

Parenting through separation

FACT SHEET 6

Getting on as separated parents

1. Your children are going to need you to co-operate with their other parent and plan for them together from now on. There are different degrees of getting on acceptably.

- What kids like best is when their separated parents talk often to make plans and arrangements for them, and can both be at the same important events.
- It's also OK for kids if their parents don't communicate directly or see each other, but can co-operate and put up with differences without complaining.
- It will harm your children if you show hostility to their other parent and expose them to conflict.
- If the other parent is not around then you will have to help your children cope with their feelings about not seeing them.

2. When you need to have parenting discussions it will help if you just focus on your children and their needs

- Separate out relationship issues from parenting issues, and make sure you deal with them at different times.
- When you are discussing parenting matters, treat your ex-partner respectfully as a parent, regardless of how you see them in terms of your adult relationship.
- If the other parent raises relationship issues during parenting discussions, agree to deal with them, but at another time.

3. It will be better for your children when you trust each other's parenting, and that usually gets easier over time

- Remember your ex-partner loves your children as well.
- Put up with different parenting styles, and remember that parenting doesn't have to be perfect.
- Make sure that you are able to act responsibly as "lifeguard" for your children whenever they are with you, in case something goes wrong.



4. You will probably get on better if you try these communication tips –

- Choose carefully where you have your parenting discussions. Make sure it's always out of your children's hearing.
- Have a regular meeting or phone call about your children so that you keep up the habit of communicating. Don't wait for something to go wrong, because then it will be harder to sort things out.
- Try counselling on your own or with your ex, or with the whole family.
- If meetings get tense, then hold them in a public place like a park or café.
- Only make telephone calls about your children when they can't hear.
- If contact is difficult in person or by phone, then try email or texting. But be careful, because there's much more room for misunderstandings this way.
- Try using a communication book that is always with your child and write down messages to the other parent about things like medicines, homework and washing.
- Use "I/when/because" statements rather than "you" statements.
- Try other programmes and courses – for example on communication, or parenting skills.
- If contact with the other parent always ends in conflict, then try communicating instead through a third person (perhaps a counsellor or mediator).

5. If you've got a problem sorting out a parenting issue, then try getting someone else to help

- Try a family/whānau member or friend whom you both respect.
- Try the free counselling that you can get through the Family Court, or a private counsellor.
- If counselling doesn't work, then contact the Family Court for more options.



This handout was written by Julia Maskill and Dr Kerry Gould for the Ministry of Justice (2007) and provides additional information to that provided in the free 'Parenting Through Separation' programme delivered for the Ministry of Justice. For details of programmes in your area phone 0800 211 211. There is more information available for parents who have separated from www.justice.govt.nz/family