



## On Fire Empire Podcast TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 11

**[0:00:00.6] ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to the On Fire Empire Podcast, Episode number eleven.

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:15.6] KB:** Hi there, it's Kelly Bennett. Hey, I want to welcome you to this Episode 11, which really is supposed to be the kickoff to our season two but best plans laid aside, I got sick and so we're presenting our last 'tweener episode, which is on the topic of how to tell the children when you're getting a divorce?

As you may be able to tell from the sound of my voice, I came down with a really, really nasty flu and a head cold all at one time. So that definitely put a little hitch in my giddy up here and as we were finishing up our batch recordings for Season Two, which is all about journeys, it put a little delay in our recording process. So, hey, we're not anything if we're not flexible, right?

So, we dug back into the library of prerecorded items and we came up with this really good topic. Now, I know, here we are at the beginning of 2019 at the time this recording has been made and in the law office, we see a lot of people who are taking the step to end a bad marriage and make some hard but positive choices in their families. But this question always pops up in the midst of that and it's perhaps one of the toughest ones when you have kids, and that is, how to break the news to children when a marriage is over.

I think you're going to find this really helpful and if you aren't in the midst of a divorce, but you know someone who is, please pass this along. Because in this encore episode, I talk about the different ages and phases that children have and what they're going through and the different ways to approach them because they do have different needs, obviously, based upon their age and what they can understand.



So without further ado, sit back, relax and enjoy how to tell the kids.

[INTRO]

**[0:02:32.6] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to the On Fire Empire. Each week, seasoned divorce and business lawyer, mediator, CEO and surf diva, Kelly Bennett will help you discover strategies and smarter fast, big results. As you listen, you may ask yourself, “how did Kelly know I was going through that?” It may feel like she’s a fly on the wall of your life. She’s intuitive, direct and on point. Kelly brings the amazing lessons from her life’s work to the table to set you up for a blazing, bright future.

We firmly believe lasting empires happen when well-rounded leaders achieve personal happiness, live out their calling and develop meaningful relationships. Now it’s time to hear from Kelly and her crew of experts, learn some new strategies, challenge your way of thinking and get juiced about igniting your empire of a lifetime.

The information provided in this podcast is for general interest only and not intended as legal advice, nor does it create attorney/client relationships between you and Kelly. Now, here’s Kelly.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:03:35.3] KB:** Today, we’re talking about five tips to help you tell your kids you’re getting a divorce. Well, the first thing I want to talk about here is if you and your spouse are civil with each other, try to agree to tell the kids together. This is something that could be really important for your children and could turn into, we’re not going to kid ourselves a positive experience, but it can be one that is not a negative experience.

As you’re telling your kids together, if you and your spouse can, under this area I want you to think about what are you going to tell your kids? Agree together ahead of time on what exactly it is you’re going to say and agree on what you’re not going to say. Try during this time to not be



negative. You don't want to have negative comments and if you and your spouse don't think that you're at the place where you can have a conversation with your children about what's going to happen and about the divorce without launching into some negative talk about one another or some digs about one another, then don't do it. If you can, try to tell the kids together.

If you can't tell the children together, then at least tell your spouse that you are going to bring this topic up with your children. Be very clear. "I'm going to tell the children, I think it's important that we have an open and frank discussion about this." Let your spouse know when you're going to have the discussion and where you're going to have the discussion. This helps you lead with the foot of respect as you go through the divorce process, and it helps your spouse know that there aren't going to be any surprises so he or she is not caught unaware. That's a nice way to go about it and it's a fairness issue and it also helps you really set the tone for taking the higher road.

**[0:05:40.6]** Now, speaking of taking the higher road, even when your spouse is not taking the high road, if you're in a very contentious situation, I want to encourage you to take the high road every time you're talking to your children about this issue of divorce. Because that just, again, it sets the tone and it is really for the benefit of your children and we'll talk about that when we get to a couple of the other points.

Number two, commit to be a no drama mama or no drama papa, whatever the case may be. Here, you want to talk with your children in a way about the divorce that is very factual and almost neutral. We like to say, "Just the facts ma'am, just the facts." There doesn't need to be any kind of metaphors, any kind of dramatic talk and even if your children react in a dramatic way, it helps for you to bring it back to neutral, stick to the facts, and that creates a calming effect during the discussion. Now, I'd like to encourage you also, watch metaphors.

