

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Coping With Upset Feelings

Objectives

- Verbally express feelings related to the divorce
- Learn and implement healthy coping strategies

Materials

- Client's scrapbook
- Client's Ziploc® bag
- Tokens (or coins, carnival tickets, beads, or Lego)
- Box filled with inexpensive prizes
- Colored fine tip markers or colored pencils
- Upsetting Situations (included)
- Scissors
- Crafts to make puppets (see Discussion section below)
- Photo of each parent (see Discussion section below)
- Three copies of "Coping with Upset Feelings" (one copy for the child's scrapbook, one copy for each parent)
- Letter for parents (one copy for each parent)

Advance Preparation

Review the Upsetting Situations, select the ones that are appropriate to the client, and cut them out to make Situation Cards.

Discussion

This chapter helps children cope with typical stressors related to divorce, including loyalty conflicts, visitation issues, dating, a depressed parent, and moving. Variations are included to help children who are dealing with a faraway parent or parental abandonment. The practitioner can select the Situation Cards that are appropriate to the client, and add additional scenarios to ensure that the client's treatment issues are addressed.

The client can create the mom and dad puppets using paper bags, paper plates, or popsicle sticks. Craft supplies can be used to make the faces. Another idea is to request a photo of each parent and to glue each photo onto the paper bag, paper plate, or popsicle stick.

The activity will not necessarily fully address the stressors, but it will normalize the child's feelings and provide a variety of coping strategies. The success of the intervention will be

greatly enhanced by engaging the parents in the treatment process, and helping them to adhere to the tips outlined in the letter for parents.

If a parent has moved a considerable distance away but still maintains contact with his child, the practitioner can try to contact the faraway parent via phone, email, Skype, or another video-calling software and engage that parent in the treatment process. The parent can be provided with guidance on ways he can maintain strong relationships with his child from long distances.

Coping With Upset Feelings

Welcome back to the story! Today we're going to talk about what to do with upset feelings. Banana said, "When parents are divorced, things happen that can make kids feel sad, angry, bad, worried, or confused. But you can learn ways to feel better when you have upset feelings. We're going to make mom and dad puppets. Then we will use these puppets to help you feel better when you are upset."

You can make mom and dad puppets too and then use the puppets to help you feel better when you are upset. First, make two puppets: Make a mom and a dad puppet.

Next, your therapist will read some situations and you will use the mom and dad puppets to help you with upset feelings.

After they did the activity with the mom and dad puppets, Cory felt much better. Banana reminded Cory, "Your mom and dad love you very much. They want you to be happy. They want you to know that your feelings are most important. So you can talk to your mom and dad about your feelings, problems, and worries. They will try their best to help you feel better!"

Can Cory talk to Mom and Dad about feelings, problems, and worries?

Can you talk to your mom and dad about your feelings, problems, and worries?

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you: "You can talk to us about your feelings, problems, and worries. We will try our best to help you feel better!"

Upsetting Situations

When you do something fun with Dad, you are excited to tell Mom all about it. But you are worried that telling Mom will make her upset. When you do something fun with Mom, you are excited to tell Dad all about it. But you are worried that telling Dad will make him upset.

It's important for you to know: It's okay to have fun with Mom and Dad. It's okay to tell Mom you had fun with Dad. It's okay to tell Dad you had fun with Mom. You can talk to Mom and Dad about whatever you are feeling. Your feelings are most important!

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

You can talk to us about fun times you have.

When you are with Mom, you miss Dad. You are afraid to tell Mom you miss Dad. When you are with Dad, you miss Mom. You are afraid to tell Dad you miss Mom.

It's important for you to know: It's normal and okay to miss Dad when you are not with him. It's normal and okay to miss Mom when you are not with her. You can tell Mom when you miss Dad. You can tell Dad when you miss Mom. You can talk to Mom and Dad about whatever you are feeling. Your feelings are most important!

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

You can talk to us about whatever you are feeling. We will try to help you feel better.

It's picture day at school. Mom wants you to wear the sweater she bought you. Dad wants you to wear the sweater he bought you. You are worried if you wear the sweater Mom bought you then Dad will be upset. You are worried if you wear the sweater Dad bought you then Mom will be upset.

