

Separation and divorce

Helping parents to help children



Resolution is a group of family lawyers and other professionals committed to taking conflict out of family disputes. Members abide by a code of practice, which encourages solutions based on the needs of the whole family and, particularly, the best interests of children.



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What should I expect?

The emotional aspects of separation and divorce for parents and children

As life changes for you and your children, it is normal to experience a sense of grief. Divorce ranks second only to bereavement regarding the level of stress it generates in a person's life. Even though the whole family goes through a change at the same time, it is likely that your children's feelings about divorce will be different from your own. Therefore, it is vital that you realise your feelings about splitting up are different from your children's.

Not only will your children's experience be different, but you and your partner will probably have different feelings too. When a relationship breaks down, often one partner has begun to distance themselves emotionally before starting the separation. This situation usually leaves one parent further along the emotional process than the other. Regardless of which position you are in, understanding the process and how you, your children and the other parent are managing their emotions can be helpful.

When divorce or separation occurs, children will experience a wide range of emotions. Sometimes it can be difficult to know which changes in their behaviour are normal and which are related to their parents splitting up. Although children may talk to you about their feelings, it is also helpful to pay attention to their actions and behaviour. The following information has been designed to help you recognise various ways you and your children might experience this transition.

During this time you can help yourself and your children through this process by:

taking care of yourself. Eat, sleep and exercise on a regular basis

trying to stay mindful of your feelings about the situation

accessing support so you can manage your feelings in a responsible manner

making planned changes rather than reactive ones

placing the needs of your children at the forefront of your decision-making process

Denial

The idea that life is changing can often be overwhelming for children. They may be reluctant to acknowledge the divorce or separation as real. Parents usually go through a similar process by distancing themselves from, or denying the reality of, the situation. For some parents, this stage can also manifest itself as shock or disbelief.

During this stage you might:

- feel like 'this can't be happening to me'
- choose not to participate in the process
- actively sabotage your partner's attempts to file for divorce or leave the family home
- postpone telling family or friends that things are changing
- continue life as if nothing has changed
- tell yourself 'this is just a phase'
- distract yourself to avoid dealing with the reality of the separation by working extra hours or keeping yourself busy
- minimise the impact by telling yourself things are fine
- distance yourself emotionally from your feelings by engaging in self-destructive behaviours, such as using alcohol, food, gambling or overspending
- delay telling children or make up excuses for a parent's absence or change of residence.

“ Just because your ex wasn't a good partner, doesn't mean they aren't a good parent.

Regardless of how you feel about each other, it is important for your children to have regular time with both parents. Children need the security of knowing that while you may be divorcing each other, you are not divorcing them. ”

When children are having difficulty accepting the reality of divorce or separation they may:

- change the subject when you talk about it
- choose not to tell others, such as friends, teachers or family members
- make up excuses for the change in the family
- talk about the family as if nothing has changed
- try to plan events that involve both parents being together
- resist spending time in the other home with their other parent because it makes the situation more real for them.

How can you help yourself and your children?

In the early stages, try to keep life predictable and consistent for you and your children. Try to avoid making significant changes and maintain regular routines and normal activities as much as possible. Make sure you and the children get plenty of rest, eat regularly, exercise and have access to supportive family and friends.



Anger

Anger is a normal and understandable reaction to divorce and separation for both parents and children. You may not feel well equipped to deal with this emotion, but how you manage the anger for yourself and with your children is critical. Key factors in dealing successfully with this stage involve recognising the feeling and then finding some healthy, appropriate ways to deal with it.

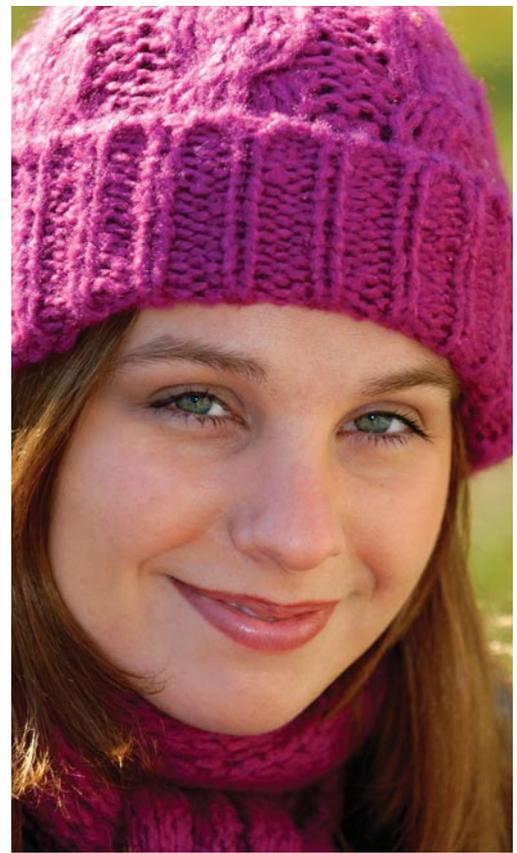
When parents become angry they may:

- feel more irritable and short-tempered
- make irrational parenting decisions
- overreact
- feel extremely tense and stressed
- make personal attacks or look for ways to get even with their ex-partner
- become less emotionally available for their children
- be unsupportive of the children's relationship with their other parent
- criticise or say bad things about the other parent in front of the children.

When children are angry they may:

- behave badly, test limits or break rules
- tell a parent 'I hate you' or become disrespectful
- blame one or both parents for the situation
- throw temper tantrums or display other destructive behaviours, like biting, hitting, fighting and kicking (this can be especially true for younger children)
- have frequent emotional outbursts
- engage in risky or dangerous behaviours (teens and pre-adolescents)
- withdraw from the family or emotionally shut down.





What can you do for yourself?

If you find yourself reacting inappropriately to something, find a way to distance yourself from your immediate response. Give yourself time to vent your feelings to a friend, sort through your feelings and cool off. Once you have sorted through things, then approach the situation. If the issue involves the other parent, instead of waging a personal attack, stay focused on the issue at hand. At all costs do what you can to manage your anger so that your children do not end up paying the price.

Other ways to manage your anger might involve exercising, writing, deep breathing, talking to a friend or finding professional, spiritual or religious support. Most importantly, find healthy ways that work for you.

It is also advisable to use some discretion when getting feedback or advice from others. Anger can often leave us feeling very vulnerable. While family, friends or colleagues may have good intentions, remember that their perspective might be biased or based on their own experiences. There will be times when the advice you receive from others is not right for you or your children. Therefore, choose your support people wisely. Seek out those who are able to listen and support you in a helpful way, rather than those who want to help you fuel the fire.

How can you help your children?

When children are feeling angry it is important to provide them with love and understanding as well as discipline. If you are having problems with how your children are handling their anger, try the following:

1. Schedule a time to talk to your child about the situation.
2. Let them know you understand this is a difficult time for them and give them a chance to share how they feel.
3. Tell them while it is okay to feel angry, how they are handling their feelings is not.
4. Clearly identify which behaviours are not acceptable (for example, hitting, being disrespectful and breaking things).
5. Write down with your child at least three to five healthy, appropriate ways they can express their anger. Good examples are exercising, hitting or screaming into a pillow, keeping a journal or diary, drawing to describe feelings, stepping away from the situation, counting until they cool off, going for a walk or talking to someone they trust.
6. Let your child know what will happen if they choose an inappropriate way of handling their anger. Make sure the consequence is both appropriate for their age and enforceable. For example, with a younger child you might say: 'When you speak disrespectfully, you will have a time out and go to bed early.' For a teenager, you might consider withdrawing a privilege such as taking away a mobile phone or not allowing them to watch television or play computer games.