Metaphors are huge, see, I just used one. Metaphors are huge! When you think about the things you're saying to your children and the way you are describing what is happening, when you use metaphors, they tend to bring in heightened drama. Now, when you have heightened drama,



think about your metaphors. Like, “I know this could be devastating news for you but your dad and I are getting a divorce.” It’s not necessarily devastating news. If you bring it back to just the facts, “Your dad and I are going to be getting a divorce,” we don’t need to tie the negativity of the drama into it. So watch your metaphors.

If you look at the feelings that attach to those metaphors that we tend to get in the habit of using, think about how it feels. How does it feel when I say, “This is devastating news?” That’s a bad cloud, just very negative feelings attached to it. But when I say, “Things are going to be changing and I wanted to let you know that your father and I have decided to get a divorce and let’s talk about what that looks like for the next few months.” We’ve brought it back to calm, centered, fact based. It doesn’t need to be devastating news unless we make it that way. So watch your metaphors.

Another way that you keep the drama under control when you’re telling your kids that a divorce is coming is to really avoid the temptation to blame the other parents and sometimes during your discussion, the kids will try to go there and blame themselves or the other parent. But you want to take blame out of it and really avoid the temptation. Sometimes the door opens wide to be real snarky about the other parent. You want to just keep that drama low, keep it calm because you’re taking pressure off the kids.

Speaking of that, it’s really important and what we see as lawyers and when people are going through this and they start having some real reactions that are very negative from their children, is the situation where children don’t feel like they have permission to love the other parent. One of the biggest gifts you can give your kids is permission to love the other parent, permission to talk favorably about their other parent in your presence, and make it okay for your children to see their other parent as a hero. Sometimes when you got really hard feelings going on, you don’t want to hear that and you obviously don’t see that person as a hero all the time. But when you let your kids see their mom or their dad as a hero in their lives and be that hero, you are giving them freedom to be who they are and to pull the pressure off of them in the midst of the conflict between you and your spouse.



Another way that you can reduce the drama as you are telling your children about divorce is you make a plan. Or better yet, you and your spouse spend some time to make a plan on what will happen next. What is the transition for the kids? A lot of times folks come in to us and they say, "You know, they're 10, they're 11," all the way up to 15 or 16, "I am just going to let my kids decide." Well you know, when you let your kids decide and you don't put a plan in place and the structure there for them, we see very negative reactions come up because the infrastructure of stability and their day to day is being taken away from them. It also creates again, that pressure on the children if you say, "You can go where you want to. It is up to you to decide," they're afraid. "Am I making the right choice? Am I pleasing mom in making this decision? Am I pleasing dad?" You see that is a pressure cooker scenario and that just invites drama.

All right, the third pointer in how to tell your kids you are getting a divorce is make the discussion age appropriate. You know, we are not experts, we're not therapists, we're lawyers. But we do see this on a regular basis where people will tell their children very age inappropriate things and there's a break down in the communication. So for example, we know that one size doesn't fit all. Be mindful of their age and their development. Here is an example: toddlers to preschoolers. What the research tells us and the science says is toddlers and preschoolers, they tend to not have the ability to really understand future events or discussions about the future and they have a hard time expressing their feelings.

Instead, what we hear toddlers and preschoolers tend to worry about is, "Well, where am I going to live? Who's going to take care of me?" They tend to be me-centric and the world revolves around them. So with toddlers and preschoolers, keep it simple but very practical. "Mom and dad are getting a divorce that means you are going to have a place at dad's house and at mom's house. So you are going to be taken care of by both of us. When you are at school, your teachers are taking care of you and then on certain days, I am taking care of you and on other days, dad's taking care of you. But one of us is always taking care of you. Here is where you are going to live."



Those children at that age have a very hard time expressing their feelings. So be prepared for them to ask you very simple questions like, “Well, who is going to take care of my dog? Will I still get to have my kitty?” Those questions will come up over and over. Be patient and be ready for them. At that age, you don’t need to get into much more than the immediate care and where they’re going to live, the logistics.