It's important for you to know: You don't have to worry about upsetting Mom or Dad. You can do what makes you feel happy.

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

You get to choose which sweater to wear. Your feelings are most important!

Mom tells you the divorce is Dad's fault. Dad tells you the divorce is Mom's fault. This makes you feel upset and confused.

It's important for you to know: The divorce is not Mom's fault or Dad's fault. Lots of things happened when Mom and Dad were married that made them both feel unhappy being together. Mom and Dad got a divorce because they decided they couldn't be happy together.

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

You don't have to pick sides and blame Mom or Dad for the divorce. You can have happy, loving feelings for us both!

Mom says mean things about Dad. This makes you feel sad, scared, and angry.

It's important for you to know: People may say mean things when they are angry but they can learn better ways to handle angry feelings.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Sometimes I say mean things about Dad when I feel angry. I am so sorry that this upsets you. I am working on handling my angry feelings in a better way.

Dad says mean things about Mom. This makes you feel sad, scared, and angry.

It's important for you to know: People may say mean things when they are angry but they can learn better ways to handle angry feelings.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Sometimes I say mean things about Mom when I feel angry. I am so sorry that this upsets you. I am working on handling my angry feelings in a better way.

Mom says she wants you to live with her. Dad says he wants you to live with him. You love Mom and Dad and you want to spend time with each of them.

It's important for you to know: You can love Mom and Dad and spend time with each of them. You don't have to pick one parent to love. The adults will decide what is best for you, and how much time you will spend with each parent.

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

You can love us both. We will make sure you get to spend time with each of us.

Dad doesn't show up for a visit. This makes you feel sad and angry.

It's important for you to know: Even if Dad misses a visit, he still loves you very much.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

I am so sorry that I missed our special time together. I love you very much and I am excited to see you soon.

Mom doesn't show up for a visit. This makes you feel sad and angry.

It's important for you to know: Even if Mom misses a visit, she still loves you very much.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

I am so sorry that I missed our special time together. I love you very much and I am excited to see you soon.

Mom has a new friend. She spends lots of time with this new friend. You feel upset when Mom spends time with this new friend instead of playing with you.

It's important for you to know: Even when Mom spends time with her friends, you are still the most important person to Mom. You can talk to Mom about your upset feelings.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

You are the most important person to me. We will still spend lots of time together.

Dad has a new friend. He spends lots of time with this new friend. You feel upset when Dad spends time with this new friend instead of playing with you.

It's important for you to know: Even when Dad spends time with his friends, you are still the most important person to Dad. You can talk to Dad about your upset feelings.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

You are the most important person to me. We will still spend lots of time together.

Dad feels sad. Dad cries a lot. You feel upset and worried when Dad is so sad.

It's important for you to know: Dad is sad about the divorce. But even when Dad is sad, he can still take good care of you. Even when Dad is sad, you can still talk to him about your feelings.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Even when I am sad, I am okay and I can still take good care of you.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Even when I am sad, you can talk to me about whatever you are feeling.

Mom feels sad. Mom cries a lot. You feel upset and worried when Mom is so sad.

It's important for you to know: Mom is sad about the divorce. But even when Mom is sad, she can still take good care of you. Even when Mom is sad, you can still talk to her about your feelings.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Even when I am sad, I am okay and I can still take good care of you.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Even when I am sad, you can talk to me about whatever you are feeling.

It's your birthday and you feel upset because you can't celebrate it with Mom and Dad together.

It's important for you to know: It's normal to feel sad that you can't celebrate your birthday with Mom and Dad together. But Mom and Dad can each do something special to make sure you have a happy birthday!

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

We will do something special to help you have a happy birthday!

You have to move to another home. This makes you feel worried and sad.

It's important for you to know: Moving can be hard, but your therapist will talk to your parents about ways to make it easier.

Have the mom and dad puppets say to you:

We will find ways to make it easier so you won't feel so sad and worried about moving.

Dear Parents,

This chapter will help your child cope with a number of stressors related to the divorce. However, the activity will not be particularly effective unless you commit to putting the emotional needs of your child first. Below are some suggestions on ways **you can help** your child. (Note: Not all the issues below will fit your particular situation, so please refer to the content that is appropriate to your family.)