If these strategies don't help, you may want to ask your GP to refer your child to the local Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

“ When children are feeling angry it is important to provide them with love and understanding as well as discipline. ”



Second thoughts

At some point you may consider reconciling or giving the relationship a second chance.

During this stage you or your partner might:

- consider relationship counselling
- try to reconcile or give the relationship a second chance
- waver in your decision regarding the divorce or separation
- move back into the family home.

Children, however, may function under the belief that they have the ability to bring you back together.

When children are trying to save the family they might:

- promise to be good or behave better
- develop physical symptoms (for example, stomach or headache) or an emergency situation so that parents have to care for them together
- create events or reasons for parents to have contact
- try to become 'perfect' children so parents don't have anything to fight about
- become a discipline problem at school or home so that parents have a common cause. In other words, they are trying to get their parents to focus on them rather than each other
- feel responsible or blame themselves for the situation between you both.

What can you do for yourself?

Realise that making the decision to separate or divorce is a very difficult and personal choice. Give yourself time to think through decisions before acting on them. Most parents, at one time or another, feel some guilt and wonder if they should reconsider. If possible, seek out someone (for example, a counsellor, friend, colleague or family member) you can talk to who can help you weigh up your options.

“ Give yourself time to think through decisions. ”

How can you help your children?

When parents split up, children often mistakenly believe they are responsible. Their sense of guilt usually increases when they are exposed to parental arguments and conflict. From a child's perspective, if you are having a row about them, they will naturally feel they are to blame. So minimise conflict whenever possible and let children know that the divorce or separation is not their fault.

Understand that your children may need to hear this more than once as they are likely not to believe you the first time you say it. It is equally important for children to know that they cannot fix or change what has happened in the family.

Depression

When going through the process of separation and divorce it is quite normal to feel depressed or intensely sad. For most parents and children, these feelings will get better over time.

However, if you find that the sadness is persistent or becomes worse for either you or your children, you should seek professional help by consulting your GP.

Signs of depression in parents:

- Changes in appetite, which lead to either considerable weight gain or weight loss
- Extreme changes in sleeping habits, either an inability to sleep, periods of insomnia or sleeping too much
- Persistent feelings of sadness
- Lack of motivation
- Inability to do everyday activities such as cleaning the house, managing financial matters or caring for yourself
- Feeling excessively tired or fatigued
- Unable to concentrate or focus
- Frequently becoming upset, tearful or crying
- Developing physical symptoms, such as recurring headaches, stomach aches or muscular aches
- Being irritable and short-tempered
- Unable to find pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- In more serious cases, frequent thoughts of death or self-harm.

Signs of depression in children:

- Change in academic performance at school
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Inability to concentrate
- Being agitated or irritable
- Not getting pleasure from activities they used to enjoy
- Persistently sad throughout the day
- Trouble sleeping at night
- Feeling tired or lacking energy
- Easily upset and tearful
- Saying things like 'I wish I was never born', or 'Maybe life would be better without me around'.



How can you help yourself?

Again, if you are having ongoing feelings of sadness that are affecting your daily life, speak to your GP or another health professional, or consult one of the organisations listed at the back of this book. While at times it may feel overwhelmingly difficult, try to identify major causes of stress and seek help managing day-to-day activities. You may also find that taking some kind of positive action every day, no matter how small, will help you find the energy you need to get through the day.

How can you help your children?

While it is terribly hard to see your child upset or hurt, it is important for them to have an opportunity to feel the sadness. Try to avoid discounting, changing or covering up their feelings by saying things like 'It's not so bad' or 'It will all be okay'.

Some parents make the mistake of trying to indulge their children with things or activities as a way of taking their mind off the sadness. Usually, this is only a temporary cure. Instead, let your children know they have a right to feel sad about what has happened in the family. As with anger, it is important for you to help your children find some healthy and acceptable ways to deal with the sadness.

Examples of ways to express sadness:

- Keep a diary or write about feelings
- Draw a picture of how you feel
- Talk to a trusted adult
- Have a good cry
- Talk about a time when things felt better and how you might be able to make changes in the future
- Find a book or story about divorce to read and talk about it – some suggestions are listed at the end of this book.

Acceptance

While divorce and separation is a different experience for each family, most find that, after some time has passed, life eventually begins to feel more 'normal'. When this happens, you may discover that life no longer feels like an emotional rollercoaster and that transitions between the two homes become easier.

When families move closer to accepting the divorce, they will:

- have a renewed sense of interest in life
- be able to disengage from strong emotions
- be able to acknowledge both the positive and negative aspects of divorce
- make transitions between homes without as much disruption
- feel more emotionally balanced
- re-establish hope for the future
- re-engage in activities or develop new interests.



How children of different ages may react to divorce and separation

A significant factor in how children adjust to divorce and separation is their age and developmental stage. The information below offers some guidelines regarding expected milestones and how divorce may affect children in various age groups.

Infants

The primary developmental task for infants is to bond with their parents and gain a sense of security in the world around them. This occurs through regular consistent contact (for example, parents meeting their child's needs through daily activities such as changing, feeding, holding and interacting).

When parents live apart, meeting this developmental need becomes more challenging. Parents will need to be more creative in how they share parenting time. For infants, long periods of time away from either parent are not recommended.

Needs:

- Regular and consistent contact with both parents
- Routines and schedules maintained
- Planned transitions
- Minimised exposure to parental tension
- To develop trust in their environment.

Toddlers

As children move into toddlerhood they begin to view themselves as separate from their parents. While exploring their new-found independence, these young children will experience a wide range of emotions but lack the ability to understand or manage their feelings.

Be aware that your toddler will primarily express their feelings with actions, especially when they are angry, frustrated or upset. This is a time when children need you not only to love them, but to set appropriate limits and provide discipline when they behave inappropriately.

Needs:

- Appropriate limits and discipline when behaving badly
- Predictable environment (such as regular bedtime and daily routines)
- Child-safe homes with both parents that allow for exploration and stimulation
- Regular contact with both parents
- Reassurance of love through physical affection and direct interaction.

Three to five years old

During their pre-school years, children begin to develop ideas about who they are. The most important influences regarding that identity are their parents. Additionally, relationships with parents also form the basis for future social skills. Young children will often choose individual characteristics of parents as a way to define who they are. This is one reason why it is important to maintain a positive attitude about your ex in front of the children.

Things to look for:

Problems sleeping

Not eating well or loss of appetite

Digestive problems

Excessive crying or irritability

Things to look for:

May have temper tantrums, biting, hitting or crying when feeling anxious or stressed

Difficulty leaving one parent or making transitions

Becomes over clingy or anxious

Nightmares or sleep problems due to anxiety



Things to look for:

Regressed behaviour (for example, toilet trained but wetting again)

Showing anger through temper tantrums or physical aggression

Missing the parent they are not with at bedtime or mealtimes

Blaming themselves or feeling guilty

Pre-school children have a very narrow perception of the world and feel that everything happening around them is in some way related to what they have thought, felt, said or done. As a result, they often struggle with feeling responsible for what has happened between you both.

Needs:

- Routines and predictability
- To be prepared for changes
- Consistent contact with both parents
- To be reassured that divorce is not their fault
- Ability to love and feel positive about both parents
- Acceptable ways to express feelings, and limits when behaving badly.

