



## **Helping Your Child(ren) Understand and Cope with Family Breakdown**

### **Understanding**

Divorce/Separation/Family Breakdown is a critical event that affects the entire family. It is a hugely stressful time for you all. Everyone will feel a mixture of emotions whilst trying to work through how to untangle your finances, living arrangements, child arrangements etc.

Separation often involves conflict and bad feelings between parents and their families. Children can pick up on this, which may make them confused or unhappy – or even blame themselves for a break-up. It is common to see changes in your child's behaviour.

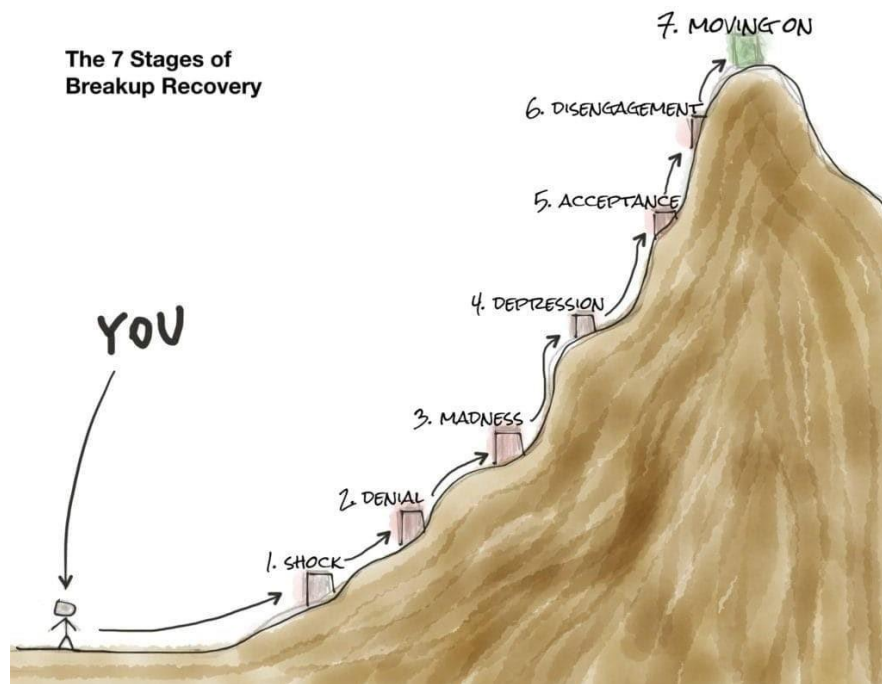
It is important that you take care of yourself physically and emotionally. Seek  
support to help you manage your emotions by leaning on friends, family or other support workers who can offer a listening ear without inflaming feelings of resentment.

It is vital that the emotional needs of your child(ren) are put to the forefront of your minds by shielding them from destructive arguments or speaking badly about each other in front of them.

Parental conflict across the spectrum from 'silence to violence' is potentially damaging. Parental conflict (whether the parents are together or separated) places your child at risk of poor

social, emotional and educational outcomes.

Divorce is never a seamless process and, inevitably, such a transitional time doesn't happen without some measure of grief and hardship. But you can dramatically reduce your children's pain by making their well-being your top priority.



On a positive note, children can benefit from seeing their parents resolve their differences and disagreements. If done with respect and understanding constructive conflict teaches valuable life lessons about compromise, negotiation, resolution and reaching agreements.

It is useful to let the school know of any changes in home circumstances so that we can be on the lookout for any changes of behaviour and support them further as needed.

We often use a workbook called 'My Family Is Changing' that helps them talk about their feelings and wishes. It also includes short stories from other children who have gone through and come out the other side of family breakup. This lets them know that they are not alone.



## **Coping Strategies**

To support children during a separation and help them with their worries, you should:

- remind them that they're loved by both parents
- be honest when talking about it but keep in mind the child's age and understanding
- avoid blame and don't share any negative feelings the adults have about each other
- keep up routines such as going to school and specific meal times
- let them know they can talk about their feelings with you – explain that it's okay to be sad, confused or angry
- listen more than you speak – answering questions will help them to open up.

## **A Wish List From Children Affected By Divorce/Separation**

The following wish list was created by the most common responses when children were asked what was most important to help them during and after their parent's separation.

-Children usually want both parents to remain involved in their life.

This includes phone calls, visits, letters, and consistent, planned interactions. As soon as one parent stops being involved, children can feel unloved and unwanted. However, children do not want to be used as spies or feel bombarded with questions/interrogated by the absent parent fishing for information.

-Children don't want to hear their parents fighting.

Children are attentive, they hear fights carrying on in the next

room and it upsets them. Especially if the fight has anything to do with them, in which case they may feel responsible for the turmoil. It's not always easy for parents going

through a divorce to be civil and get along, but it's so important for the children that you do.

-Don't talk badly about the other parent or make children pick sides.

By bad mouthing your child's mum or dad you make them feel like they have to take sides and can't openly love both parents. Children should be able to enjoy hanging out with both parents without feeling like they have to take sides or act a certain way around one parent.

-Don't use your child as a middleman for communication.

Parents should be mature enough to talk to one another without relying on their child to deliver messages.



## **Useful Websites**

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/divorce.html?WT.ac=p-ra>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/parenting-family/children-and-divorce.htm>

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/divorce-and-separation/thinking-about-divorce/coping-with-divorce-or-separation/>

<https://www.todayparent.com/family/kids-and-divorce-an-age-by-age-guide/>

## **Suggested Reading for parents**

Talking to Children About Divorce: A Parents Guide to Healthy Communication at Each Stage of Divorce – Jean McBride

The Guide for Separated Parents – Putting Children First –

Karen Woodall The Incredible Years – Carolyn Webster-

Stratton



## **Books to share with your child**

Two homes – Claire Masurel (for younger

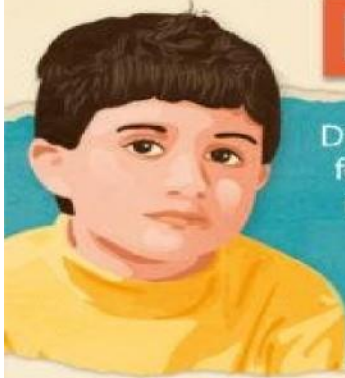
children) My Family Is Changing – Tracy

McConaghie

The Invisible String – Patrice Karst

Divorce is not The End of the World – Zoe Stern (older children)

# TIPS TO HELP YOUR Child Cope with DIVORCE



Divorce can be heart wrenching for everyone involved, but the impact upon children can be much greater if the proper steps aren't taken to help them through this difficult time.



## Here are Steps You can Take to Support Your Child Through a Divorce

