

Parenting through separation

FACT SHEET 1

What children need from their parents

1. You can make separation better for your children when you try to see things from their point of view, and when you help them as much as you can

- As long as parents handle separation carefully, kids do have every chance of being ok.
- But if separation isn't handled carefully, research shows it can be damaging.
- There are important things you can do to make things better for your children (even without their other parent's co-operation).

2. Separation is a journey for your children – it usually gets better over time

- At first most kids feel pain and insecurity, and are really upset and miserable.
- Some kids get clingy, others act aggressively.
- If your child seems ok, remember they may be protecting you from their feelings, or they may not know what to say or how to get help.
- Lots of kids keep on hoping their parents will get back together.
- Most kids eventually adapt to the changes.
- The more you help your children, the better things will be for them.

3. The journey is different for every child – watch out for their individual reactions and needs

- Things that will make a difference include your children's age, gender and personality, and your behaviour and the support you give them.
- Your children's sense of time is different from yours – for them, time goes more slowly. A week is a very long time for a baby.
- Young kids (under 12) often blame themselves for their parents' break up, and need lots of reassurance that it's not their fault.



4. Take time to think about the impact of separation on you as well

- Although your adult relationship is over, you can't cut all connections with your ex-partner, because you are both going to stay parents for life.
- Think about your feelings and how they're affecting everyone. Accept that your feelings are natural with all of the changes going on.
- You and your ex-partner will probably be at different stages of the separation journey when you have to make important decisions.
- You might be struggling yourself and find it very hard to focus on your children's needs, but that's what they urgently need you to do.
- If you or your kids need protection from violence you can apply for a Protection Order from the Family Court.

5. Don't make things worse for your children

- Don't allow conflict to happen around your kids (including shouting, fighting, background stress, coldness, and actions like slamming doors).
- Don't involve your children in your conflict by asking them to play any part in it.
- Don't make it difficult for your children to see their other parent or any of their other family/whānau.
- Don't ignore your children; do tell them what's happening, and remember to protect them from adult issues and conflict.
- Don't ever make your children choose between you and their other parent.
- Don't forget your children's need for adult care.
- Don't make too many changes for your children at once.
- Don't forget your good parenting skills.
- Don't abandon your children.



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