Six to nine years old

Now that children have begun to establish a sense of who they are, their focus turns to building self-esteem. The development of special skills or talents can become one way that children start feeling good about themselves. Remember that your child's relationship with the other parent is still a key factor in how they view themselves. Make sure you speak positively about the other parent and that you allow your child to feel good about that relationship.

Developmentally, school-age children view divorce differently to younger children and are more likely to feel a greater sense of sadness. While they are better able to identify and talk about their feelings, they may be reluctant to do so because they are worried about making things worse or upsetting a parent.

Needs:

- Opportunity to talk about feelings
- Reassurance that they are special to you both
- To know divorce is a grown-up problem they cannot fix or change
- Contact from the parent they are not with (for example, phone calls, emails, dinner during the week).

Things to look for:

Greater sense of sadness over the divorce

Fantasies of reuniting or saving the family

May personalise the divorce and feel they are to blame

Worried about being replaced or being rejected by a parent

10 to 12 years old

In the pre-teen years, children view the world in all or nothing, right or wrong terms. They do not have the emotional maturity or skill to understand that both parents may have some responsibility for the marriage or partnership not being successful. For this reason, they may openly condemn one parent for their actions – particularly if they view that parent as responsible for the divorce or separation.

Even though it can be tempting, it is best if parents do not place children in the position of judge and jury. Instead, support your children in seeing more than one perspective. Realise that although your pre-teen can express their feelings, they will need your support in identifying how to manage them.

Remember that, even as peers and friendships become more important to them, your children still need your continued involvement in their lives. Make it a priority to contact them regularly when they are not with you through phone calls, sending emails, texting or by participating in important activities.

Needs:

- Not to be placed in the middle of adult issues
- Opportunity to test independence
- Not to shoulder adult responsibilities
- Consistent contact with both parents
- To be consulted on decisions that affect their lives.

Things to look for:

Taking sides with one parent over the other

Overly anxious about the future

Moving into parenting role – may feel strong need to take care of a parent

Difficulty managing or talking about feelings





13 to 18 years old

Teenage years are a time when children begin to move away from the family and establish themselves as independent young adults. As friends and social lives are the central focus for teenagers, you may need to be more flexible regarding time arrangements between homes.

Developmentally, teenagers have a tendency to be somewhat cynical about the world and when parents divorce, those feelings may intensify. Often they will react by either rushing into intimate relationships or by avoiding commitment.

Rather than trying to talk your teenagers out of those feelings, it is best to present the value of learning from your experiences and how they can make considered choices in their own lives.

Because teenagers are young adults, they are often exposed to more adult information than younger children. Don't make the mistake of using your teenagers as confidants or overburdening them with intimate details of the divorce. Even though they are older, they still do not want to be caught in the middle.

Needs:

- More flexible time arrangements with parents
- Parents to stay involved in life and activities
- To be consulted about decisions that affect their lives
- Reassurance about their future
- Continued structure and discipline
- Support in managing feelings in healthy ways
- Not to be overburdened with adult information.

Things to look for:

Behaving badly or engaging in dangerous, risky behaviour

.....
Withdrawing from the family by spending more time away from home

.....
A tendency to overreact and being unable to control their emotions

Tips for talking to children about divorce

“ If possible, both parents should be present when telling children about the divorce or separation. ”

Once you and your partner have decided with certainty that you are going to separate or divorce, you need to plan how you will tell your children. Here are some guidelines for you to consider regarding your first conversation with your children.

If possible, both parents should be present when telling children about the divorce or separation

Ideally, it is best if both parents can talk to children together. However, this is only appropriate if parents are able to manage their own feelings and opinions about the divorce or separation. In some divorce situations, parents may hold differing opinions about why things did not work out or be in different stages of the emotional process. If talking to children together is going to create more tension, have separate discussions.

Discuss what you will tell children beforehand

Whether talking to children together or individually, children benefit from hearing similar messages from both of you. Try to keep explanations simple and avoid placing blame. Use general statements such as, 'We will be happier living in different homes'.

If you cannot agree on what to say

Sometimes due to our own hurt and pain, we may feel strongly that children need to hear the truth. In some families, one parent may be very committed to assigning blame for the divorce. Holding one parent exclusively responsible for the divorce often creates a confusing and difficult situation for children. They will most likely feel very conflicted and worried about either betraying or rejecting a parent. Whether or not you initiated the divorce, try to view the situation through your child's eyes. Children have a right to love both parents.



Think through how you will manage your feelings

As you go through this process you will probably experience a wide range of emotions. In the early stages, feelings of sadness and anger about splitting up are usually at their strongest. To minimise the impact for your children, think through your own issues and how you will manage them in front of the children.

Let children know how life will change

Try to address major concerns for children such as:

- when and how they will see each parent
- where they will live and go to school
- how they will spend time with important family members
- how life will be different.

If children have questions you are not prepared to answer, let them know that you are both still working out the details. Reassure them that when you have an answer, they will be the first to know.

Tell children they are not to blame

It is quite natural for children to feel responsible when parents split up. Make sure your children understand that your decision to divorce or separate had nothing to do with them or their behaviour. Additionally, children need to know that there is nothing they can do to change what is happening in the family. Also, reinforce the point that it is not their responsibility to try and make things better between you both.

Make sure children know they can ask questions and talk about how they feel

Let children know you understand this will be a difficult change for them. They also need to hear that they will probably have many different feelings. Reassure them that it is okay to ask questions or talk to either parent.

Additional issues to consider

Children's reactions or feelings

There are many different factors that affect how children will react to separation or divorce. Some children will be very upset, while others may be incredibly angry and hurt. Others might feel profound sadness, while some will show no reaction at all. In families where there has been a great deal of fighting between parents, children may even feel a sense of relief. It is also quite common for siblings to have very different feelings and experiences.

Most importantly, let children know that their feelings are normal. Be sure to give them the support and space they need to safely express how they feel.

Initial talk and follow up conversations

For initial conversations, it is best not to overwhelm children with information. Try to keep the discussion straightforward and age-appropriate. Focus on addressing the fact that parents are separating or getting a divorce and how life will change for now. It is likely that your children will have additional questions after your first talk and need follow-up conversations. Follow-up talks do not have to be formal or structured. You may find that children are open to talking during transition times, such as bedtime, meal times or while engaged in other activities.





“ While the feelings we have for each other have changed, we will never stop loving you. ”

Messages children need to hear from parents

Below are some examples of things children need to hear:

- While the feelings we have for each other have changed, we will never stop loving you.
- We know this will be hard for you, and we are sorry.
- You can always love both parents.
- Just because we may be unhappy with each other, does not mean you have to be upset.
- What has happened is not your fault – you did not cause this.
- Divorce is a grown-up problem that you cannot change.
- We will always be your parents.
- You will always have a family. Instead of being a family in one home, you will have a family in two homes.
- We will both continue to be a part of your life.

How to listen to your children

Divorce and separation bring many challenges and changes to children's lives. During this time one of the most important skills you can possess is being a good listener.

Give children your full attention when they are talking to you

This means turn off the television or stop putting away the groceries. Sit down and make eye contact with your child. If you can't stop what you are doing, let your child know that what they have to say is very important to you. Then arrange a time with your child when you can give them your undivided attention. It is better to ask children to wait minutes, not hours.