Tips for Preventing Loyalty Conflicts

Children in divorced families often feel caught in the middle. They may feel they have to take sides and love one parent more than the other. They may feel a need to put their own feelings and needs aside in order to please you. They may feel they have to keep secrets. This loyalty bind is emotionally damaging to children. The following are some suggestions from the book *Making Divorce Easier on Your Child* by Long and Forehand, and from the website www.UpToParents.org:

- Accept and encourage your child’s love for the other parent. It is healthy and beneficial for your child to want to talk about and do things for his other parent; allow this to occur.
- Communicate positive feelings about the other parent. For example, once a week share with your child a good quality (or good memory) about the other parent. Or point out a positive quality your child gets from the other parent (e.g., “You have a beautiful smile, just like your dad” or “You have a great singing voice just like your mom”).
- Be aware of the subtle, nonverbal messages you convey that could make your child feel caught in a loyalty bind. For example, telling your child to call the other parent but then acting sad or aloof when your child makes the call. Send clear messages that support your child’s relationship with the other parent, for example, say, “I want you to talk to Dad/Mom. He/she loves you so much and wants to spend time with you.” Make sure your tone of voice and body language send the appropriate signals.
- Don’t make your child keep secrets from the other parent or lie for you.
- Don’t talk to your child about adult issues such as money problems, child support, and court battles.
- Separate your feelings for the other parent from your child’s feelings for the other parent. This may be difficult, but it is an important aspect of how you can help your child adjust to the divorce in a healthy way.

- Encourage and support regular contact between your child and his other parent, and help your child express his love for the other parent. For example, take your child to buy a birthday gift for the other parent, encourage your child to call the other parent with important news, buy a postcard for your child to send to the other parent when you are on vacation, etc.
- Celebrate what your child gets to do with the other parent. For example, say, “I know how excited you are that Dad is coaching your soccer team” or “You and Mom are going to have so much fun on this trip.”
- Regularly talk about yourself and the other parent collectively. For example, say, “Dad/Mom and I were talking and saying how proud we are about the progress you have made in swim class.”

You may feel you are already doing what is necessary and that the other parent is the one to blame for your child’s loyalty binds. However, there are two sides to every pancake! You cannot control the other parent’s behavior. You can only control your own behavior and do what is best for your child.

Tips for Helping Your Child Cope When You Start Dating

Every child will react in his own way to a parent’s dating after the divorce. However, below is some information about how children are typically affected by parental dating after divorce:

- When a parent begins dating, a child’s hope that his parents will reunite is shattered.
- Children are likely to view a date/new partner as a threat to their own relationship with you. They may not voice this concern, either because they lack the cognitive skills to articulate their feelings or because they do not want to displease you.
- It is awkward for children to adjust to having an adult who is not their parent acting in a parenting role.
- Children may experience loyalty conflicts between biological parents and new partners.
- Children fear future rejection if the new relationship does not last.

On the other hand, parental dating after divorce can also offer benefits to children, such as:

- Happier parents mean better moods.
- A role model of a happy adult relationship.
- New people who care about them.

Below are some suggestions on how to help your child adjust to your dating:

- Keep your dating relationships private and away from your child until the relationship is serious. Only you can decide what “serious” means for you. What you should avoid, however, is introducing your child to every person you date after your divorce. If your child attaches to every person you date, he is likely to be hurt and experience loss each time the relationship does not work.
- Make sure the introduction of your new significant other takes place only after you have had a private conversation with your child about the relationship. For a younger child, you can refer to your partner as a “new friend.” For example, “I have a new friend who would like to meet you. His/her name is _____. We’re all going to go to the park tomorrow.” It can be helpful to choose a setting where the focus will be on an activity, not “getting to know each other better.”
- Demonstrate with words and action that a new love interest will not undermine your parent-child relationship. Don’t allow dating to interfere with visitation schedules or normal child-parent activities. Maintain regular one-on-one time with your child when your new partner is not part of the action. Quality time with you tells your child he is important and that you are paying attention to his needs.
- Don’t allow your date or new partner to discipline your child. Your child will respond to you better than your boyfriend/girlfriend. Until the new relationship has had time to become permanent, it is better that they do not have authority over your child.
- Encourage your child to express his feelings, but do not allow him to dictate the terms of your love life. Listen to your child and validate his feelings.
- You have no obligation to let the other parent know about your casual dates. You do need to let the other parent know when you introduce your child to someone with whom you are in a more serious relationship. This is common courtesy as well as safety. All parents want to know when their children are being exposed to other adults. The other parent may not like this person, but they do need to know that they are treating your child well.

