

SPLITTING UP

Part of the DIVORCE AND SEPARATION series



Free Parentline
0808 800 2222

Free Textphone
0800 783 6783

Website
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Email
parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

Parentline_{plus}

Because instructions aren't included



Thousands of children experience the break up of their families every year and divorce and separation can be very painful for the whole family.

Whatever your feelings, it is really important to put your children's needs first and avoid them being caught up in conflicts and arguments. Family change can be very hard and upsetting for children – but most find that in time, things do get better and they can eventually feel OK about what's happened.

DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN SPLITTING UP

- Do reassure your children that it is not their fault and that they are loved by both their parents.
- Do ask for help early on – family, friends and professionals can help you and your children to adapt to changes in your family.
- Do sort out details of contact, residence and finance calmly so that you all know what is happening – it will make it less painful for your children. Local mediation services can help.
- Do be honest with your children about what is happening and what is going to happen. Trying to hide conflict or the fact that you are separating doesn't protect them. Instead, if they think that their parents lie and aren't to be trusted, it may drive them away.
- Do allow children opportunities to talk about how they feel and be aware that mood and behaviour changes may be their reaction to the situation.
- Do encourage and help your children to be in frequent contact with their other parent through visits or by phone, post, email or text. It will be reassuring for them.
- Do allow time for everyone involved to adjust – some arguments between adults may not be resolved and children may need time to get used to their parents not getting back together.
- Don't lean on your children and expect them to be confidants, allies or friends. They will still have feelings of affection for both parents.

Going through separation, divorce and repartnering can be a hugely challenging and distressing time for every member of the family. Family change is all around us – more than one in four children in Britain will see their parents separate or divorce before they reach the age of 16.

If you are facing the break up of your family, you may be going through a range of feelings such as sadness, anger, fear of being alone, relief. One of the strongest emotions that parents talk about when they contact Parentline Plus is loss and what effect this overwhelming feeling is having on their children. This can be about loss of a shared future, a family life in the same home, a loss of the familiar and secure. All loss needs to be mourned before you move on and this leaflet is designed to help you and your children do just that, so the family can move forward.



“I’ve taken more individual responsibility – though also work hard to maintain shared responsibility with their mother.”

PUTTING YOUR CHILDREN FIRST

Children may show their distress in all sorts of ways:

- Reactions like losing their temper, becoming moody, fighting, bullying, and missing school are not unusual. Talking about the difficulties, giving them time and attention, praising them, can all help.
- Children often blame themselves for family break up, thinking that what they did or said was the reason a parent left. Make time to reassure your children that it was not their fault.
- Sometimes children will focus all their anger on one or other parent, a brother or sister, or stepparent and blame them for the break up. Other adults around the family can help you and the children at this time – look to grandparents and other relatives and family friends.
- At these times, children may want to talk to someone outside of family and friends – a helpline or youth worker. This is a mature step to take, so let them know that you understand they cannot always tell you how they feel. You can also help by pointing them to other places which could help – there is a list of independent sources of help for children at the end of this leaflet.

LISTENING AND TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN

Sometimes it is not easy to get your child to speak about what they are feeling. If your child bottles up their feelings, they may get angry or have mood swings. They can find it difficult to tell you that they're upset or missing the other parent. Be patient and loving: it may take time for them to talk. Your child may want something that's not possible like getting back together with your ex-partner. It's important that you explain to them why this can't happen.

Remember – It's easier to help your child cope with being part of a separated family if you understand how they feel and what they need.

“I wasn't allowed to see my dad. My mum said it was for the best, but now I want to see him because although I do love my stepdad, I want to know my real dad again.”

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

Family breakdown is a time when tensions are very high and violence can erupt. If it does, it is essential that you take steps to protect yourself and your children.

Children must be protected from hearing or witnessing harmful conflicts as well as being physically protected. There are instances where remaining in contact with a violent, abusive or dangerous parent is not in the child's best interests and you and your children should feel able to express this view and be supported to keep yourselves safe.

