

Children need parents to understand what they're going through

A Parenting Through Separation programme factsheet

1. You can make separation better for your children

- Most children will want to continue their relationship with both parents.
- Put aside what's happening in your relationship and understand the effect of your separation on your children.
- The more you help your children, the better things will be for them.

2. It takes time for children to accept that their parents are separating

- At first, most children feel pain and insecurity, and may be really upset and miserable.
- Some children get clingy, others may be aggressive.
- Sometimes, even when children seem OK, they may be protecting you from their feelings or they may not know how to ask for help.
- Many times, children will keep hoping their parents will get back together.
- Over time, most children get used to the changes.

3. It's different for every child – watch out for their individual reactions and needs

- Things that will make a difference include your children's age, sex and personality, 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 an infant.
- Children aged 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 relationship is over, you can't cut all ties with your former partner – you're both parents for life.
- Think about your feelings and how they affect others.
- Accept that your feelings are natural with all of the changes going on.
- You and your former partner will probably be at different stages of the separation journey when you have to make important decisions.
- You might find it hard to focus on your children's needs but that's what they urgently need you to do.
- If you or your children need protection from violence, ask the Family Court for a Protection Order.

5. Ways to help your children

- Keep them away from conflict (including shouting, fighting, background stress and actions like slamming doors).
- Ensure they don't get involved in any arguments.
- Help them to keep seeing their other parent and their wider family/whānau.
- Tell your children what's happening but protect them from adult issues.
- Make sure they never have to choose between you and their other parent.
- Remember their need for an adult to keep caring for them.
- Try to keep to your children's routine as much as you can to help them feel secure.
- Keep in regular contact with them, even if you're not involved in their day-to-day care. Otherwise, they may feel abandoned.

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