



HELP YOUR CHILD NAVIGATE YOUR SEPARATION

Separation and divorce have a big impact on children but there are practical things you can do to limit the damage. This guide lists some of the key things you can do to help and support your children. For more information and details of the courses we run for teenagers and young adults visit www.yourdirection.info and follow us on Instagram @yourdirectionuk.

UNDERSTAND THEIR SITUATION

The breakdown of a child's family is a huge life change that they have had no choice in. Whatever their age it's a loss that affects every part of their life internally and externally, how they feel and how they live their daily lives. Children often find it difficult to express how they feel and just want to be "normal" so dealing with this stuff is hard.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Your own well-being is essential for you to be the best parent possible. Get support from friends, family or counsellors or join a support group like Restored Lives to help you. This is a big life crisis so don't try to cope on your own.

BUILD A NEW APPROACH TO PARENTING

Parenting when separated is different and often needs a new approach to communication with your ex. Sticking to the facts on an issue rather than sharing your feelings will help but this is hard so have some support around you and talk to them about your emotions. If communication with your ex is difficult or abusive, parenting can feel impossible but there are many skills that can ease the situation and keep you all safe. Get all the support you can as this will help you and your children navigate this time more quickly and successfully.

ISSUE

HOW TO HELP

HOW YOU LISTEN

When children ask questions or talk about the separation parents can often be defensive, become sad or go into problem solving mode.

Children will experience many different feelings and will find it difficult to express themselves. They may be very confused about how they feel and need strategies to deal with their emotions.

➤ Create an open, non-judgemental space by simply listening and asking questions. Let them know that it's ok to talk about their feelings and that your first priority is to listen.

➤ Tell them about changes and ask their opinion. They have no control over what's happening and need to feel heard. Consider what they want. Encourage them to speak to you and others or write a journal. Being active can also help release their emotions.

ISSUE

HOW TO HELP

HOW THEY FEEL

Children can feel isolated due to the situation or abandoned when one parent leaves.

Children sometimes feel that they could have helped their parents more or stopped their arguments.

Children feel hurt if a parent says "You're just like your Dad/Mum".

Children often lose trust in their parents' ability to parent and sometimes take on the parents role and responsibilities.

Keep in contact with your child regularly, in person and online. Do everything you can to ensure your ex and the extended family on both sides are also able to keep in touch.

Tell them that it's not their fault and that you are sorry for the impact it's having on them. Reassure them that they are loved by both parents.

Never say "You're just like your Dad/Mum" unless it's a compliment.

Be open about how you and your ex are building a new approach to parenting. Reassure them that they are not responsible for fixing anything between their parents.

HOW YOU SPEAK TO THEM

Children feel hurt if they hear their parents speak badly about each other.

When children have to pass messages between parents it puts an increased stress on them and they can easily get hurt.

When parents try to comfort children by saying things like "It will be better for you" or "Don't worry you'll be ok" it can stop children from expressing their real emotions.

When parents talk about their own thoughts and problems with their ex to their children it can become a big burden for children to carry.

Don't speak negatively about the other parent in front of your child. Avoid putting them in the middle of any conflicts between you and your ex.

Don't use children as messengers. Focus on open and direct communication with your ex by speaking about the facts of a situation, not your feelings.

Instead validate and acknowledge with phrases like "This is really hard", "This is so unfair". Offer comfort with things like "I'm here to support you", "We'll work through this together". Help them find healthy ways to process feelings. Resilience builds over time by learning these skills.

Don't expect your children to become your listening ear, find other people who can support and guide you - that's what the Restored Lives course is for.

ISSUE

HOW TO HELP

WHAT YOU ASK THEM TO DO

Children find it difficult to adapt to all the changes in their circumstances.

➤ Try to keep the child's normal routines. Make it easy for them to organise their things to be in the right place and be patient with them. Take their opinion into account and be flexible.

When parents can't agree on activities or who is paying for them it seriously impacts on the child.

➤ Be clear and upfront with your ex and your child about events and activities and the decisions you make. Tell the school, youth group or club about what is happening.

For young children particularly, it's helpful to have consistent routines and rules in both households.

➤ Try to agree on similar routines with both parents. If there are differences make sure that children are fully aware and be patient with them if they forget.

Moving between two homes can be stressful, especially the handover times.

➤ Recognise this and try to keep transitions as calm and stress-free for children as possible. This might mean having any conversations you need with your ex at another time.

WHAT YOU ASK THEM NOT TO DO

Children feel bad if you hinder or stop their connection and contact with grandparents, family or friends

➤ Don't stop them from having a relationship with your ex. Allow and encourage your children to have a good relationship with your ex, their relatives and even new partners. This doesn't change their love for you or your love for them.

Children become stressed when they aren't allowed to talk about certain topics or issues with some family or friends

➤ Don't ask them to lie or cover up actions or activities.

HELP FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Our course, Your Direction has been created specifically to support teenagers and young adults whose parents separate. During five sessions, we bring groups of 12-18 year olds and 18-30 year olds together giving them a safe space to talk with their peers. We explore the key challenges and discuss skills that help.

Developed jointly by Restored Lives and children's charity Spurgeons, Your Direction combines lived experience with expertise from professional counsellors and specialists. The course is stuffed with practical tips and lively discussions that help young people navigate their parents' breakup and move forward successfully with their own lives.

Read more at yourdirection.info and encourage your children to join us at the next Your Direction!

HELP FOR YOU

You don't have to do this on your own. Restored Lives is here to help you. We have over 20 years of experience supporting thousands of people to recover from separation and divorce.

We offer an eight-session course for anyone who is recovering from separation or divorce, whether you separated recently or many years ago. The sessions are packed with practical tips, tools and skills to help you recover and move on successfully.

Restored Lives will give you the opportunity to meet others who have had similar experiences. Each week we watch short videos covering all the topics that arise when you separate and discuss them in small groups.

To find out more and book visit
www.restoredlives.org

MORE RESOURCES

In addition to our courses, we have a range of other resources to help you including a book, workshops, free downloadable resources. We run a support group for men and groups for anyone recovering from separation from an abusive partner.

Visit:

www.restoredlives.org/free_divorce_resources

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To see my own daughter going through Your Direction is a miracle. Restored Lives changed my life and is having a huge impact on my daughter. She's written me a letter that's made me shed tears. Only 8 months ago she wanted nothing to do with me, today she tells me she loves me daily.

Father of 16 year old who attended Your Direction

Your Direction was developed in partnership:

Spurgeons

Restored Lives