Listen to your child without trying to fix, judge, criticise or change their feelings

Typically, as parents, we have a strong desire to spare our children from unpleasant, hurtful or difficult situations. Since divorce can stir up a lot of those experiences, we may try to shield our children by fixing the problem or trying to convince them that they really don't feel that way. Unfortunately, our good intentions can be damaging. When children are not allowed the opportunity to solve their own problems or have their feelings acknowledged, they are deprived of building both self-esteem and self-confidence. Also, it may be difficult for children to identify how they feel if parents never talk about or recognise certain feelings.

“ Listen to your child without trying to fix, judge, criticise or change their feelings. ”

Try to understand your child's feelings and perspective

One way you can convey understanding is by focusing on what your child is feeling and verbalising that feeling for them. You can make statements such as 'I can understand why you would feel that way', 'It sounds like you are feeling...' or 'It must be really difficult when...'. Also, remember that understanding does not mean you agree with your child's perspective. It just means you understand.

Take action

Children need to talk to someone who is supportive and understanding. Taking action doesn't mean you fix the problem or give advice to your children. Once you feel you understand your child then you can make a decision about how to respond. Sometimes it may mean giving them a hug, working together to come up with solutions or having to watch them struggle with a difficult issue or problem on their own.

Keep your issues separate from your children's feelings

Make sure you have a support system away from your children to deal with your own feelings. When you find yourself having a strong reaction to something your child has said or is feeling, try to stay focused on your child. If you are finding it too difficult, give yourself time out to process what is going on and how you are feeling about the situation.

When necessary, get help or find support

Many of the changes divorce or separation bring can be difficult to deal with for parents. If you or your children are having a hard time dealing with those changes, find support or seek out professional help through your GP or from one of the organisations listed at the back of this book.

If your child doesn't want to talk

For some children, talking about divorce makes it feel too real and they may not be ready to accept the fact that life is changing. If your child does not want to talk or resists discussions about divorce, let them know you understand this is hard for them. You can also tell them you understand that they might not want to talk right now, but when they are ready to talk, you will be ready to listen. It can sometimes be helpful to find an age-appropriate children's book or other resource that can make talking about a difficult subject easier for children. Some suggestions are listed at the back of this booklet.



Tips for managing your relationship as parents

Redefine your relationship

While your relationship with your partner has ended, your role as a parent has not. For many parents it is helpful, especially in the early stages of separation or divorce, to handle issues between each other in a business-like manner. Avoid conversations that address old issues, personal information or encourage conflict. If you are having difficulty separating your emotions from the situation or person, ask yourself how you would handle a similar situation with a colleague. Sometimes it may be helpful to think about how you would want the situation handled if the roles were reversed.

Change your expectations

Following divorce or separation, some parents try to control one another by resorting to manipulation, confrontation and criticism. Don't put energy into trying to control your ex or the situation. The most you can do is be the best parent you can and strive to influence your children in a nurturing, supportive way.

Address the issues

Find some way to address your issues related to the divorce or separation instead of hanging onto the anger and hurt. Dealing with your feelings will also help you to be less reactive when issues arise involving your children or your ex. Remember, moving on is important for both you and your children. If you are having difficulty doing so, find some help from one of the organisations at the back of this book.

“ While your relationship with your partner has ended, your role as a parent has not. ”





Address the other parent in a respectful manner

While you may not have a tremendous amount of respect for your ex as a person, you can talk to them respectfully as the parent of your children. When discussing issues or addressing disagreements, avoid making personal attacks including statements that judge, criticise or assign blame to one another.

Practise restraint and avoid reacting when angry

Try to listen to each other's opinions and ideas before responding. If something said by the other parent stirs up strong feelings, try not to act on your immediate reaction. If necessary, ask for a proper discussion and give yourself time to think things over.

“ Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret. ”

Ambrose Bierce

Give the other parent notice regarding issues

Instead of springing an issue or discussion on the other parent, it may be more helpful to let them know beforehand that you want to discuss something (perhaps through a text or email). If contact is made either by telephone or in person, before launching into a discussion, consider asking, ‘Is this a good time to talk?’ If not, ask to arrange a time that is mutually convenient.

Avoid using handovers as a time to discuss issues with the other parent

While it may seem convenient to discuss arrangements while exchanging the children, handovers are often emotionally charged times for both children and parents. If you have something you need to share or discuss, it may be best to make a phone call, text or email the other parent or ask to arrange a time when you can talk with them. If meeting face-to-face is necessary, consider holding discussions in a neutral setting. Meeting in a public place can sometimes be more productive for parents than sitting at the kitchen table. Places like a local coffee shop or restaurant may also reduce the likelihood that things will get heated or out of hand.

Do not have heated arguments or discussions in front of your children

Parent conflict is one of the most damaging aspects of divorce or separation for children, so do not involve your children in an argument between the two of you. Consider the best times to arrange phone conversations with the other parent and make sure the children will not be able to listen in.

Follow up all agreements or details of conversations in writing

If you and the other parent have made a change in plans or come to an agreement involving the children, follow it up in writing. It is not uncommon for parents to walk away with different understandings about what was said or agreed. A written follow up will help minimise misunderstandings.



Situations that need special consideration

While much of the advice offered to separated and divorced parents focuses on developing a co-operative parenting relationship, there are some situations where these ideals may not apply. Any circumstance that places a child at risk, either emotionally or physically, must be managed in a way that protects and preserves the child's safety.

Situations that need special consideration are:

- domestic abuse – physical, emotional or sexual abuse toward a parent
- physical, emotional or sexual abuse of a child
- addiction issues
- parental neglect or abandonment
- when one parent turns a child against the other parent
- hostile aggressive parenting.

While it is important for children to maintain a loving relationship with both parents, the physical and emotional well-being of children should always come first.

It is important to note that a difference in parenting styles or values does not automatically mean a child is in danger. For example, allowing children to have crisps and fizzy drinks for dinner, or to watch TV until midnight is very different from a parent who drives under the influence of drink or drugs with their children in the car. Situations that involve parenting differences need to be addressed but not necessarily to the same degree.

Domestic abuse and addiction

In some situations, especially those involving domestic abuse or addiction issues, a parent may try to minimise the seriousness of the abuse or violence, or not talk about it, in an effort to shield children from what is happening. In fact, most children are aware of the abuse. As many as 90% of children are in the same room or in the next room when domestic abuse occurs.

Other parents may hang on to the hope that the behaviour of the abusing parent will eventually change and therefore work to keep the peace instead of protecting themselves and their children. When this happens, the non-offending parent places both themselves and their children at enormous risk. Even when things improve for a time, significant change can only occur if the offending parent has acknowledged the problem and is actively seeking professional help. If you are a non-offending parent, you need to be relentless in advocating the safety of your child or children. In many cases, this means getting the protection of the legal system.

“ As many as 90% of children are in the same room or in the next room when domestic abuse occurs. ”





You should tell your solicitor if the other parent has threatened you, hurt you physically or sexually, controlled or isolated you or has behaved in an emotionally abusive way towards you. Your solicitor will be able to advise you about an application for an injunction, which would prohibit further behaviour of this nature or stop the other parent from coming to your home. Your solicitor can also advise you about making arrangements for your children and the other parent spending time together that do not expose either you or the children to these risks. You may be eligible for legal aid for injunction proceedings, but if your income or capital is above a certain limit, you would have to pay a contribution.

