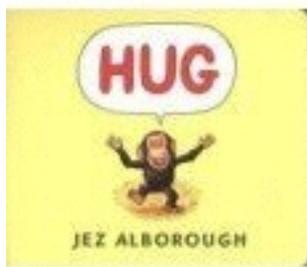


This is an email that I received from a colleague about books that are good for children going through a family divorce.

- Harper West

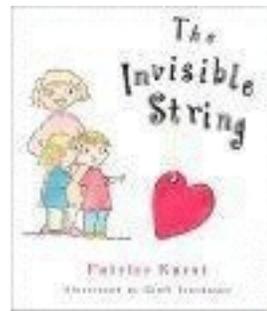
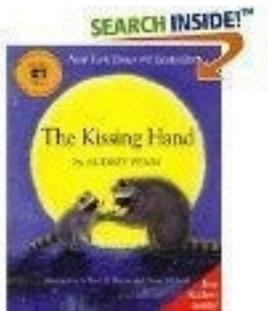
Dinosaur divorce is a very good book. Though thorough and complete and caring, it introduces a new and potentially disturbing concept almost every page-turn or two, and the "story" element is a bit thin sometimes for kids who need the story to be Dinosaur's and not their own. It might also be a bit overwhelming for a 2 year old: sometimes it is overwhelming even for elementary-age kids. Based upon my work with many toddlers going through separations and divorce, I suggest that the client introduce the children slowly to one theme at a time, and in an order that meshes with the child's own development as well as child development in general.

Because two year olds are often experimenting with differentiation (No! I hate you!), it can also be very adaptive to also take a rest from divorce and separation books with books about being together, object constancy and reunion in general: Hug is especially good for 2 year-olds, because it is almost entirely non-verbal. Also there is Guess How Much I Love You, Piglet and Mama, Piglet and Papa, Momma Do You Love Me?, Poppa Do You Love Me, etc. Because it is directly about differentiation, I love Runaway Bunny but some kids who are not yet behaving like the bunny in the story find it very disturbing, so I would skip it if the child is not yet (or, perhaps, not going to be) expressing "Go away or I will!" to his or her parents. (But Momma Bunny responds spectacularly.)

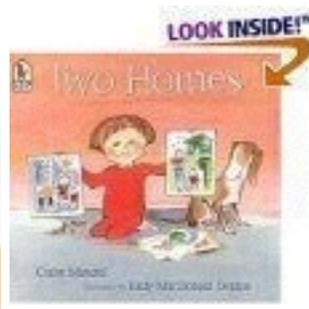
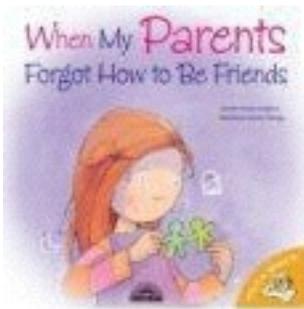


That said, I usually begin with The Kissing Hand, a story that first helps the child know that they can love Mommy & Daddy (and Mommy & Daddy can love them) even when they are apart. Because the story centers around a kiss that Mommy puts in child's hand "to save for later", and the child also gives one to Mommy in case she misses him while he is at school, it has the advantage that parents and children can both actively

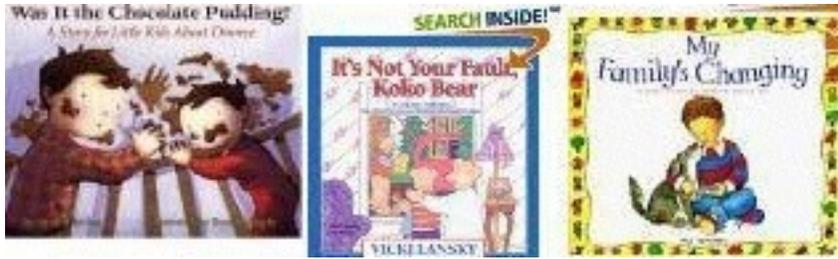
do this after reading the story and before separations, even little ones like going to bed at night or going to daycare, as well as before visitation with the other parent. The concreteness fits the age to some extent. If appropriate, I usually add a page about doing the same with Daddy or siblings or grandparents or pets. Some versions of the book actually have a page of "heart" stickers at the back to facilitate young children understanding the lesson. Once this concrete task is accomplished, The Invisible String talks about the more abstract "invisible string of love" that connects people who love each other, that cannot be broken by time, by distance or even when people are in Heaven. I love this one: it talks about how when you feel the invisible string pull on your heart, you can be comforted knowing that right at that moment, the same string pulled on the loved one's heart. I and my colleagues at the UCSF Child Trauma Research Project have found that children in divorce often love this story, even up to ages 8 and 9 if it is the right message at the right time.