If the proper groundwork is laid, and if the new boyfriend or girlfriend is really committed to you and accepting of your child, a positive relationship can develop between your child and your new partner.

Tips for Helping Your Child Cope with Moving

Moving to a new community can be an exciting but sometimes difficult event for a child and a family. In divorced families, a move can be even more stressful if both parents are not in support of the idea. If the move becomes a source of conflict, it needs to be resolved in a way that does not drag your children into the middle. Ultimately, both of you play an important role in easing the transition for your children. Following is a guide for how parents can prepare children for a move and help them adjust to the changes:

- Timing the move is an important factor to consider. When circumstances allow for flexibility, it is better to avoid a move immediately following a divorce or midway through a school year. If there is little flexibility to time the move, the tips below will help ease the transition.
- Prepare your children by informing them early about the move. Children need time to get used to the idea. Provide age-appropriate information about the move and encourage any questions. Use storybooks to show what moving is and explain to them what will be happening. Answer questions honestly and be prepared for a variety of reactions.
- Many children will be anxious when they learn about the move because they may fear the unknown. If you are moving nearby, take your children to see the new home and neighborhood. Being able to visualize where they are going can help to relieve anxiety. If moving far away, try to gather information and images of the new destination—the town/city, house, school—to show your children. Find out what facilities and activities they can be involved in.
- Allow your children to make some choices for the new home, such as what color to paint their bedroom walls.
- Make a “packing date” where both you and your children spend time sorting and packing. Children will find it easier to do these tasks if the entire family is involved. Reward “packing dates” with pizza or movie nights.
- While packing up their things, explain what you are doing and that their toys are not being thrown out or taken away for long. It can be tempting to “clean house” and discard old toys and unused articles. But this should be done carefully; the loss

of material things may overwhelm some children. Better to help them sort out the bulk of their things once they have moved to their new home and when they can feel more in control of their new environment.

- Explain to your children what will be missing in the new home, such as the couch from the living room. This will help them anticipate and adjust to the changes.
- Help your children to create an address book with contacts of friends, teachers, coaches, etc. Encourage your children to stay in touch, and assure them that their friends are just a mouse-click or postage stamp away.
- Help your children plan their goodbyes. Some may want a party while others prefer a special play date with one or two friends. Saying goodbye is an important step in the moving process.
- Together with your children, create a special box just for moving day essentials. It should include those items your children will need on the day of the move. It should also include a “Fun Bag” with some games and small toys to keep them busy on moving day. Allow your children to decorate the box.
- On moving day, put your children’s furniture on the moving truck last so that it is first to unload. Try to get the children’s rooms in order before the rest of the house. This will help orient them quickly to the new surroundings.
- Access religious and community organizations in your new neighborhood. They can provide a ready structure of activities, contacts, and resources for the whole family. If the family was involved with similar groups before, participating in such activities in the new location can increase feelings of familiarity.
- Encourage children to become involved in a club or sports team. This provides a ready-made group of peers on a regular basis. Parents can invite the group or team over for ice cream or pizza to help the children build new relationships. In this way parents can get to know parents of new peers.

When parents are sensitive to how moving can affect their children, they can make it a positive experience, enhancing children’s emotional growth, adaptability, self-confidence, and social skills.

Attached is a copy of the chapter from today’s session so you can better understand what was covered.

Upsetting Situations: Variation for a Faraway Parent

Mom moves far away. You feel sad. You worry you won't see Mom again.

It's important for you to know: Even if Mom moves far away, she still loves you very much. You will still get to see Mom and talk to her.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Even though I moved far away, I still love you very much.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Even though I moved far away, we can still talk on the phone.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Even though I moved far away, we can still see each other sometimes.