In addition to physically protecting children, it is extremely important that you offer emotional support to help them cope with difficult situations involving domestic abuse and addiction. Often children involved in these types of situation have ambivalent feelings about the other parent. Some may feel deeply responsible for a parent's behaviour, while others may feel quite conflicted and worry about betraying one or both parents.

How children are able to handle difficult situations is influenced by many different factors, but one of the most significant aspects is how parents talk to children and help them understand the situation. The following recommendations are designed to help you support your children in managing their feelings about what has happened in the family.

Organisations that can help with domestic abuse and addiction issues are listed at the back of this booklet.

“ It is important that you offer emotional support to children to help them cope with difficult situations involving domestic abuse and addiction. ”



Tips for helping children manage where there is domestic abuse or addiction

Acknowledge what has happened and allow children to talk

Some parents mistakenly believe that talking to children about a serious situation such as domestic abuse or addiction will either overwhelm or scare children. In fact, not talking about the situation leaves children defenceless and often more afraid because they do not understand what has happened or why. Talk to your children openly and honestly, offering them age-appropriate explanations and information. Children usually feel a great sense of relief when they receive permission from a parent to talk about the situation. Children also need to know that they can talk about their feelings and ask questions without being fearful of making things worse or getting into trouble.

If you are unsure of what to say to your children, seek out professional support or guidance. At the back of this booklet you will find details of organisations that can assist you in finding the help you need for you and your children.

Educate your children about the problem

Along with supporting children's feelings, it is vital that you educate them about the problem. Help children learn how to keep themselves safe by teaching personal protection skills such as when and how to call for emergency help, how to find and approach a safe adult when there is a crisis, and how to recognise and avoid unsafe situations.

Talk about the problem, not the person

While it may be challenging at times, avoid making statements that criticise or condemn the other parent. Help your child to understand the dynamics of the issue, abuse or addiction in a way they can understand. If it is helpful, seek out resources for children such as books or educational leaflets that will help to explain the issues.

Children need to know that their safety takes priority over everything else. Let them know that the destructive behaviour is not appropriate and that you hope in the future their other parent will be able to make better choices.

Educating children helps them:

understand the situation is not something they can influence or control

.....
identify dysfunctional behaviour

.....
increase the likelihood that they will not repeat the behaviour in their own lives

.....
build skills instead of feeling afraid

.....
feel empowered instead of helpless

Reinforce that what has happened is not their fault

Many children in difficult situations feel guilty or responsible for what has happened in the family. Make sure your children know that the situation is not their fault and that they cannot change their other parent's behaviour. It is also helpful to let children know that no matter how much they may hope or wish, the other parent is the only one who can change the situation.

Inform your children about how life will change for now

When domestic abuse or addiction issues are involved, the time spent by the child with the other parent may need to be suspended or supervised. If this occurs, talk to your children in an age-appropriate way. Let them know in clear terms when and how they will see their other parent. If spending time together is not possible, be sure to support your children's feelings. It is normal for children to have mixed feelings about not seeing the other parent. While they may truly appreciate being in a safer situation, they may also have difficulty letting go of the wish that everything could be okay.

Provide children with a stable and consistent environment

Children who live with domestic abuse or addiction experience very chaotic and unpredictable lives. Although the process of divorce can bring even more changes to a family, do what you can to create a consistent, predictable and peaceful home environment for your children. Children can actually make a successful adjustment and heal from the past with the support of one consistent, loving, stable parent in their lives.

Seek support for both you and your children

Healing for families who have dealt with these issues takes time. Be sure that you seek support for yourself as well as your children. While reaching out to others can be hard to do, it is an important part of making life better for your family. There is a list of organisations at the back of this book that can help.

When one parent turns the children against the other

In some high-conflict separation situations, one parent may successfully influence their children to turn against or completely reject their other parent.

Currently, there is a considerable amount of debate amongst the family law community and public organisations on how to label this destructive dynamic. Some professionals refer to it as parent alienation, Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) or alienation, while others may view it as unjustified rejection of a parent by a child.

Regardless of what term is used, when children are pressured or significantly influenced by one parent (often called 'the favoured parent') to completely reject their other parent (often known as 'the unfavoured parent'), professional intervention from one of the organisations at the back of this book is highly advised.

A key factor in these situations is that the children's rejection is usually based on unjustified reasons. Children may also refuse to see a parent or have scheduled contact with them.

When children have been pressured to reject a parent, they are placed in a situation where they must view one parent as all bad and one parent as all good. This leaves no space for children to love both parents. Given that children view themselves as half one parent and half the other, the end result is that the children are forced both emotionally and psychologically to deny or reject a part of themselves.

“ Help your child to understand the dynamics of the issue, abuse or addiction in a way they can understand. ”



It is equally important to note that there are many other reasons why children may choose to distance themselves from a parent. A parent who has engaged in destructive, abusive, harmful or hurtful behaviours may be responsible for compromising their relationship with the children. When a parent has behaved badly and does not take responsibility for inappropriate behaviour, children may choose to distance themselves from that parent.

If the children do not want to spend time with you, before assuming that the other parent is responsible, it is important for you to consider other factors that may have contributed to the problem.

Hostile aggressive parenting (or HAP) is another term used to define the inappropriate actions and behaviours of a parent. It is most often seen in high-conflict situations where an adult has not been able to move beyond their own hurt and pain regarding the separation or divorce. As a result, that parent uses the children as a way to manipulate, control or seek revenge on the other parent.

Hostile aggressive parents are unable to acknowledge the needs of their children. They view children as belonging exclusively to them and are incapable of seeing the damage they are inflicting. While HAP greatly interferes with the development of a healthy parent-child relationship, it does not always result in a child rejecting one of their parents.

Hostile aggressive parenting can also extend beyond the parent-child relationship to include other significant adults in children's life, such as grandparents, new partners or step-parents.

Although there is significant debate within the family court system and amongst childcare professionals over how these situations should be handled, it is important for parents to understand the dynamics of these high-conflict situations and how they may potentially impact the parent-child relationship.

Tips for managing children rejecting a parent or hostile aggressive parenting

Both of these dynamics can be hugely challenging for parents. The following tips can help you to deal with these extremely difficult situations.

Get education and professional support

When children turn against you or you have a former partner who is engaging in hostile aggressive behaviours, restoring your relationship with your children can be a long and difficult process. Make sure you are taking care of yourself through this process by handling your feelings about the situation in a healthy adult way. Seek good legal representation or other professional help, such as counselling, if necessary. Dealing with these situations almost always involves using the legal system to protect your relationship with your children. Make sure your lawyer is educated about these dynamics and ask them how the family court overseeing your case views these situations.

Behave with integrity

Just because the other parent is not focused on the needs of the children doesn't mean you should behave in the same way. Don't be trapped into thinking that you are helpless. You may not have control over the other parent's actions, but you do have control over how you respond and how you handle the situation with your children.

“ A parent who has engaged in destructive, abusive, harmful or hurtful behaviours may be responsible for compromising their relationship with a child. ”





Don't let the situation take over your life

Find some support for yourself from friends and family or, if you feel you need it, from some of the organisations at the back of this book. As much as possible, limit the amount of emotional energy you give to the conflict.

Maintain contact and be consistent with children

Some parents mistakenly believe that, with time, their children will realise the truth, know that they have been lied to and come back to them.

In fact, maintaining consistent contact with your children is especially important in this situation. When children are being actively influenced to reject a parent, they need an alternate perception of reality. If you do not maintain contact, your children are left with no defence against the hostile parent's perspective.

