

Helping your children through separation

TIP SHEET



Separation isn't easy for anyone. At such an emotionally-challenging and painful time, it's a big ask to put someone else's needs in front of your own. But as a parent during this difficult period, it's important to focus on your love for your children and their needs.

While it's inevitable that children experience loss after their parents separate, they will handle separation better when they are not involved in the conflict between their parents.

Children can sometimes blame themselves for their parents' separation, so they need to be reassured that it isn't their fault. It's also important to let children know that their parents will not stop loving them because they are separated.

Children will often show their pain through their behaviour.

Without the words to discuss their feelings, younger children may become needy, experience sleep disturbances or throw tantrums.

Teenagers may act out by running away or becoming withdrawn. They may take on risky and dangerous behaviour, such as misusing drugs and alcohol. It's important to see these behaviours as a sign of distress.

What to do

- Remember you and your former partner's shared dreams for your children and hold these in mind as you negotiate tough times.
- Find an outlet for the hurt and grief you are experiencing. Make sure that you look after your own emotional needs. Talk with friends, seek a support group or find a counsellor.
- Try to establish a healthy parenting relationship with your former partner, unless there is a risk of family violence and it isn't safe to do so. You will be connected forever by your children and there will be occasions in the future where you may be present at events together.
- Remember that children also grieve. Talk with them about their feelings.

- Establish a consistent daily routine for your children, to give them a sense of normality.
- Keep your children informed about things that affect them. Prepare them for changes, such as moving house, and let them know when they will be seeing their other parent.
- Seek family dispute resolution if you and your former partner are experiencing difficulties with financial agreements, parenting arrangements or property.

What not to do

- Don't fight in front of your children.
- Don't encourage your children to take sides.
- Don't speak badly about your former partner. Your children love both of you and are loyal to both of you.
- Don't grill your children for information when they return from visiting their other parent.
- Don't punish your former partner by threatening to or making it difficult for them to see their child.
- Don't ask your child to be the messenger between you and your former partner.

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More information

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) provides a range of services to support young people, parents and families who are experiencing separation. We offer relationship and post-separation parenting courses, individual, relationship and family counselling, family violence services and family dispute resolution (FDR).

FDR, also known as mediation, is designed to help couples who are separating to resolve their family law disputes. Disputes may include conflicts over child care, child support, financial arrangements and property settlement.

We also provide child-inclusive and enhanced child-focused FDR which recognises the importance of focusing on the needs of children during and after separation, and the value of consulting them during FDR.

Visit www.rav.org.au/FDR to learn more about the FDR process.

About RAV

RAV is a valued provider of specialist family and relationship services. A community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Our vision is for positive, safe and respectful relationships for couples, families, schools, workplaces and communities.

Visit www.rav.org.au or call 1300 364 277 for more information on our programs, locations and how to access our services.



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