To explain divorce more directly, I usually start very concretely with these:



As the child grows accustomed to the concept, I always recommend the following to educate both parent and child about children's natural tendency to blame themselves. Kids also tend to love this one in my experience, esp. since like the previous two it is encapsulated in the story of another child's divorce and therefore, at a more comfortable remove from the child's own life. It is more of a "4+ book", but with help and some simplification I think a 2 year-old and their parent might benefit from these.

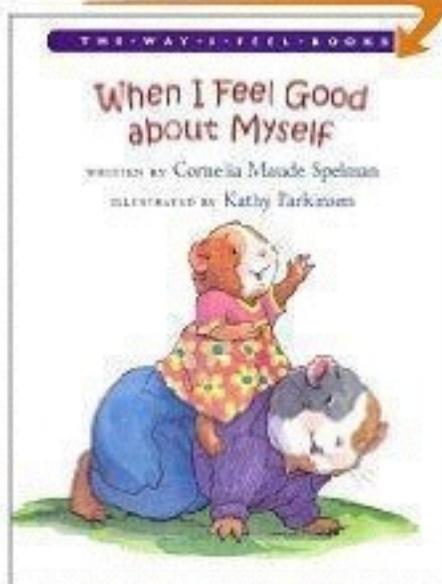


The Magic Box is another one that tends to be good when children start visitation, as again the child can emulate the storybook. Another good one is Little Monkey's One Safe Place.

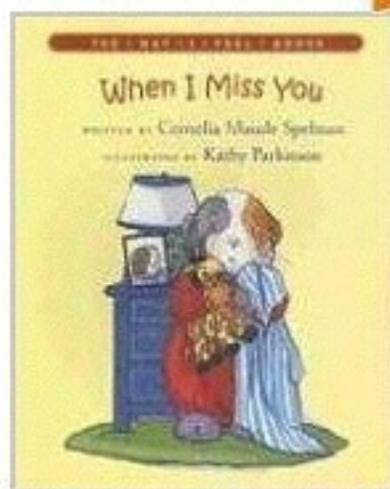


I also like the "When I Feel" series, in general, since kids can handle emotions better if they can identify them and there can sometimes be so many unintended messages to kids in divorce about what feelings we should not feel: When I Miss You, When I Care For You, When I Feel Angry, When I Feel Sad, When I Feel Jealous, etc. The parent is often motivated by a desire to protect the child from strong emotion going on between the parents: unfortunately, the kids do not always make that finer distinction and some books that explicitly authorize emotions as well as how to cope with them can be really helpful.