If you are affected by domestic violence or abuse and are not sure what to do, contact the National Domestic Violence helpline, which is available free, every day, 24 hours a day on 0808 200 0247.

↓ Parentline Plus Tips

TALKING TO AND LISTENING TO CHILDREN

- ✓ Try to see things from your child's point of view – sometimes when you've done this it becomes easier to understand their behaviour and find a way of dealing with it.
- ✓ Give your child opportunities to tell you about their feelings, even if these are not easy to hear.
- ✓ Get help and support for yourself if your child is telling you difficult and upsetting things.
- ✓ Try to be honest and straightforward with your child, don't make promises you can't keep, or threats you won't carry out.
- ✓ Ask your child about their point of view on key decisions. They'll value being listened to.
- ✓ If you can't do something their way, explain clearly why. It will help them understand.

It is important that each parent supports their children to enjoy a positive relationship with the other parent and you and your ex-partner will have to work out what is best for each of you and the children and how to involve each other in decisions. This will change as needs change.

Most parents find that putting aside their conflicts and disagreements and thinking about their children's needs can provide a way forward to negotiate arrangements.

To do this, you may need to find some individual support to help you come to terms with the situation. You also need to work through some key questions and issues. You will probably find this easier to do if you can talk things through with a third party who is more objective – this could be a family member or friend who you trust, or it could be an organisation. This leaflet contains details of organisations that can help.

NEGOTIATING WITH YOUR FORMER PARTNER

Although you may think the decision to break up means the end of conflict in a relationship, often the conflict continues as you try to sort out arrangements around children, money and where to live.

Disagreements may continue but the way they are approached can make a difference to the way your children experience the break up. It matters less that you split up, than how.

How you talk and act with your ex partner, will have a key effect on your children. Research is very clear about the fact that it is best if children are raised by both parents whether or not they live together.

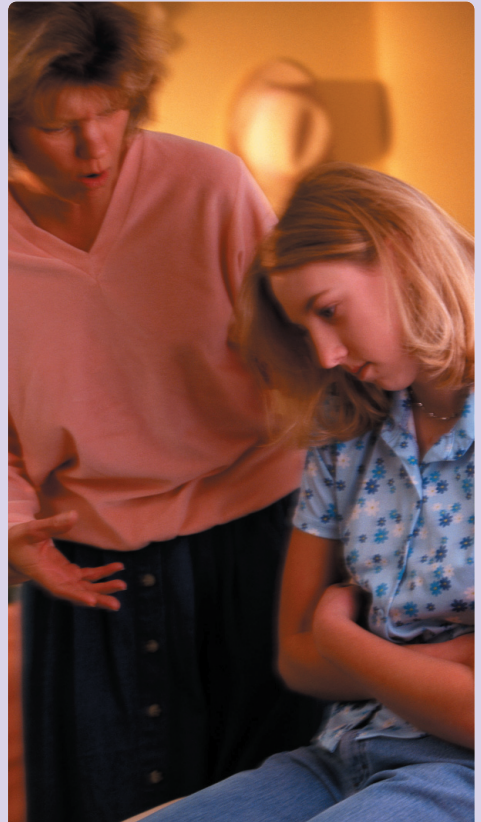
A new guide **'Putting your children first'** is available to help parents think about how to keep in touch with children after separation, their children's lives and living arrangements.

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

There is no one 'right way' of making arrangements for the children. It will depend on your children's ages, school, interests and friends and on where you both live and how and where you work. Older children are likely to have their own friendships, interests and hobbies, and these need to be taken into account when making arrangements for them to spend time with each of their parents. Family and friends may be willing to help, and may have useful suggestions, but make sure they are able to put the needs of your children first. Sometimes family and friends get as lost as parents in the divided loyalties and conflicts that are so common when parents separate.

When a former partner starts a new relationship, things can get hurtful and distressing for everyone. Try to put any feelings you may have to one side and focus on your children – they may be just as distressed. To children, new beginnings can mean the end of hope that you will both get back together again.

