



By Gregory Ramey, PhD, child psychologist at Dayton Children's and *Dayton Daily News* columnist

Dr. Ramey answers questions from readers

Question:

My husband and I are planning on getting a divorce when our children graduate from high school in three years. Unfortunately, my eldest son, who is a senior, found out about this a few weeks ago.

I've asked him to keep this a secret from his younger sister, but his dad and I are unsure if this is the right thing to do. We want the children's high school years to be pleasant ones, but I feel like I'm putting my son in a bad situation.

Answer:

Growing up is tough enough without your son having to keep a secret like this from his friends, other adults and his younger sister. This is a time when he needs to talk about this issue and get support from others, including you and his dad.

Now that the kids know about this, reconsider your decision to postpone the divorce. If you decide to act sooner on your separation, you and your husband should jointly meet with your children. Do not go into a lot of detail about the reasons for the separation. Keep the focus on the fact that you are both committed to the children and being the best parents you can under difficult circumstances.

Question:

I've always had a pretty laid back attitude about toilet training, waiting until my children were ready rather than pressuring them. However, my 4 year old son is still in diapers and shows absolutely no interest in using the toilet. His two older siblings were toilet trained before they were two. Is there a certain point in which I should pressure him to give up his diapers?

Answer:

Yes, and he is well beyond that point! Assuming your child has no medical problems and is developmentally normal, there is absolutely no reason why he cannot be toilet trained at his age. This is an important developmental milestone for him to achieve and it's time to increase your expectations that he accomplish this.

Question:

I just came back from a doctor's visit and was shocked to hear my pediatrician tell me that my 6-year-old was overweight. While I think she is a little on the heavy side, I certainly wouldn't pay any attention to this until she was much older. Do you think children at this young age should be put on a diet?

Answer:

It's hard to answer your question without knowing more specifics regarding your daughter's weight. However, obesity is the number one health problem confronting America's children. Youngsters who put on weight at an early age, including 6-year-olds, are much more likely to be overweight the rest of their lives. Your physician's sensitivity to this issue is well-founded.

Speak with your doctor about your concerns. The focus should not be on a diet, but rather on making sure your child is not spending much time in front of the television, is getting regular exercise, and is eating healthy foods. The way you manage this issue with your 6-year-old will have lifelong consequences.

Gregory Ramey, Ph.D., is a child psychologist and vice president for outpatient services at The Children's Medical Center of Dayton. For more of his columns, visit www.childrensdayton.org/ramey.