

Blame-Free “Short Relationship/Divorce Story” Worksheet

One essential element of effective co-parenting/parenting is the **blame-free “short, relationship/divorce story”** you each tell yourselves and others about what happened to your relationship that resulted in separation/divorce. The “short story” can be 1-2 sentences. It tells what was **valuable** (where your children came from), defines **shared responsibility** and **what’s happened, without assigning any blame or negative judgments** to either of you. You’ll have it “right” when it’s a sad, compassionate story that allows for grief, and soothes some of pain and anger that have arisen. The story you tell yourself (your thoughts) determine your emotions, and related behaviors. Hence the need for a judgment-free story that’s viable, *models a lesson for your kids* (e.g. don’t divorce without trying couples therapy), and doesn’t prompt prolonged suffering/anger and related ineffective behaviors. The story also serves as the **“party line”** you share with YOUR extended communities, and allows your children, as well as friends and family, to feel free to love you both, without feeling pressured to take sides – a tension your children will feel.

If you have not yet told your kids you’re divorcing, there are 2 versions – the short version below is for extended family and friends. Telling your children requires more preparation and care.

The SDS needs to be easily memorized, so it’s the first thing out of your mouths when people ask about you – you’re asking them to know this is what you’re both telling your children.

Instructions: 1) Say what gave rise to your having kids together and what was valuable. 2) Say what you tried & how the relationship ceased to be viable. (This often includes a “kids don’t make our mistakes” message), 3) Take shared responsibility for your divorce being an *adult* decision, so kids don’t blame themselves, and reassure children/adult children that you’ll both love them and remain present and involved in their lives. 4) Use “we” language to empower yourselves to work towards being on the same page *for your children’s wellbeing (even if they’re adults!)*. Curb any impulse to blame/negatively judge your co-parent. You both had a part in creating whatever you did / didn’t create for your marriage... and your children need to hold onto a blame-free story. This blame-free, shared-responsibility story grants your children permission to love both of you, and by extension, to love the parts of themselves that are like you both.

Some Blame-free Descriptive Examples:

#1: *“We loved and enjoyed our life together a long time before and after having you. At the same time, we were so different we weren’t able to grow together as loving friends and partners, and never developed the “we” kind of teamwork and consideration that loving partners and parents need.”*

#2: *“We were very much in love when we had you. We didn’t get the help we needed to grow the skills that would have made continuing a loving relationship possible. Since then, we’ve hurt each other so much in court, that we can’t see a way to ever trust each other again.”*

#3: *“We loved each other very much when we had you. We think so differently, that over time we struggled to understand one another. We wish we had pursued the help we needed before things got worse. Without that understanding, we gradually felt further and further isolated from each other. We’ve both been lonely as partners.”*

Edit, alter or add elements to the following basic “divorce explanation” a few experts recommend for children: *“We (your parents) loved each other very much. We really believed we could make a life together. We tried our best and, despite seeking help, we were unable to make our relationship work. [Yes, this assumes that people do the best they can.] We’re so sorry about how this hurts you and forces certain changes on your lives. At the same time, we want you to know that we both love you very, very much. We will both stay close and involved with you, to help you grow up strong, capable and happy. Our making our relationship work was up to us - totally our job as adults, not yours, and it’s about our about grown-up stuff, that has **nothing** to do with you.”*

When you have it right, it will honor what was valuable, and just feel sad. It will prompt grief, not anger or righteousness.

Once you have it right for yourself, edit it down to *something easy to memorize* – bullets often help.

Then share it with your co-parenting specialist(s). S/he’ll/they’ll help edit to combine both your ideas as a draft for you to accept or alter. Then copy the agreed-to SDS into your phone where you can reference and recall it easily. A blame-free story helps you each pull yourselves free of holding onto being stuck in blaming, angry, or victim stories that disempower you and distress your kids by extension. You’ll find *yourself* more at peace when you can tell yourself and others this kind of affirming, blame-free narrative. Our thoughts and narratives drive our feelings, which often drive our behavior. What you tell yourself/others makes a difference in how you’ll parent and co-parent your children for years to come.