

## Facing Divorce, with a Special Needs Child

<http://special-needs.families.com/blog/divorced-with-a-special-needs-child>

by [Kristyn Crow](#)

There is no question that having a child with a disability is a tremendous source of stress for any couple. What was once a carefree romantic relationship turns into a painful, confusing, emotional rollercoaster, at least for a time. Sometimes one partner decides he or she wants off the ride. And this leaves a tremendous burden on the spouse left behind.

### When Reality Hit Me...Hard

I found myself in this situation. I'll never forget sitting across from my then-husband as he announced, "It's time for you to move on with your life." I looked down at my seven-month pregnant belly, and considered my three little boys, ages eight and younger, who were sleeping at Grandma's house. My first son had recently been diagnosed with juvenile diabetes, and my second son had just been diagnosed with autism. My third boy was born with a cataract in his eye, which caused doctors to question whether all three had some sort of genetic syndrome. My unborn child would be here in just a few months, and now my husband was leaving. How on earth would I *move on* with my life?

It takes two to have a divorce, and I'm sure that my pessimistic, worried nature didn't help create a pleasant mood in our home. I became consumed with medical issues-- those of my boys, and also my own, as I suffered a stress-related illness. I wasn't a perfect companion and I didn't really have the tools or support I needed to cope with these challenges, which seemed to hit me all at once. My greatest regret is that I did not have more courage. Still, I find it highly irresponsible for anyone to abandon a spouse in this predicament. My life, which had already become quite difficult, suddenly was a whole lot harder.

### My Advice...

What advice would I give to someone going through a divorce while parenting a special needs child? Here are a few things I would strongly suggest:

- 1. If there is any way to salvage your marriage, SALVAGE it.** Your child has enough chaos and adversity already, without having the added confusion of trading parents back and forth, or losing one parent entirely. Imagine the frustration for a child who relies on consistency, like an autistic child, to suddenly have to switch environments every few days. Not a secure situation. Your child, especially a special needs child, will benefit greatly from your marriage enduring. For tips on improving your marriage, see my blog, "[Keeping Your Marriage Strong While Raising a Special Needs Child](#)."
- 2. You cannot do this without help.** You've got to find family members, friends, counselors, social workers, neighbors, people who attend your church, or anyone else available to you for support. If contacting people seems overwhelming, get your closest friend or family member to start the process. Contact that individual and say, "I need your help. This is what I need..." and be clear. Ask this person to make some calls for you. See my blog, "[Finding Support: Parents of Special Needs Children](#)" for more specific advice.
- 3. As hurt and heartbroken as you may feel, do not purposely limit your child's contact with the other parent.** Unless there is addiction, abuse, or an unsafe situation, your child needs frequent contact with his other parent, for his own emotional well-being. It's incredibly painful to drop off your son or daughter with your former spouse. I know this all too well. But you will have to be strong for the sake of your child. For the first several weeks, I set-up visits

with my friends each time my boys went with their father. It helped knowing I would not be alone.

**4. Immediately make this chaotic time as structured as possible for your child.** Set-up specific, reliable visitation dates. Keep drop off points at the same place each time. Create a routine. Provide a comfort object for your child to take with him on all visits. Make your child a calendar with the visitation schedule clearly marked, and let her cross off each day, so she can predict her visitations in advance.

**5. Do not argue in front of your child.** Do whatever you can to keep his life peaceful and as uncomplicated as possible. If necessary, get a mutual friend or acquaintance to accompany you to visitation drop offs, to limit any hostilities.

**6. Have faith, courage, and hope.** Trust me; I could not have imagined a worse scenario for my life. It seemed like all was lost. But life has a tendency to eventually turn the tables. You just have to be patient, and keep doing what's right. Focus on your child, but also nurture yourself. I've found that karma, fate, or destiny (whatever you choose to call it) will eventually reward these efforts.

Please email me if you need support, or write me a note in the forums. I'd love to hear your story.

#### **Learn more about Kristyn Crow**



Kristyn Crow is the mother of seven children, and the author of three children's books. Visit her website at [www.kristyncrow.com](http://www.kristyncrow.com) .