

SHOULD KIDS BE YOUR CONFIDANTES?

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Mitch's world was shattered when his wife decided to leave the family. He was father to three children 14, 12 and 10-years, and a physician in a very busy city ER. Mitch was so busy at work, he had not spent time cultivating friendships in his off-duty time. When his marriage broke up, he had no-one to talk to about his troubles. He wore out his work colleagues whenever there was any down time. Sympathy was running out for him.

Without anyone else to confide in, Mitch turned to his children. They got to hear it all: what he thought of his wife's decision, what he thought of her as a person, how their marriage had been until their break-up and so on. The kids were not able to give him any advice but he kept right on talking and talking and talking about his anger and resentment. The kids felt helpless and hurt.

What parents need to understand is this. Discussing marriage problems with one's children is totally inappropriate because:

- a) Children become party to information they are often unable to objectively digest or should not be privy to.
- b) Children are a captive audience. They can't get away from you when they feel uncomfortable about the content of the conversation.
- c) Negative things are being said about their beloved other parent.
- d) Children become burdened and overwhelmed by the stress of something they can do nothing about.
- e) Children often feel responsible for the break-up because they are too young to understand.

Parents need to shield their children from parental tensions. Parents should seek out adults, and where necessary, professional counseling to assist them. If children need to be brought into such discussions, then the conversation should be age-appropriate and in small enough doses that the child can assimilate it.

A parent's responsibility is to provide a peaceful, safe and loving home for themselves and their children. A very effective way of ensuring a positive environment is to create a set of strong family values which describes what peacefulness, safety and respect for one another is, and will look like in their home. If such an environment seems to be unattainable, then, for the sake of everyone, professional help should be sought.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.