Despite their attempts to reject you, continue to follow through with what you say you will do. While it can be incredibly frustrating, do what you can to stay connected to your children, for example through emails and texts.

Do not put your children in the middle of adult issues

If you are angry about something the other parent has done, address that issue with the other parent or the court, not your children.

Don't blame your children for the rejection

In normal parenting situations it is reasonable to hold your children accountable for inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour. But these dynamics are not normal circumstances. Children are being placed in a situation where, in order to be embraced by one parent, they must reject the other. If your relationship with your children is in jeopardy, the first and most important goal is to preserve your relationship and emotional connection with your children.



Try to understand your children's position

It is incredibly stressful and difficult for children when they are placed in a situation where they must side with one parent over the other. Consider the stress you are experiencing as an adult in dealing with this issue and imagine how your children feel having to live with this stress day after day.

Avoid taking the rejection personally

While it is incredibly painful to be rejected by your children, it is important to understand it is not a situation your children can control or successfully manage without support.

Offer children an alternate perception of reality whenever possible

It is okay to say that you do not agree with how the other parent is handling this situation. However, be careful not to blame, judge or criticise the other parent – these actions may push your children further away.

Because this is such a difficult and frustrating situation, some parents may feel that if they tell their children the 'truth', try to set the record straight and aggressively fight the situation, their children will see they are obviously the victimised parent. In most cases, this will not happen. Furthermore, when parents do this they are also engaging in inappropriate behaviour by asking the children to choose one parent as right and one as wrong.

Give clear messages to your children

These messages might include:

- You do not have to pick or choose one parent over the other.
- Your feelings do not have to be the same as ours.
- You should always be able to love both of your parents.

Don't give up

When dealing with high-conflict situations it can be hard to see how your actions are making a difference. In some parent-child relationships it may take years before you will see the results of your choices and efforts. Don't make the mistake of thinking you do not matter to your children – you do.

Legal jargon buster

During the legal process, there may be many terms that seem unfamiliar or confusing. The following information defines some of the key language used in the family court system. If you are ever unsure of what a term means or have questions about how your case is proceeding, ask your solicitor.

Applicant

The person who starts legal proceedings or makes an application for separation or divorce. This person then becomes a 'party' to the proceedings.

Where the application is a petition for divorce, s/he is referred to as the 'petitioner'. Once papers are sent to the other parent and their lawyer, the person receiving the papers is referred to as the 'respondent' [to the application].

Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)

Cafcass is an independent organisation used by the court to represent children in cases where there are concerns about the children's safety. Cafcass carry out safeguarding checks with social services, the police and the parents involved. Their job is to tell the court what they think is best for the children based on their assessment of the case.

Child Arrangements Order

Previously referred to as access, contact, custody or residence, a Child Arrangements Order sets out the arrangements for care of a child and defines when they spend time with each parent. Occasionally, a Child Arrangements Order may apply to other significant adults in a child's life, such as grandparents. It can also include specific guidelines about how other forms of communication (for example letters, email, telephone calls and Skype contact) will take place. In most cases, courts prefer not to define those arrangements too closely.

Child-inclusive mediation

All mediators are trained to help parents to think about the ways they can explain things to their children. They can also provide information about how children can be supported when parents separate. Some mediators are also qualified to see children and young people separately as part of a parental mediation process. This is known as Direct Consultation with Children (DCC). Both parents (and anyone else who has parental responsibility) must agree to their child being seen. Your child must also decide if they want to be involved or not. Your mediator will explain exactly how this might work and whether it is appropriate when you meet.

Collaborative practice

A way of resolving separation issues without having to go to court. Instead of trying to work out the details separately, both you and your partner, along with your lawyers, will sit together to work it out, face-to-face.

For more information on collaborative practice, you can download our booklet Finding solutions together: How the collaborative process can help ease the pain of family breakdown available from www.resolution.org.uk.

Consent Order

A legal document that confirms what you and your partner have agreed in the divorce. It can include details of how you are going to divide up your assets, such as money and property, as well as what agreement has been made about child maintenance or your children generally.

Contact centre

These may be either supported or supervised neutral places for contact with children to take place. Supported contact centres are run by volunteers who will be present at the centre and can assist where handovers are an issue or where children need to remain at the centre to see a parent or party. Supervised contact centres offer a greater degree of involvement in overseeing the contact that is taking place.

See the National Association of Child Contact Centres website at www.naccc.org.uk for further details.

Family Assistance Order

An order made by the judge to provide the family with support through Cafcass or social services, for a fixed period of time. The order is usually made where parents are having difficulty reaching agreement over arrangements for their children. The order cannot be made without agreement from both parties.

Family Court

A court able to help resolve family issues including adoption, parental disputes, finances, divorce, local authority involvement and domestic abuse. It is usually the court nearest to where the child lives that deals with any issues. To find details of your nearest court, see <https://courtribunalfinder.service.gov.uk/search/>

FHDRA (First Hearing Dispute Appointment)

Usually the first hearing after making an application to court concerning issues relating to children. It is designed to see if matters can be resolved at an early stage and to enable the court to make directions to move discussions and disputes forward if not.

Guardian

Refers to a person who has been appointed to care for a child in situations where both parents have died. This assignment of responsibility can happen through a parent's will or by court order.

The term may also be used to refer to a 'Guardian Ad Litem'. In this instance the Guardian is an individual appointed by the court to represent the child within court proceedings, where there is a concern that neither the applicant nor the respondent may necessarily be promoting the child's best interests (also referred to as a 'rule 16.4 Guardian').

Injunction

An order issued by a court that orders a party to carry out a certain act or prevents them from doing a certain act. For example, a Restraining Order (a form of injunction) may be issued to stop one person from contacting another. During a divorce, if a party has threatened to remove marital property, or has threatened to kidnap their child, a court might prohibit the party from touching any marital property or removing the child from the country.

Legal aid

Also known as public funding. The government can help you pay legal costs, but only if you are on benefits or a very low income. For further details see www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid

Non-molestation Order

Protects you or your child from being harmed or threatened by the person who's abused you.

Occupation Order

An order that sets out who has the right to stay, return or be excluded from a family home.

Parenting plan

An agreement prepared by parents to deal with the day-to-day care and needs of children (for example, who takes the children swimming, who buys the school uniform, who deals with pocket money). For more information see www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parenting-plan.aspx

Parental responsibility

All the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that go with being a parent. It means that you have a duty to care for and protect a child and that you have a right to make decisions regarding that child's future, such as choosing his or her school, authorising medical treatment and other important decisions.

It does not mean you have to pay maintenance. Child support and parental responsibility are not connected in any way. It is also not connected to time with your child and who the child lives with.

Biological mothers automatically have parental responsibility. Biological fathers have parental responsibility if they are married to the child's mother (whether before or after the child's birth).

Same-sex partners who were in a civil partnership or were married at the time of conception of the child, both have automatic parental responsibility.

Since 1 December 2003 unmarried fathers have parental responsibility if they have been named on the child's birth certificate. If the child was born before 1 December 2003, an unmarried father needs a court order or permission from the mother to have parental responsibility.

In all of the circumstances, parental responsibility can be given either by court order or through a parental responsibility agreement. This document can be obtained from www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities/apply-for-parental-responsibility.

Party

Party is a legal term for anyone directly involved in the case. They can be the person who filed (or petitioned) for divorce (also known as the applicant or petitioner) or the person who received the petition (known as the respondent).