Dad moves far away. You feel sad. You worry you won't see Dad again.

It's important for you to know: Even if Dad moves far away, he still loves you very much. You will still get to see Dad and talk to him.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Even though I moved far away, I still love you very much.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Even though I moved far away, we can still talk on the phone.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Even though I moved far away, we can still see each other sometimes.

Tips for Helping Children Cope with a Faraway Parent

Dear Parents,

Long-distance parenting is one of the most difficult challenges facing divorced parents and their children. It is important for both parents to work to ensure that the relationship between the parent at a distance and their child continues. This can be a challenge, particularly if there is anger or resentment about the long-distance arrangement. It requires effort and a commitment to the parent-child relationship. If both parents keep the focus on the needs of the children, it becomes easier to take the actions that will help them thrive.

Helping Your Child Cope When You Live Far Away

As the long-distance parent, you must put effort into maintaining your relationship with your child. Try to remember that being a long-distance parent does not mean that you will automatically disappear from your child's life. It just requires some motivation, creativity, and cooperation to maintain a strong relationship with your child. Below are some ideas:

- As the adult, it is your responsibility to initiate contact with your child. Do not put the onus on your child to call or email you. You take the lead! Try not to take it personally if your child does not call you right back or is not very talkative on the phone. This is pretty normal for children and usually has nothing to do with you.
- Set up a regular schedule for contact and follow it faithfully. Your child needs to be able to count on you to follow through.
- Show interest in your child's life. Ask about the things that are important to your child, such as school, friends, extra-curricular activities, etc. Know the names of your child's teacher and closest friends.
- Keep the contact with your child positive. If you feel the need to encourage improved behavior, make sure you balance those comments with positive ones. Try to give three good comments to one "do better" comment.
- When talking with your child, try to avoid asking questions that will yield yes, no, or one-word answers. Instead, ask open-ended questions that invite more. For example, instead of asking, "Did you have a good time at David's birthday party?" which will likely elicit a yes or no and then silence, ask, "What did you do at David's birthday party?" At least now, you are likely to get some information.

- Never badmouth the other parent to your child and do not use your communication time with your child to grill him about the other parent. Keep your child out of the middle.
- Send videos of yourself reading bedtime stories to your child, showing parts of your day, etc.
- Have “Show and Tell” via Skype, FaceTime, or another video-calling software. Encourage your child to show and talk about something that is important to him, such as a drawing he made.
- Create a family website and post information and pictures to each other.
- Stay in contact with your child’s other parent and respect their house rules. Clear things with the other parent before mentioning them to your child.

Tips for the Residential Parent

Since your child is living with you, it becomes your responsibility to support the relationship between your child and his long-distance parent. You do not have to do all the work—just your 50%. The other 50% belongs to the long-distance parent. Below are some suggestions that will help you in your important role:

- Never badmouth the other parent to your child. What you say to your child about the other parent can influence the success or failure of your child’s relationship with the long-distance parent. Remember that your child will be emotionally healthier now and in the long term if he maintains positive contact with the other parent, even if it is predominantly a long-distance relationship.
- Support the long-distance parent’s attempts to stay in touch with your child. For example, ensure that your child is available for scheduled telephone calls. Or set up an email account for your child so that he can have a way to be in touch with the other parent. Give your child privacy and space to spend time with the other parent via phone, email, etc. Offer your own ideas about ways your child can maintain positive contact with the other parent.
- Share relevant information with the long-distance parent. Make it easy for the parent to get information from school, physicians, coaches, etc. Consider investing in one of the online programs that have been developed for divorced parents such as Our Family Wizard (www.ourfamilywizard.com). With it you can provide information about your child that the other parent can access day or night, and vice versa. Parents

who have information tend to be more involved and feel more connected to their children.

- Help keep the other parent “alive” for your child. For instance, allow your child to display a photograph of the other parent in his bedroom. Encourage your child to talk about the other parent.
- Let your child know that you want him to spend time with his other parent. Do your part to handle travel arrangements and get your child ready to transition to the other parent.

Upsetting Situations: Variation for an Absent Parent

You don't get to see Dad. This makes you feel very sad, angry, and confused.