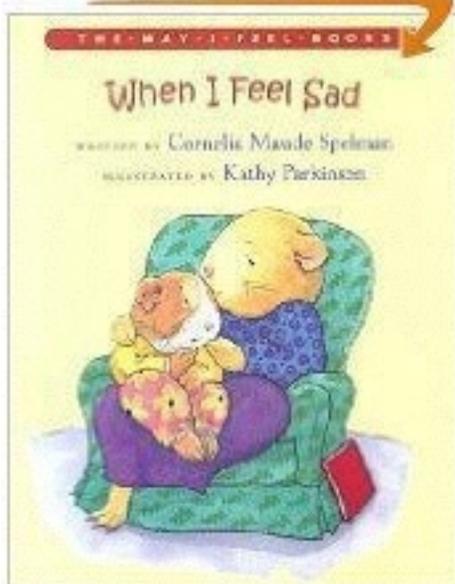
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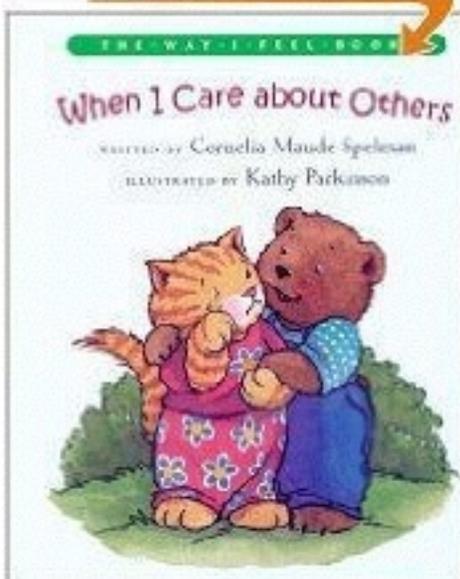
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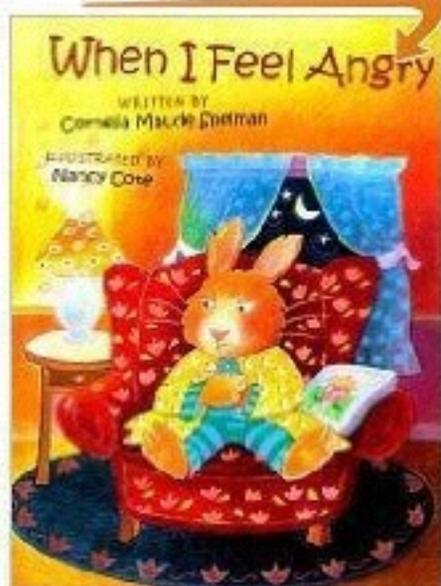
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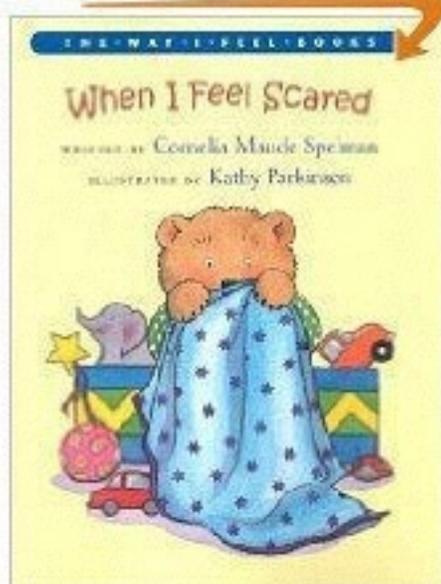
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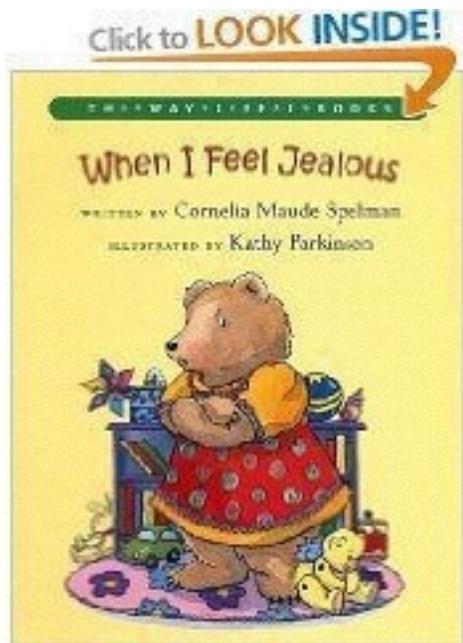


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There are tons of others, but I highly recommend a progression over a period of weeks or as called for by the child's own feelings and behavior.

Hope that helps,

Jay Seiff-Haron, Psy.D.
SF, CA

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