



## Ways to Help Your Children Adjust to the Separation

- Assure them you both love them. Keep telling them.
- Reassure them that you will both still take care of them.
- Give them the freedom and encouragement to love both of you.
- Tell them that the decision to separate is final.
- Tell them it is not their fault.
- Tell them it's okay to feel sad and to talk about it.
- Spend time alone with each child, as well as seeing the children together as a group.
- Keep a regular routine and responsibilities. Consistency in the midst of change will help them feel more secure.
- Encourage them to play with others and continue their interests.
- Don't use your child as a counsellor or expect them to take on adult responsibilities.
- Do not put down or say negative things about the other parent when your children are present. When one parent criticizes the other, the children feel put down.
- Do not fight and argue in front of the children or encourage them to take sides.
- Assure your children that you believe in their ability to adapt to the changes.
- Finally, look after yourself. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your feelings or situation, get help.

## When is it Time to Get Professional Help for Your Children?

When your child's behaviour is of concern to you and continues for a period of time, worsens or you feel unable to cope with your child's behaviour, it may be time to seek professional help. You can discuss this with a family justice counsellor at a Family Justice Centre or Justice Access Centre.

## Community Resources

Parenting After Separation (PAS) is a free, three-hour information session sponsored by the Ministry of Justice. The purpose of the session is to help parents make informed choices about separation and conflict, taking into account the best interests of their children. Your local Family Justice Centre or Justice Access Centre can provide you with information on how to access PAS.

## Family Justice Centres and Justice Access Centres:

Information, referrals and mediation services to separating families:

[www.justicebc.ca/en/fam/](http://www.justicebc.ca/en/fam/)  
[www.justiceaccesscentre.bc.ca](http://www.justiceaccesscentre.bc.ca)

## Call Enquiry BC:

To contact a Family Justice/Justice Access Centre near you, you can call Enquiry BC between 7:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and ask the operator to transfer you.

In Vancouver, call: 604 660-2421  
In Victoria, call: 250 387-6121

In other areas of the province, call toll-free: 1 800 663-7867

## Information for Teens, Children and Parents:

[www.familieschange.ca](http://www.familieschange.ca)

# Helping Your Children Understand Separation

## Family Justice Centres and Justice Access Centres



You and your partner have decided to separate and you have been thinking about the impact for you and what to do next. Adults struggle with these emotionally difficult times — imagine what it must be like for children. Surprisingly, research shows that in many cases, adults don't talk to their children about the fact that they are separating, yet we know that it is an event that can have a huge impact on children. This brochure will give you some information about how separation impacts children and some ideas about how to talk to your children to minimize the impact and help them get through this difficult time.

## Common Reactions of Children

Be prepared for all sorts of reactions from your children. Depending upon their age, gender and level of understanding, they will react differently to your separation.

### Pre-schoolers

- May exhibit more crying and clinging, irritability, tantrums, return to earlier behaviours (such as, bedwetting, eating habits or baby talk) or withdraw. May fear being abandoned or feel they are responsible for the separation.

### Children Aged 5 - 9

- May feel angry and deceived or a strong sense of loss. May fear being abandoned. May become aggressive or have nightmares or difficulty sleeping, complain about stomach pains or be sad. May feel they are responsible for the separation and/or dream about getting the parents back together.

### Children Aged 10 - 12

- May feel very angry, withdraw from friends, experience depression, complain about stomach pains or be sad. Could blame one parent – usually the one leaving.

### Teens

- May feel angry and hurt or unsure of trusting future relationships. Could become highly critical of their parents. May withdraw from social activities and friends, become rebellious and aggressive. They may take on adult worries and responsibilities.



## How Should You Tell Them?

***Usually it is best if both parents are together when you tell your children about your decision to separate.***

This strategy will reduce the chances of blaming each other for the separation and will enable your children to support each other. This will not always be possible, especially if there are communication problems with the other parent or personal safety is a concern.

If you are leaving an abusive relationship — safety must always come first and it may not be appropriate to meet together. A family justice counsellor at a Family Justice/Justice Access Centre can help you with this decision if you are uncertain about what to do.

***It is best to tell your children about the separation before it happens.***

It is a good idea to tell them on a non-school day, as they will need some time to react and absorb the impact of your decision. Pick a time and place where there will be no distractions. Keep the conversation short — five to 15 minutes and be there to provide support afterwards.

***Prepare what you are going to say ahead of time and stick to it.***

Planning ahead of time what you are going to say shows your children that you are confident you have made the best decision and this will help them feel more secure.

***Tell them in brief, frank and simple language they can understand.***

Be as honest as possible. Don't burden them with details they cannot understand. You might say, "Things haven't worked out the way we planned and we think it is best we no longer live together." Tell them they are not to blame for the decision to separate. Allow and support them to love both of you and not take sides.

***Let them know how you will both be spending time with them and where they will be living.***

Admit there will be changes and talk about their particular needs such as friends, toys, activities and school. Assure them that you will continue to love and care for them and they will continue to see their family – such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family members. It is a good idea to let the school or daycare provider know about the separation so they can be alert for changes in your children's behaviour.

***Encourage your children to ask questions.***

Allow them to express their feelings of grief, sadness and anger by talking or drawing it out. LISTEN to their concerns and take them seriously. By listening, you show them that you are recognizing the impact on the children and care about them. Keep your promises. Your children need to be able to trust and rely on you, especially right now.