Things can go wrong, situations do change and arrangements can be broken. Your children may react very strongly and could be very angry with both parents. Try talking to your child and see what you can come up with together to make things easier. A child may want a break in visiting arrangements but other forms of contact may continue – such as phone calls, text messages, email.



**“Mum used to use me...
like I was a private detective
or something... like I was
a spy.”**



If it proves difficult to help you reach agreement a third party can help both of you to work out the areas for compromise. This could be a friend or family member – or it could be an organisation. You will find a list of agencies at the back of this leaflet.

↓ Parentline Plus Tips

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

- ✓ Decide which things you can compromise on, and which you can't.
- ✓ Consider everyone's circumstances – both yours and your children's. This could make a real and practical difference to what is and what is not possible.
- ✓ Keep things flexible if at all possible to make it easier to renegotiate arrangements that reflect changes.

“I don't say what I really would like because I don't want to upset either of my parents.”

GRANDPARENTS MATTER

Your child needs to know that, even though their parents are separating, there are other relatives and loved ones that are still there for them.

Many children want to see their grandparents and other relatives after a split. It helps them feel that there's still some part of their old family life there. It also helps them to feel more secure.

STEPFAMILIES

Following divorce and separation, one or both parents may be involved in a relationship with a new partner. Everyone will need time to adjust to this. For help with negotiating the changes this brings to your family take a look at our Stepfamily series of publications. Phone our publications department on **020 7284 5500** or download at **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Divorce and separation affects the whole family. Doing the best you can is sometimes hard work and you may need someone to help you through. Try to find people who you trust to talk to. This leaflet helps you to find out more by listing organisations that can provide practical ideas, and emotional support to help you come to terms with parenting after you have separated.

BENEFITS TO HELP YOUR FAMILY

There are lots of ways you can support your family by claiming benefits. There are different types of benefit for children, parents and guardians.

- If you are responsible for bringing up a child under the age of 19, you may be able to claim child benefit.
- If you are separated, you may be able to claim child support from the parent who is not living with the child.
- There is a new deal for lone parents, which can help with the cost of childcare, training and transport.
- You can get help with your pension if you are divorced.

“You don’t know your stepfamily very well but are expected to live with them – of course there are going to be arguments.”

FURTHER HELP

FOR CHILDREN

ChildLine

The UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in danger or distress.

- Helpline: **0800 1111**
- General public enquiries: **020 7650 3200**
- Website: **www.childline.org.uk**

Itsnotyourfault

It's not your fault is a website for children and young people about divorce and separation, with useful information.

- Website: **www.itsnotyourfault.org**

National Youth Advocacy Service

Provides advocacy services for children and young people up to the age of 25. They provide specialist help in children's rights, children in care, contact issues, education and youth justice. They have a network of advocates throughout the country and their own legal advice team.

- Free helpline for children and young people: **0800 616 101**
- Email advice for children and young people: **help@nyas.net**
- Website: **www.nyas.net**

Relate

Provides free counselling for young people whose parents are separating. Find more details and your nearest location on their website.

- Tel: **0845 456 1310**
(Monday – Friday, 9.30 am – 4.00 pm)
- Email: **enquiries@relate.org.uk**
- Website: **www.relate.org.uk**

The Site

A website for all young people providing extensive factsheets and articles on all the important issues which young people face today: sex & relationships, drink and drugs, work and study, housing, legal and money issues, and health and wellbeing.

- Website: **www.thesite.org.uk**

Youth Access

A directory of youth advice, information, support and counselling services for young people across the UK.

- Referral information: **020 8772 9900**
(Monday to Friday, 9.00 am – 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm – 5.00 pm)
- Website: **www.youthaccess.org.uk**

FOR YOU

Parentline Plus

A national charity offering help and information for parents and families via a range of services including a free 24-hour confidential Parentline, groups and workshops, information leaflets, email support and website.

- Free confidential, 24-hour Parentline: **0808 800 2222**
- A free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: **0800 783 6783**
- Email support: **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**
- Website: **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

The following organisations could help you with specific problems about separations and divorce.

Families Need Fathers

A national charity providing information and support on shared parenting issues arising from family breakdown to divorced and separated parents, irrespective of gender or marital status.

