

Family Law Services

Parents Tips for Children & Young People

It is important to acknowledge your own grief, loss or anger. These are normal emotions to be feeling when your relationship breaks down. Do not be ashamed to ask for help. Counsellors, friends or relatives can help you to get through this. Seeking advice is important, it helps parents learn about their children's reactions and support them. Parents can also use emotional and practical support to help them get through the separation process.

Children

Sometimes the words you use are hard for children to understand.

Below are some words and terms that may confuse children and a simple way to explain them:

Separation 'When your parents stop living together, they separate.' Remind your children that while you are happier living separately you both still love them very much.

'Live with' 'You are living with the parent you are with most of the time.'

'Spend time with' 'This means the time you are with the parent you do not live with and other important people in your life.'

The Court 'The building where parents go to get a divorce and decide what is best for you.'

Divorce 'When married people decide they do not want to live together anymore, they end their marriage.'

Your children's feelings and expressions

Children cannot articulate themselves as well as adults, they cannot always tell you exactly how they are feeling. Here are some ways you can encourage children to express themselves:

- Ask them to draw how they feel
- Let them know it is okay to cry and feel sad, they should not feel embarrassed about crying
- They can pretend play with their teddies and soft toys, telling them how they feel
- If they are angry and mad, they can stretch or run on the spot to relieve the anger
- Let them run around or kick a ball at a park or open space, to help release their tension
- Create an emotion dictionary, where they find pictures to reflect how they feel and stick it next to the word

Communication with children

- Let them know what the plans are, give them plenty of notice and time to prepare
- Tell them you are concerned about them and both parents are there for them
- Be considerate regarding your personal life, but tell them if you are seeing someone else
- Always acknowledge a question regardless of how difficult it may be for you at the time, if you are unable to answer or do not have an answer, agree on a time when you will get back to them

Moving between homes can be hard for your children, so help them be organised!

- Shared calendar - Help them make notes on a calendar for when they will spend time with each parent and important events (like parties you agreed to go to), write who is going to pick them up after school and drop them at their weekly activities
- Make both houses feel like home - Have your children make a list of things they would like to have at both homes, let them create their own space where they can have pictures of their friends, favourite singer or pet and any other things to make them feel more comfortable

Your children may feel concerned about the situation, remind them:

- They do not have to deliver messages between their parents
- They have the right to feel safe and comfortable at each parent's home
- They do not have to choose sides, they are allowed to love both of their parents at the same time
- They can be there for each parent, but they do not have to counsel their parents
- Parents talking about stressful issues can be overwhelming, it is okay for them to say they do not want to listen to it
- Focus on the things they have to do and enjoy doing
- Separation can be stressful and it takes time for everyone to adjust to the situation
- Provide them the Kids Helpline number to talk about how they feel - 1800 551 800
- If they are in danger, call the police on 000

Young People

Young people are going through physical and emotional changes. They need you both as role models and a support while entering adulthood. It is important for them to be able to ask questions or talk about the situation when it is possible.

Communication with young people

- Remind them you and the other parent will always be there for them even though the family is undergoing a major change and acknowledge their feelings of confusion, sadness and/or anger as normal in response to the separation
- Use the forms of communication a young person is more comfortable with - Try text messages, messaging apps or email as it may be an easier way for them to communicate with you
- Young people want to be part of the decision making and to be heard - Ask them what they would like to do or where they would like to go, offer 2-3 choices (this helps them feel they are part of the decision making process, even if you make the final decisions)

- Try to stay involved in their lives - Your opinion about their accomplishments and support is important to them as they are developing their self-worth
- Avoid talking about inappropriate and sensitive issues like money, this may make them feel scared and/or insecure
- Remember that young people are growing up so their interests and wants are changing and they have a lot to deal with: school, friends and their self-development

Friends and social situations

- Do not get angry if they would rather see their friends than their parents, this helps them gain a sense of autonomy
- Young people sometimes want to show off they are growing up, but they still need your support during this difficult time
- Young people are just coming to terms with their own sexuality and sexual feelings, do not flaunt yours and your new partner's in front of them

The other parent

- Conflictual issues are between parents, do not involve them in the conflict
- Be mindful of the conversations you have in regards to the other parent
- The rules are the rules and try to apply them at both houses so it reduces the tension between all of you, young people need boundaries to help them function and cope with challenges in life
- Be present at their sporting events, plays and school events - it shows commitment to them and their lives (if you cannot attend, ensure the other parent or important people in their lives can attend)

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