

## How to help children deal with divorce or separation

Parents separating can be traumatic for children. They may feel confused, upset and sometimes blame themselves for a break-up.

There are steps you can take to reduce the impact on them:

### Love

Reinforce and remind children that both parents love them. Try to reassure them that they are safe and will always be cared for.

### Talk

Be honest when talking about the separation but keep in mind the child's age and understanding. This can be especially important as they reach their teens and start to form their own relationships.

### Avoid blame

Try to avoid blame and never criticise your ex-partner in front of the children, it can be tempting but is unfair on your children. They may feel they are being criticised as well. Try and agree some ground rules on how you and your ex-partner act/ behave in front of the children to help reduce the impact of the separation.

### Listen

There is never an easy time to talk to children about divorce or separation and some children find it extremely difficult to talk about their feelings. Choose a time when both you and the children are happy, perhaps after a trip. With younger children, drawings can be a useful way for them to try and express how they are feeling and a good way to help them open up. If you are worried about how your children are dealing with the divorce, speak to your GP about finding a professional counsellor.

Let children know that they can talk to you about their feelings – explain it is ok to be sad, confused or angry. They are entitled to be deeply affected by the decision to separate and they should be encouraged to keep talking, even if you don't like what you hear.

### Reduce conflict

Try to co-operate and mediate over disputes relating to the children. This will reduce trauma and emotional stress for all involved. Decisions should always centre around what is best for the children, not the parents. Unless one parent is posing a direct risk of harm to your child (emotional, physical or any other kind of harm), the legal presumption is that it is always best for a child to have a relationship with both parents, where it is safe to do so.

There are four principle ways of resolving disagreement over arrangements for children:

- Try talking about it directly with your ex-partner
- Try an alternative way of dispute resolution like mediation
- Engage a solicitor to try and negotiate arrangements that you both agree on
- Make an application to the Family Court.

**If you feel you need legal support, please get in touch and we would be happy to discuss your options and next course of action with you in detail.**