

# 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Teenagers may act out by running away or becoming withdrawn.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 the shared dreams that you and your former partner had 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 co-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.
- If you and your former partner are experiencing difficulties with parenting, property and financial agreements, family dispute resolution can help.

## 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 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 or making it difficult for them to see their children.
- Don't ask your children to be the messengers between you and your former partner.

*Relationships Australia*  
VICTORIA

## Seeking support

### Family violence

If you're affected by, or at risk of family violence, you are not alone. **If you feel unsafe right now, call emergency services on 000 (triple zero).**

For free, 24/7 crisis support, call:

- **1800RESPECT** on 1800 737 732
- **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre** (Victoria) on 1800 015 188.

### Family dispute resolution (FDR)

We provide FDR, also known as mediation, to help separating couples and families to resolve family law disputes related to parenting, and property and financial matters.

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

Visit [www.rav.org.au/family-dispute-resolution](http://www.rav.org.au/family-dispute-resolution) to find out how we can help.

### Co-parenting after separation

Our Parenting After Separation Seminar program provides parents with key information and strategies to assist children to successfully adjust to separation and/or associated conflict.

Visit [www.rav.org.au/separation-courses/pass](http://www.rav.org.au/separation-courses/pass) to find out more and register online.

### Other resources

**Family Relationships Online** is an Australian Government website providing information for all families – whether together or separated – about family relationship issues.

Visit [www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au) or call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321.

## About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.