

After the Divorce: Setting Boundaries with Extended Family

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By Wall Legal Solutions



There's no way around it. **Divorce can be very complicated, despite our best efforts to keep things as normal as possible where the kids are concerned.** Especially where extended family—[grandparents](#), aunts, uncles, cousins—are concerned, **getting everyone to agree on the house rules** can be exhausting. At the end of the day, **children whose parents have divorced simply want to know that they are loved, safe, and wanted**. And with a little effort—shown in a few specific ways—the *extended family can help make this happen*.

4 Requests for Extended Family

Here are a few suggestions to pass along to those who love your kids:

1. Please Don't Slander Mom or Dad

It may be as clear as the sun who was responsible for the break-up of the marriage, but discussing either parent in negative ways in front of the child will damage **the child** ... not the parent at fault. Though it is understandable why family members take sides in a divorce, it should be equally understandable why **slandering the opposite parent in front of the child does more harm than good**. Give yourself permission to **be kind to both parents (or to refrain entirely from discussing either one) when a child is present**.

2. Please Don't Change the Family Traditions

Traditions represented by both sides should be maintained if at all possible. And the children should be invited—and encouraged!—to participate in traditions as normal. If the child wants to have a birthday party or graduation celebration where the whole family is present, **honor the child's wishes and do everything possible**

to make it a civil and positive experience. Refusing to meet in the middle for important celebrations where the child is concerned creates more loss **for the child.**

3. Please Stick to the Script

It may seem disingenuous to respond to a child's questions with pre-established answers, but **there are reasons you may be discouraged from sharing your honest opinion when the child of a divorce asks questions** such as, "Why did my parents break up?" or "Do you love my [mom or dad]?" In truth, the child may already know the answer to the question. And, in fact, he or she may **simply want to know that everything is going to be ok.**

Additionally, **extended family members shouldn't be the ones to break life-changing news to the child of divorce** if at all possible. If **Dad** is dating again or if **Mom** is moving away, **let the parents be the one to share important updates with their child.** Do the child a favor and **skip unhelpful responses** (however true!) in lieu of simple **reassurance.**

4. Please Respect the Boundaries

If or when the child of divorce wants to talk about the new relationship of the opposite parent (or any news he or she perceives as good), the best course of action is to **listen.** If the child wants you to speak, **respond by asking the child how he or she feels.** And then **listen.**

Reacting with sarcasm or frustration may confuse the child—who may already feel responsible for his or her parents' divorce—and may **cause the child to shut down and discourage him or her from speaking in the future.** If you need to vent, find someone **other than the child** for which to share your opinions.

A Final Word

Extended family can be a powerful force for good or for bad in the life of a child of divorce. **Subtle comments and actions—whether positive or negative—can make a lasting, long-term impression.** The truth is, children of divorce need their extended family—especially during or after a painful personal season—and **you have the power to be present, supportive, and kind.** In other words, you can be a necessary **part of the healing process for a child you love.**

Contact Wall & Wall Attorneys at Law in Salt Lake City, Utah

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