

When Parents Separate or Divorce

Helping Your Child Cope

Family Service Canada - <http://www.familyservicecanada.org/>

Separation/divorce is a time of change and adjustment for both parents and children. Your child may respond in ways that you hadn't expected or that may appear to be unrelated to the family change. The following are some general guidelines that may be useful to you in helping your child cope with separation / divorce. Note that all items indicated may not necessarily apply to your child or family situation.

1. Be aware of all the changes in your child's life over which he/she has no control. Try to understand your child's feelings from his/her perspective. Be sensitive to your child's feelings.
2. Take time to adjust to the new family unit. Understand that this is a new experience for everyone.
3. Accept sadness and feelings of missing the other parent. Allow your child to express his/her feelings without feeling guilty or ashamed.
4. It is normal for children to go through a grieving process after their parents separate or divorce. Be patient and answer your child's questions honestly and carefully.
5. Assure your child that he/she is not responsible for the separation.
6. Assure your child that he/she is not alone; that other children have parents that are not living together too. Talking to your child, reading storybooks and watching videos of other children experiencing similar situations may help your child accept that he/she is not different.
7. Remain consistent in guiding your child's behaviour and following through with expectations and consequences. This may be a difficult time for your child; as a result he/she may challenge the limits.
8. Plan time for just being together and enjoying the company of your child. Nurture each other with closeness and sharing of a special food, book, activity or outing.
9. Reassure your child of your permanence in his/her life. Your child may fear that you too will move to another home.