

Some resolutions divorced parents should consider in the new year

By Jeffery M. Leving SM

With the start of the new year, many have begun resolutions for several things, which are often health or diet related with most invested in physical goals such as losing weight or getting into better shape. While those types of goals are commendable, many times they are too lofty to be realistic and when results do not show up quickly enough, the goal-setter gives up hope.

Another problem with many resolutions is that some may feel if they didn't start on them as the calendar flipped to January 1, they will have to wait until next year. This is bunk, as every day is a new chance to start anew.

Whatever day you might be reading this, I encourage you to start on a new resolution tomorrow and if you're a divorced parent, consider making a resolution that lasts and just as important, one that impacts your relationship with your children.

One solid resolution is to resolve to remind your children that they are loved. This does not cost anything or take much time but is of vital importance. For parents who are in the midst of divorce proceedings or have recently finalized things, their children should be reassured early and often that the divorce is not their fault. All too often,

children feel that somehow the divorce is their fault and that if they were better behaved or got better grades, then their parents would still be together.

Experts say that the main reason kids blame themselves for their parents' divorce is because they weren't told the truth. Without sharing too many details and in an age-appropriate manner, tell your children why you are divorcing. Just as important, let your kids know there is a zero possibility of you and your ex will get back together if correct. Most kids will initially go into a form of denial when their parents separate. Also, assure them that both you and your spouse love them very much and are not divorcing them. Don't make promises you know you will not be able to keep. Consistently keeping your promises lets your children know that they can trust you and such will help them adjust more easily to your divorce. If you've made a promise and then later realize you can't keep it, be upfront about it to your children. You may think they have forgotten about the promise, but most likely they have not. Honesty is the only thing that earns trust in these types of situations.

Another good resolution is to let your child express their feelings, no matter what they are. Children of divorce need time to grieve and many are unable to communicate their feelings in the same manner as an adult. Thus, they should be encouraged to express their feelings about the divorce. Allow them to express disappointment, even if it

is you that they are disappointed in. Hear what they say and invest in their dreams.

Don't downplay their feelings or say things like "Don't worry, you'll stop feeling sad," "It's better this way" and "Everything happens for a reason." That may only convey the message that you can't or don't want to deal with your children's feelings.

Kids should be allowed to fully emote their feelings and be told that it's natural to feel sad. Offer your support and comfort by letting your children know that their feelings matter to you. Ask what you can do to help them feel better. Their dreams are made of hope for their future. So, support them and keep their hope alive.

A third resolution that divorced parents should consider is to respect your children. This may sound obvious, but sadly many divorced parents talk badly of their ex in front of their children. Divorced parents need to stop themselves from doing this sort of thing, even if they feel that their ex did something horrible. The children are not to blame. Do not express bitterness toward your ex or imply that they aren't a good parent. This will only make your kids defensive, feel guilty and can potentially ruin their self-worth.

You may have to communicate with your ex, but be sure that you don't fight in front of your kids--period. Don't argue or fight with your former spouse with your children listening. Also, do not argue or discuss child support issues in front of your children. Heated conversations regarding unreliability or finances should take place when your kids aren't around or through lawyers. These types of conversations are not only upsetting, but may cause your children to feel despair, sorrow, and forced to take sides.

While I have outlined three possible resolutions, keep in mind there are several other similar ones that you may want to do. (Notice I said do and not try.) It is vital to have the attitude that you will not just *try* to complete the resolution, but you will actually do it. It is also important that these and any resolutions do not have to start at the beginning of a new year. They can start next week or even tomorrow, as each new day is a new chance for us all to take positive steps towards completing a goal for our children and their future.

I hope the resolutions I've outlined are considered and undertaken by many. I wish you good luck, but with a positive attitude, you will not need luck.

Attorney Jeffery M. Leving is the recipient of President Biden's 2023 Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award.

Leving, who has dedicated his career to safeguarding children and reuniting them with their fathers, has written three acclaimed books: "Fathers' Rights," "Divorce Wars" and "How to be a Good Divorced Dad," the latter of which was praised by President Obama and by Cardinal Francis E. George, then the Archbishop of Chicago. Follow Jeffery M. Leving on Facebook and X @DadsRights.