

Divorce and separation advice

Here are some suggestions that might help to ease the pain:

Try and keep as many aspects of your child's life the same as they were before (e.g. school, clubs, bedtime, house rules, friendships etc).

Try to make contact visits regular and reliable – it helps if they are on the same days each week. Keeping a calendar that your child can understand may help keep things clearer for them.

Maintain as friendly a relationship as possible with your ex-partner – avoid arguments when the child is present. Money disputes and contact arrangements need to be kept as adult issues. Mediation may help you in this. It is very important you do not talk badly of your ex-partner. Remember this is your child's father or mother.

Encourage the child to talk positively about his or her parent, **do not** enlist them to take sides, spy, or act as a go between.

Provide continued assurance of love and support – when words fail, touch.

Let them know they were not responsible for the break up.

Give time and attention, listen.

Don't discourage your child from talking about the separation – allow the child to share in your sorrow, but not your bitterness.

Let the child continue being a child – don't turn to them for your support. Identify other adults who can support you.

Tell your child's school so that they can make allowances for their behaviour and moods.

Allow the child space to be alone as well as time with you or other trusted adults.

Try to label the child's feelings. They may not have the words to talk about how they feel. Try not to get frustrated by this. Your child will learn about feelings from watching how you deal with the situation.

Be mindful of special days.

Try to keep discipline consistent whilst making some allowances for the confused feelings. It does not help your child to abandon all the rules. This will make them feel too much has changed. Allow your child some leeway when they are feeling bad but remind them what is and is not okay behaviour.

Try to be aware of how your own moods and preoccupations may cloud your judgement of your child's behaviour. You may be less tolerant of difficult behaviour because you are stressed and it may stir up feelings of guilt and worry in you.

It may be that separation represents a new start for you. Your child may not feel this at all. Give them time to adjust before introducing something or someone new to cope with. If you already have a new relationship, if possible it may be easier if this takes place when your child is not around. Otherwise, your child may feel they are the only ones suffering the consequence of the previous relationship.

If there was violence in your previous relationship your child needs to know how they will be safe. It may be hard for you to do this but your child may want to remember the good things about your ex partner as well as knowing that hurting other people with violence was wrong. Your child needs to know that people are not all bad, there is some good in everyone. It is also important that you do not identify any aggressive behaviour in your child as similar to your partner's aggression. Your child may need to learn other ways of resolving conflict. It will not help them to be over identified with the violent parent.

Encourage your child to keep contact with their family network and friends. Your family needs as much support as possible at this time.

Where Can I Go for Help?

If you have concerns about your child it may helpful to talk to your Health Visitor or General Practitioner or the child's school teacher. It may be helpful to talk to someone outside of the family.