



## Parent Separation: Fact Sheet

Experiencing a separation or divorce can be an extremely stressful event. Separation comes with huge changes and these changes can be difficult to process and understand, especially for children and adolescents.

You may notice during this time that your child begins to express their emotions through behavior such as increased anxiety or a need to be close to parents, increased anger or meltdowns, problems with schoolwork, difficulties sleeping or increased risk-taking. Remember, each child will respond to this experience differently. Below are some strategies you can put in place to support your child through this transition.

### Strategies to support your child:

#### Explain what is happening and prepare them for the transition:

- Be clear and explain to them what parts of their routines and lifestyle will change and what parts will remain the same.
- You could use a social story or [journaling](#) to help them better understand what the changes will look like. If you need support to use these strategies speak to your OT, they will be able to talk you through these strategies and help prepare resources if needed.

#### Create and maintain structured routines:

- Try to keep the routines as close to before the separation as possible.
- This experience will be a huge change for them, so using predictable and consistent routines will help to reduce their anxieties.
- Use the same or similar routines within both households and keep visits with the other parent consistent and predictable.
- You can also use resources such as visual schedules to help introduce new routines.

#### Holding Space for Emotions:

- Support them by acknowledging that parent separation is a big change and can be difficult to get used to. Be aware that each child may react and process their experience differently.
- Hold space for them to share their emotions, without offering solutions.
- Use [emotion coaching](#) or [journaling](#) to help them label and understand their feelings.
- Be open to repeating certain conversations, especially with young children, as they will need to go over things several times before they can understand it fully.

#### Create or Sustain Family Rituals:

- Are their rituals within your family, perhaps at dinner time or afterschool, that are meaningful to your child? Can you maintain these or tweak them after the separation?
- Create new rituals such as a between houses transition ritual. Perhaps you always stop at the park or play a specific game in the car? This will allow them to have predictable patterns in their week, which will ease anxiety and help with new transitions.
- Transition days can be difficult for children as they move between each house. Help them notice and name these feelings and create a supportive routine as they settle into your home. For example, a cuddle and a chat on the couch, jumping on the trampoline or a shared game together



### United and Shared Approach to Parenting:

- Children will always cope better when both parents are amicable and on the same page, even if this ends up looking like a business type relationship.
- Don't speak negatively of the other parent in front of the child /children.
- Try and have the same rules and boundaries for key parenting topics such as screen time, bedtime routine and behavior management.
- Support your child to continue their relationship with the other parent (unless it's unsafe), allowing them to have pictures or objects that remind them of the other parent, or by scheduling in regular phone calls.

### Look after yourself:

- Your child will need you to help them co-regulate and to support them through this change.
- Make sure that you are checking in with yourself and taking time for self-care when you can.
- Reach out and seek support from those around you.

### Resources:

<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/divorce-and-separation>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/divorce.html>

<https://www.playtherapymelbourne.com/parental-separation-and-play-therapy/>