It's important for you to know: Sometimes parents don't see their kids. When this happens it is because that parent has big grown-up problems that have nothing to do with anything you did wrong or bad. Even though you are not seeing Dad, you still have a mom to take care of you and love you!

Put the dad puppet on the other side of the room.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

Dad is not seeing you because he has big grown-up problems to work on.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

You did not do anything wrong or bad to make Dad go away.

Have the mom puppet say to you:

I am here to take care of you and love you.

You don't get to see Mom. This makes you feel very sad, angry, and confused.

It's important for you to know: Sometimes parents don't see their kids. When this happens it is because that parent has big grown-up problems that have nothing to do with anything you did wrong or bad. Even though you are not seeing Mom, you still have a dad to take care of you and love you!

Put the mom puppet on the other side of the room.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

Mom is not seeing you because she has big grown-up problems to work on.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

You did not do anything wrong or bad to make Mom go away.

Have the dad puppet say to you:

I am here to take care of you and love you.

Tips for Helping Your Child Cope with an Absent Parent

Dear Parent,

Your child may be estranged from a parent either because his parent abandoned the family or because access with a parent was terminated. Talking openly and appropriately with your child about the absent parent, and answering your child's questions, can ease your child's feelings of confusion, sadness, anger, guilt, and rejection. If you do not answer your child's questions, he may ask others and may not get appropriate information about his family situation. It is important that your child gets the information he needs from you. It is also better for your child to feel he can talk to you about difficult topics. Talking about your family situation with your child will help to build trust and closeness in your relationship with your child. Below are some tips for helping your child cope with an absent parent:

- Do not show your anger or frustration about the absent parent to your child, and do not badmouth the other parent, as this will only escalate your child's bad feelings. Rather, focus on your child's feelings. It is completely appropriate for you to express how disappointed you once were that the other parent was not able to be part of your family, but that is not something that should be dwelled upon in the conversations with your child.
- Talk about some of the positive things that you liked about the other parent. Do not let your negative feelings toward the other parent come out when you are having these discussions. Show your child photos of the other parent, and use these photos as a way to share appropriate information such as what their parent looked like and how you met. One idea is to put together a shoe box that contains photos, mementos, and stories of the other parent. Over the years, your child can look through the box and remember the stories connected to each item. This will help your child gain a sense of family roots and identity.
- Provide your child with information about his extended family. Again, if you have photos, this can be helpful to aid in your discussion. If not, you can draw pictures to help your child visualize his grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.
- Young children do not need to know the details underlying the reasons for the parent's absence in their life. A general statement that alleviates potential feelings of guilt is sufficient, such as: "Mom/Dad is not seeing you because he/she has big grown-up problems. These big grown-up problems have nothing to do with anything you did wrong or bad."

- Some children need or ask for more specific information. For instance, if your child's parent has an addiction that has kept him from being an involved parent, you can say, "Your Mom is very sick. She drinks too much alcohol and that keeps her from being the type of mom who is able to live with her children." Try to tailor your words to the child's age, and do not offer more information than the child seems to be asking for, as this can cause the child to become confused or feel overwhelmed.
- If your child asks if his absent parent loves him or wonders how the absent parent may feel about him, it is best to be positive. You can say, "I'm sure if he knew you like I do he would think you are an amazing kid!" Reinforce your own love and care for your child. It can be helpful to repeat the following message often: "I love you so, so, so much and I am here to take care of you."
- Allow your child to express his own feelings such as anger, hurt, sadness, love, ambivalence, etc. Make sure that he understands that he is in no way to blame for his parent's lack of involvement. This issue may arise again and again throughout the years, especially if the other parent pops in periodically for visits and then disappears for lengthy periods. Continue to reassure your child that the other parent's decisions are not your child's fault.

There is no way to protect your child from hurt and disappointment in life. The key, though, is to keep the disappointment from being felt as a reflection of his self-worth. Helping your child cope with having an absent parent teaches him that he can deal with life's challenges. Above all, remember that you and your child are a family. Do not focus on a parent's absence or lack of involvement; rather, focus on the things that you do together, and build a solid foundation of your own.