Prohibited Steps Order

An order restricting a parent from taking certain actions in relation to a child, for example preventing them from removing them from the UK or from changing their schooling or surname.

Relocation

If you wish to move with a child to live elsewhere, it may be referred to as a relocation. If you wish to move within England and Wales it is referred to as an internal relocation and if you wish to move abroad, it is referred to as an external relocation, or alternatively as a removal from jurisdiction.

Section 8 Order

This refers to all orders that the court is able to make under section 8 of the 1989 Children Act. These include Child Arrangement Orders, Prohibited Steps Orders and Specific Issues Orders to decide a specific point and dispute.

Service (to serve)

The process of delivering court documents, generally by post, but sometimes 'in person'. Often the court will direct that certain documents must be served (sent) to specific parties and filed (sent to) with the court. If Cafcass are involved, they will also need copies of any documents that are served.

Specific Issue Order

Used when parents cannot agree on details of how a child is brought up, for example which school a child should attend, or whether they should receive certain medical treatment.

SPIP (Separated Parents Information Programme)

A programme (usually several sessions) that the court may order parents to attend during court proceedings, designed to help those facing difficulties in parenting together after separation.

Undertaking

A promise to the court to do or not to do something which, if broken, can result in that person being found in contempt of court and ultimately being fined or sent to prison.

The welfare checklist

A list of factors that a court has to consider before making decisions related to a child. The court will always consider the best interests of the child first and foremost. If necessary, the court can initiate proceedings of its own volition and can make any order under section 8 that it considers necessary to protect a child's best interests.

Suggested reading and online resources for children

An updated list is available on our website: www.resolution.org.uk

Books

Local libraries and bookshops will usually stock a range of books. All of the resources below were available on Amazon at the time of publication, unless otherwise stated.

For younger children

Two of everything

Babette Cole

A story about two children who worry that it's their fault when their parents separate. A funny picture book that addresses children's concerns about divorce.

My family's changing

Pat Thomas and Lesley Harker

Explains facts gently but seriously, and encourages interaction and discussion between parents and children.

Two homes

by *Claire Masurel and Kady MacDonald Denton*

Alex has two homes – one at Mummy's and one at Daddy's. An excellent book for very young children.

Ruby's voice: supporting LGBT families through separation and divorce

Holly Tibbetts (currently available in Kindle format only)

Ruby's voice was created to help open a dialog for children dealing with separation or divorce in their own LGBT family.

Was it the chocolate pudding?: a story for little kids about divorce

by *Sandra Levins and Bryan Langdo*

With childlike innocence and humour, this book explains divorce from a kid's point of view. Special emphasis is placed on the fact that divorce is not the child's fault, that it is a grown-up problem. Deals with practical day-to-day matters such as single-family homes, shared care, child-care issues, and misunderstandings.

Mum and dad glue

Kes Gray and Lee Wildish

A little boy tries to find a pot of parent glue to stick his mum and dad back together. His parents have come undone and he wants to mend their marriage, stick their smiles back on and make them better. This rhyming story is brilliantly told with a powerful message that even though his parents may be broken, their love for him is not.

The huge bag of worries

Virginia Ironside and Frank Rodgers

Although not specifically about separation, this book gives children strategies for dealing constructively with their anxieties.

It's not your fault, KoKo Bear: a read-together book for parents and young children during divorce

Vicki Lansky and Jane Prince

KoKo learns that a child can love and be loved by both parents even when living in a family apart.

For older children

Divorce helpbook for kids

Cynthia MacGregor

This book discusses many of the topics that trouble children when their parents divorce.

Suitcase kid

Jacqueline Wilson

A good book for children between the ages of 9–12 years. Andy is upset about her parents' divorce and does not know who she should live with – one week at Mum's and one week at Dad's. How will it end?

Mom's house, dad's house for kids

Isolina Ricci

Guidebook designed for children 10 years old and up. Explores the process of separation, divorce and forming stepfamilies. Includes tips, exercises and examples that help children build skills as families change.

It's not the end of the world

Judy Blume

Karen's parents are getting divorced and she feels as if her whole world is falling apart. She wants her parents to get back together, but, as she learns this isn't going to happen, she realises that divorce is not the end of the world.

Happy

Jo Johns (currently available in Kindle format only)

An upbeat story about a separating family that shows how children can overcome the trauma of their parents splitting up.

DVD resources

SPLIT

A film for kids of divorce (and their parents)

A very personal film on the effects of divorce on children. The film features 12 children aged 6–12, who explore the often frightening and always life-altering separation of their parents. As these children share their stories, this touching production provides both kids and their parents the opportunity to move towards healing and hope.

Available from splitfilm.org

Suggested reading and other resources for parents

An updated list is available on our website: www.resolution.org.uk

Books

What most children say: a pocket guide for parents who live apart

Clear and simple messages from children backed up by research.

Available from Kent Family Mediation Service

kentfms.co.uk

Parenting apart: how separated and divorced parents can raise happy and secure kids

Christina McGhee

A comprehensive and powerful guide filled with practical and effective ways to minimise the effect of divorce on children. Offers tips and insight on every aspect of divorce and separation, from gently explaining things to your children to maintaining a sense of stability for yourself.

How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk

Elaine Mazlish and Adele Faber

While not directly related to the topic of divorce, this book offers techniques to solve problems with children, with the aim of making parent/child relationships less stressful and more fulfilling.

Helping children cope with divorce

Edward Teyber

A well-regarded book that offers guidance about practical and emotional problems. Voted one of the 10 Best Parenting Books by Child Magazine. It is designed as a post-divorce parenting manual, offering practical guidelines to help you minimise stress and explain divorce so that children don't feel responsible. Covers all age groups and is packed with good advice

We're still family: what grown children have to say about their parents' divorce

Constance R. Ahrons

This book challenges the myth that children of divorce are troubled, drug abusing, academically challenged, and unable to form adult relationships. Instead it provides new evidence that the legacy of divorce is not as devastating as some researchers suggest. By listening to the voices of these grown children, divorcing parents will learn what they can do to maintain family bonds.

The guide for separated parents: putting children first

Karen and Nick Woodall

Children living in separated family situations fare best when their relationship with each of their parents continues to be close.

Putting Children First helps mothers and fathers unlock and resolve the conflict around contact with children that can arise during and after separation.

Truth about children and divorce: dealing with the emotions so you and your children can thrive

Robert E. Emery

In this book, Robert Emery applies his 25 years of experience as researcher, therapist and mediator to offer parents a new road map to divorce. Topics include how parents can manage the potentially toxic feelings of their divorce and deal more effectively with the necessary daily tasks – from talking to children and creating a workable parenting schedule to dealing with legal issues

The Relate guide to starting again: learning from the past to give you a better future: how to learn from the past for a better future

Sarah Litvinoff

A guide to coping with broken relationships, improving self-esteem and how to promote happiness in children.

Online and other resources

2houses phone app

A free app which can be used by both parents and provides access to tools to help with parenting apart. Includes a shared contract calendar, a financial planner to manage the expenses from each parent, and a journal to allow the sharing of information, photos and messages.

2houses.com/en

Our family wizard

American website that provides tools for shared parenting and reducing conflict between parents.

Includes the facility for children to be kept informed of arrangements.

ourfamilywizard.com

Helpful organisations and websites

Help with separation

Resolution

Resolution is a group of family lawyers and other professionals committed to taking conflict out of family disputes. Members abide by a code of practice, which encourages solutions based on the needs of the whole family and, particularly, the best interests of children. Includes fact sheets and directories of local solicitors and mediators.

