and moms who become so involved with work, after divorce, it is often said, "Not only did they divorce their ex but the children as well." It's an adult decision, but it's the kids who struggle most with a new family composition. They are commonly not ever asked what they want, which is the real tragedy in parents divorcing. Why shouldn't our children be asked what they want and what they think? They should at least be heard so parents can take into account knowing how their very own children feel about them dissolving their family.

Related Link: [To Move or Not to Move? Why This Decision is Tough on Kids](#)

As a former educator, school counselor, family advocate, and, most credible of all, a divorced parent, I feel comfortable offering the following suggestions:

- Together, assure your children, "We may no longer want to be together, but we will always love you." You can never remind them of this truth enough. Your children need to feel secure in the continued love of both parents.
- Be honest. If divorce is imminent, then don't give your children the false hope that you might be together again. Explain the changes: visitation, sharing of holidays, and any possible moves into a new home or school.
- Encourage them to talk with you and truthfully answer their questions.
- Let the school know the situation. Many times, a teacher has come to me with a student acting out, and we discover that the family is going through divorce. Knowing this helps the school in helping the child – thus, the reason for school counselors.

– Don't talk negatively about your ex-spouse in front of your children or even to others when your children might hear your conversation. Speaking despairingly of the other parent (even if it is true!) is like shooting an arrow in your child's heart.

Related Link: [What Now? Transitioning From Married to Single](#)

Divorce changes our lives and that of our children. It is one of the most difficult and emotional situations for a family to experience. Fortunately, we have resources like Hope After Divorce and Divorce Support Center. And through these resources, we find hope for the future. Our children also need to have hope for better times ahead, and as their parents, we are responsible for providing this hope.

(And go see *Jersey Boys* – it's definitely worth the money and your time!)

To find out more about Hope After Divorce, click [here](#).



Patricia Bubash received her M.Ed. in Counseling from the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Working with students and families has been her true calling for over thirty years. For more than twenty years she has presented workshops at the community college on a variety of topics relating to parenting issues, self-esteem and issues relative to divorce. Patricia is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Missouri and, a Stephen Minister. She

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