- Office Tel: **0870 760 711**
(Mon – Friday, 9.30 am – 4.30 pm)
- Helpline: **0870 760 7496**
(Mon – Friday, 6.00 pm – 10.00 pm)
- Email: **fnf@fnf.org.uk**
- Website: **www.fnf.org.uk**

Gingerbread

Provides a professional freephone advice service for lone parent families, membership services, and a network of self help groups. The website includes a virtual group for lone parent families.

- Tel: **0800 018 4318**
(Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 5.00 pm)
- Email: **advice@gingerbread.org.uk**
- Website: **www.gingerbread.org.uk**

One Parent Families

Provide a helpline with free information to lone parents on issues including benefits, tax, legal rights, family law and contact issues. CSA, and returning to work. They are able to connect lone parents with other organisations and local groups.

- Tel: **0800 018 5026**
(Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 5.00 pm)
- Website: **www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk**

Relate

Offers courses on parenting post separation as well as books, advice and local counselling services. Find details of their full range of support and your nearest Relate Centre on their website.

- Tel: **0845 456 1310**
(Monday – Friday, 9.30 am – 4.00 pm)
- Email: **enquiries@relate.org.uk**
- Website: **www.relate.org.uk**

FURTHER HELP CONTINUED...

Samaritans

Provide confidential emotional support to any person, irrespective of race, creed, age or status, who is in emotional distress or at risk of suicide.

- Tel: **08457 909 090**
- Email support service: jo@samaritans.org
- Website: www.samaritans.org

Women's Aid Federation

Provides a free telephone helpline for women experiencing physical, emotional or sexual violence in the home. The free, 24-hour helpline can refer to local refuges and emergency accommodation across the UK.

- Tel: **0808 200 0247**
- Website: www.womensaid.org.uk

National Association of Child Contact Centres

Promotes safe child contact within a national network of child contact centres. A child contact centre is a safe, neutral place where children of separated families can spend time with one or both parents and sometimes other family members. Please call the information line for details of local centres.

- Tel: **0845 4500 280**
(Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 1.00 pm)
- Website: www.naccc.org.uk

Child Support Agency

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions and is responsible for assessing, collecting, paying and enforcing child maintenance.

- Tel: **08457 133 133**
- Website: www.csa.gov.uk

National Debtline

A national telephone helpline for people with debt problems. Offers expert advice over the phone and via email. The service is free, confidential and independent.

- Helpline: **0808 808 4000**
(Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 9.00 pm,
Saturday, 9.30 am – 1.00 pm)
- Email advice via the website:
advice@nationaldebtline.co.uk
- Website: www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Shelter

Provides advice and information for people who are homeless or have a housing problem. Advice on hostel placements, finding accommodation, housing rights, housing benefits, rent arrears.

- Tel: **0808 800 4444**
(8.00 am – midnight, seven days a week)
- Website: www.shelter.org.uk

Parenting Plans

A new guide **'Putting your children first'** is now available. Copies can be ordered from:

- Post: **Freepost, PO BOX 2001, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 8BR**
- Website: www.orderprocessor.co.uk

MEDIATION

If you find it difficult to discuss the arrangements for your children on your own, a trained mediator can help you with this. To find a mediator, contact one of the organisations below.

National Family Mediation

The umbrella organisation for local family mediation services and can provide details of local services in the UK.

- Tel: **01392 271 610**
(Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 5.00 pm, with a 24-hour answer phone)
- Email: general@nfm.org.uk
- Website: www.nfm.u-net.com

UK College of Family Mediators

Can help you to find a mediator.

They can be contacted at:

- Tel: **0117 904 7223**
- Website: www.ukcfm.co.uk



CAN'T GET ONTO THE INTERNET AT HOME?

Visit your local library which will have computers and internet access.



“Obviously my role as father is different now... but we spend quality time together... and continue to be close and very loving towards each other.”



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Free Parentline: 0808 800 2222

Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: 0800 783 6783
Web: www.parentlineplus.org.uk Email: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

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