All right, so what about kids who are in the elementary school age? Kids in the age group, six to 11 well we see them as they tend to be black and white thinkers and they tend to assign blame. So be careful here because your children may assign blame to themselves or they may try to engage you in a conversation, “Is it dad’s fault that this is happening?” So you want to again, bring it back to neutral. “No it’s not your fault.” Reassure them that this has nothing to do with them. I tell my clients all the time to please be careful with your children, especially in this age group, because they tend to have this innate ability to make everything related to the divorce and the changes happening in the family their fault.

Also in this age group, they tend to miss their absent parents a lot. So scheduling and reassuring is very important for kids in the middle school age group. Reassuring them when they’re going to see mom or dad next, when they are going to talk to them next and get a schedule in place. If you are not getting along with your spouse, co-parenting can help and we are going to talk about one other point coming up that can help you address this if you are not being able to agree on a schedule.

Now let’s move on to the wonderful junior high and teenage years. Kids in this age range tend to give off the impression that they’re a little aloof, they don’t need you, they’re starting to individualized and gain independence but connectedness through a divorce seems to be a constant theme that is coming up at least in the many clients that we see. So connectedness; you want to make sure that your teens and your junior highers feel connected to you.

They might come off as angry, irritable, aloof, very moody, that’s super common and it’s not always necessarily the divorce that’s causing that. A lot of times it’s just being a teenager but



reassure them that you're there. A few of our clients have said, "You know, since we have started this divorce process, my teen daughter is texting me every 35 minutes. It seems like she needs to know where I am all the time." That's that need for connectedness. Be patient with it and give them that feeling of connectedness and encourage the other parent to do the same.

All right and tip number four is, enlist the help of a therapist. This is one that I can't emphasize enough. I think in every single case that comes through our law office doors where there's children, I am always encouraging my clients to enlist the help of a therapist. If you yourself don't even have the words to say to your children, you go see the therapist. Someone who is an expert in families and children, especially focusing on children and have them coach you through some of the approaches and the words to use with your children.

If you and your spouse are civil and you think you can tell your children together, I also encourage that the two of you go in to a therapist and have that same conversation and maybe even practice it in front of the therapist and get agreement on what to say and what not to say like we said at the very beginning of this video. Sometimes when you make those agreements in the office of a professional, they're easier to stick to and you'll have more success and the last point on seeing a therapist for help is, if you need to, find a therapist that will conduct and facilitate that conversation between you, your spouse, and your children. Sometimes, just having a professional to lean on and allowing them to guide the conversation is your best route to success where you feel uneasy about it. So enlisting a therapist is super important and believe me, it will pay off.

**[0:17:35.0]** Now, the last and final tip, number five, assure your children no matter what, when you first tell them and as the process unfolds, assure them this is not their fault. When your children are starting to wrap their minds about what is happening with the divorce, they will come up with all kinds of ways to make it their fault but you want to let the children talk about their feelings, let them express them, have no comment or opinion when it is negative on the other parent and simply tell them, "We are going to allow adult issues to be discussed between



the adults and we want to make it so you are free to be a kid.” That is probably one of the most important things you can assure your children of.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

**[0:18:32.8] KB:** Well there you have it, Empire Builders. There are some helpful tips on how to tell the children when you are getting a divorce. Now, that is I promise our very last ‘tweener before we kick off Season Two and I can’t wait for you to hear this new special season on Journeys. This is where we’ll be examining practical ways including some legal info on how to move through some of life’s most important journeys. You know, the kind we all face at one time or another.

Hey, I want to thank you for subscribing and sharing this podcast with the people in your life that you care about. We are all about spreading the love and the encouragement and before you go, will you do me a big favor? We’re working on getting into the iTunes New and Noteworthy category. So if you’d head on over there and rate and review On Fire Empire, I’d really appreciate it. Your support gets us seen and heard by those who really need the info.

Okay Empire Builders, make it a great week and join me next week as we dive into journeys in our first segment in Season Two on the Journey of Forgiveness. Until then, live with gusto and ignite your empire. Ciao.

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