

Children need parents to help them with the tough times

A Parenting Through Separation programme factsheet

1. Your children will deal with things better if they have a strong, positive relationship with you

- Your children need lots of warm time with you to relax and laugh.
- There are activity ideas online, for example, at netmums.com/activities/free-family-fun
- You build relationships with your children by putting them first, spending time with them, listening to them and doing things with them, even when at times this doesn't fit into your plans.

2. Good communication is the key to your relationship with your children

- Tell your children what's happening and answer their questions but don't involve them in conflict.
- Gently help your children to find the words to say what they want to say. Never ever put them under any pressure or 'interrogate' them.
- Show you're listening to your children and respect what they say.
- Watch what you say, especially when replying to difficult questions.
- Put yourself in your children's shoes and think about how the separation looks through their eyes.
- Protect your children from adult issues.
- Have lots of conversations all the time, including about everyday and funny things not just the big, difficult issues.

3. Your children need both parents, so help them keep up their relationship with the other parent

- It's sometimes hard to hear your children say they love the other parent and want to spend time with them, but it is usually good for them if they can.
- Your children might not want to tell you they want to see the other parent because they think it would upset you.

- Keeping relationships going with whānau on both sides of the family is important for your children, so they can feel good about themselves and get on well with others.
- Help your children through the short-term difficulties that contact with the other parent may cause. (But get advice if you're worried.)

4. Your children will need more support from you if their other parent doesn't keep in touch

- You can't force the other parent to have contact. You can encourage them to go to Parenting Through Separation. This programme might help them understand better how cutting off contact will affect their children.
- Your children's feelings will be affected by not seeing their other parent.

5. Your children need as much stability and security as possible

- Separation can cause lots of changes and disruptions in your children's relationships, especially if they move house and schools.
- You can help by doing what you can to keep your children's routines and activities going, and by making changes over time.
- Tell your children what's planned for them and reassure them that they'll be looked after.
- Think carefully about your children's feelings when introducing new partners or stepchildren.

6. Sometimes it's helpful to talk to other adults

- If you're worried about your children, talk to a health professional, counsellor or school counsellor.
- You may need other adults' help to be strong for your children, especially when your relationship and separation have involved violence, extreme bitterness or addiction.
- Talk to reliable adults rather than burdening your children with your separation issues.

Children need parents to protect them from conflict

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1. Your children need to be away from conflict because:

- seeing or hearing conflict with your former partner can damage them, even if they seem resilient or 'tough'
- they're likely to worry deeply if they see a parent they love being upset
- they may think they're the cause of their parents' fighting
- they may feel they need to choose sides
- they're stressed by parents being frightening or 'cold' and may develop low self-esteem
- if they grow up with conflict, they're more likely to think that's a normal way to behave.

2. If conflict is a problem, focus on what *you* can do about it (you can't control anyone else)

- Make some rules for when you talk about parenting or relationship issues:
 - never in front of your children
 - never at changeovers
 - never by telephone when they can hear you.
- If contact with the other parent always ends in conflict then cut all contact in front of your children.
- Try to use a person who won't take sides or a school as a drop-off and collection point for changeovers.

3. Don't involve your children in conflict or do things to get them 'on your side'. It might seriously damage their relationships, including with you

- Don't let them hear you saying negative things about the other parent. Don't ask them to pass on your difficult messages.
- Don't ask them to 'spy' for you and tell you what the other parent is doing.
- Don't allow them to become the peacekeepers in your disputes.

4. Family violence and abuse have a huge impact on children

- If there's violence or abuse towards you or your children, you need to speak to a lawyer or other support person to work out what is best for you and your children.
- You'll also need to do this if the other parent has a serious addiction problem, such as drugs or alcohol.
- Sometimes, Family Court protection is needed when there are safety or addiction issues. Call the Police (dial 111) for help.

To find out more, go to
justice.govt.nz/family/relationship-break-up/