W: resolution.org.uk

Divorce and children

Hosted by divorce coach Christina McGhee, this site offers helpful information, practical advice and tips for separated parents on how to help children manage family change.

W: divorceandchildren.com

Family Mediation Council

Explains how family mediation works and includes a search facility for finding a local mediator.

W: familymediationcouncil.org.uk

Sorting out separation

A government website that brings together a range of information and tools to help you through a relationship breakdown.

W: sortingoutseparation.org.uk

Parent Connection

Resources to help separating parents work things out for themselves. Includes the Listening Room, a live chat service, and parent forums.

W: theparentconnection.org.uk

Splitting Up? Put Kids First

An online interactive parenting plan offered by One Plus One, and includes links to videos that help you to communicate better with your ex.

W: splittingup-putkidsfirst.org.uk

Cafcass

Cafcass support children and young people who are going through care or adoption proceedings, or whose parents have separated and are unable to agree about future arrangements for their children. They have resources for children and adults, including the Parenting Plan which parents can use to note down what they've agreed about arrangements for their children.

T: 0300 456 4000

W: cafcass.gov.uk

Relate

Relationship advice and information for parents who are separating or have separated. Relate have a wealth of resources on their website for separating families, including an interactive guide, 'What next?' – the parents' guide to separation.

T: 0300 100 1234

W: relate.org.uk

Other support organisations

Family Lives

Support for parents who are reaching crisis point.

T: 0808 800 2222

W: familylives.org.uk

Advice UK

Provides a directory of advice-giving organisations.

W: adviceuk.org.uk

Samaritans

24-hour helpline for confidential emotional support for those experiencing despair or distress.

T: 08457 909090

W: samaritans.org

Rights of Women

Provides free, confidential legal advice on a range of issues including domestic violence, family law, divorce and relationship breakdown. Free leaflets available to download from the website.

W: rightsofwomen.org.uk

The Parent Practice

General tips on parenting and how to deal with difficult situations with your children.

W: theparentpractice.com

Mental Health Foundation

Information on all aspects of mental health and emotional issues, including addiction and substance abuse.

W: mentalhealth.org.uk

MIND

Mental health charity with a range of online support and information, including an information line and a legal advice service.

T: 0300 123 3393

W: mind.org.uk

National Association of Child Contact Centres

Keep children in touch with parents following separation within a national framework of child contact centres and services.

W: nacc.org.uk

Money Advice Service

Information, tools and advice on money issues.

W: moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Only Mums and Only Dads

Two separate websites for single parents. Both provide access to Resolution member solicitors, barristers and mediators free of charge.

W: onlymums.org

W: onlydads.org

Shelter

Practical help for families who need more in-depth help to keep their home, or to settle into a new one after being homeless.

T: 0808 800 4444

W: england.shelter.org.uk

W: sheltercymru.org.uk

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

Provides specialist information, advice, advocacy and legal representation for children and young people up to the age of 25.

T: 0808 808 1001

W: nyas.net

Gingerbread

Provides advice, practical support and campaigns for single parents. Offers factsheets and discussion forums.

T: 0808 802 0925

W: gingerbread.org.uk

NSPCC

Help and advice for adults who are worried about a child or need advice about child protection.

T: 0808 800 5000

W: nspcc.org.uk

Childline

Offers a free confidential helpline for children and young people, open 24 hours a day.

T: 0800 1111

W: childline.org.uk

Association for Family Therapy and Systematic Practice

Information on what's involved in family therapy and a directory of practitioners.

W: www.aft.org.uk

If you are a victim of domestic violence

Women's Aid

Offers a free 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline as well as an online guide 'The Survivors Handbook'. Children may also benefit from visiting their kids' website 'The Hideout'.

T: 0808 2000 247

W: womensaid.org.uk

MALE

(men's advice line and enquiries)

Support and advice for male victims of domestic violence, information for

their families and for men who want to change their violent and abusive behaviour.

T: 0808 801 0327

W: mensadvice.org.uk

Refuge

Works in partnership with Women's Aid to provide advice and support to anyone experiencing domestic violence. Provides safe, emergency accommodation throughout the UK. Website offers a useful help for children section.

T: 0808 2000 247

W: refuge.org.uk

Everyman Project

Offers counselling and support to men who want to change their violent or abusive behaviour.

T: 020 7263 8884

W: everymanproject.co.uk

Women's Domestic Violence Helpline

Advice, information and telephone counselling. Help in some community languages is available.

T: 0161 636 7525

W: wdachoice.org.uk

When a parent has an addiction

Alcoholics Anonymous

Help for people who think they have a problem with alcohol.

T: 0845 769 7555 or 0800 917 7650

W: alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Drinkline

Help to callers worried about their own drinking and support to the family of people who are drinking.

T: 0300 123 1110

W: drinkaware.co.uk

Al-Anon/Alateen

Offers hope and help to families and friends of alcoholics or young people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking.

W: al-anon.alateen.org

Release

Service dedicated to meeting the health, welfare and legal needs of drugs users and those who live with them.

T: 020 7324 2989

W: release.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous

Recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean.

T: 0300 999 1212

W: ukna.org

FRANK

Advice and information for young people about drugs. Free, confidential advice and information about counselling and specialist drug services.

T: 0300 123 6600

W: talktofrank.com

Addaction

Supports adults, young people and families who have a problem with drugs or alcohol.

W: addaction.org.uk

Families Anonymous

National helpline offers free support to anyone affected by the drug abuse of a family member. Nationwide self-help groups are available.

T: 0845 1200 660

W: famanon.org.uk

Gamblers Anonymous

Offers advice for compulsive gamblers and their families.

W: gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Gamanon

Organisation offering meetings for families affected by a gambling problem. Support meetings are available in most areas.

W: gamanon.org.uk

Gamcare

Provides support, information and advice to anyone suffering because of a compulsive gambling problem. Live online advice also available.

T: 0808 8020 133

W: gamcare.org.uk

Resolution Parenting Charter

Our Parenting Charter sets out what children should be able to expect from their parents if they are separating and what separating parents need to do in the interests of their children. At times of family difficulty, it is easy for adults to forget what it is like to be a child, distracted as they may be by feelings of hurt and fear for the future.

Resolution encourages parents to agree together, our children have the right to:

- be at the centre of any decisions made about their lives
- feel and be loved and cared for by both parents
- know and have contact with both sides of their families, including any siblings who may not live with them, as long as they are safe
- a childhood, including freedom from the pressures of adult concerns, such as financial worries
- financial support and protection from poverty
- support and encouragement in all aspects of their lives, including their education, as well as their physical and mental well-being
- form and express their own views on any matter affecting them
- be kept informed about matters in an age-appropriate manner
- privacy and respect for their feelings, including the way they feel about each of their parents
- protection from information and material, including that found online, which may be harmful to them
- protection from harm, and from adults who might do them harm



Each year around 240,000 children in the UK experience the separation of their parents. Overall, more than one in three children will see their parents split up before they reach their 16th birthday.

Written by Christina McGhee, an internationally recognised divorce coach, speaker and author, this booklet will help you talk to your children about your separation, manage their emotions and minimise conflict between households while developing workable parenting arrangements.

It is designed to give you key information at the earliest possible stage. It supports a child-centred approach, which research and experience suggests will help children to move from being a family under one roof, to being a family in two separate homes.

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