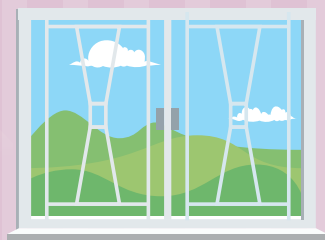


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Parenthood goes on

Handbook for
Separated/
Divorced
Parents





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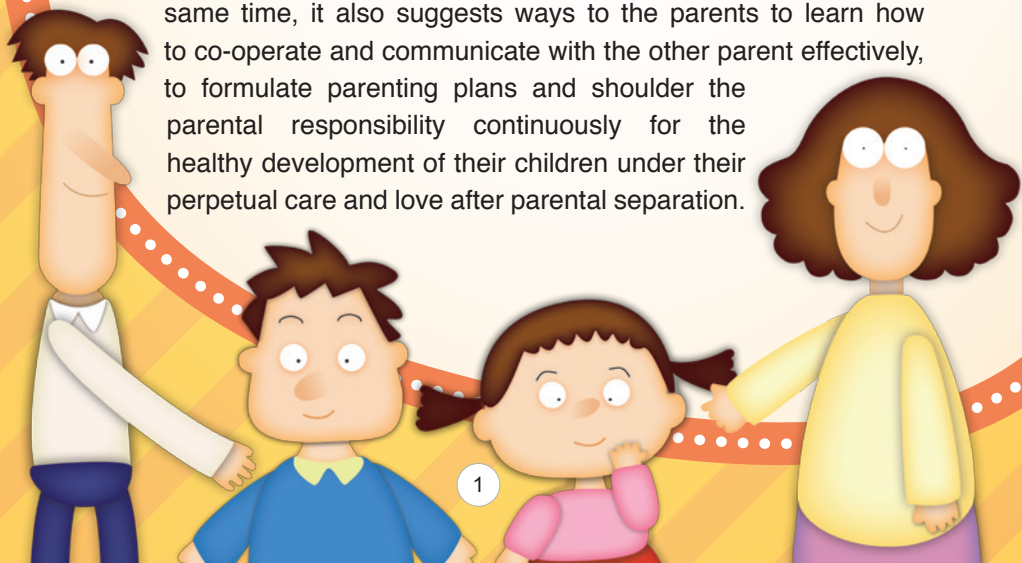
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(1) Introduction

'Divorce', 'Separation', these are tough decisions made by the parents and often lead to significant changes in one's life. Whilst the parents are adjusting themselves to their new lives, their children will also have different emotion and behavioural reaction as a response to this change. Although you may be eager to move on and cut off any connections with one another, in the best interests of the children, both parents should work together and share responsibilities to contribute to the development of the children. They should work out the caring arrangement that is good to the children and manage their and the children's emotion. The efforts from both parents will cushion the negative impacts of this separation and also provide the children a stable environment to grow. In the hearts of the children, you will always be their parent forever, and your care and love would be a precious gift for the children.

In order to facilitate the separated/divorced parents to adjust to their new lives and to have a better understanding of the importance of parental responsibilities in raising their children, this Department has produced this handbook for parents' reference. The handbook focuses on the effects of separation/divorce on the parents and children so that the parents could understand and care about the children's needs and try their best to facilitate their children to overcome the psychological changes arising from the parents' separation/divorce. At the same time, it also suggests ways to the parents to learn how to co-operate and communicate with the other parent effectively, to formulate parenting plans and shoulder the parental responsibility continuously for the healthy development of their children under their perpetual care and love after parental separation.



(2) Effects on the parents

When two people come together in marriage, none of them will wish to see the end. So when divorce becomes the only solution, it can have different levels of impact to different people. You may experience a roller coaster type of emotional ride, loneliness and lingering pain that don't go away in just a blink of an eye. This can bring unexpected changes in life and cause you to consistently adjust yourself to it. Overtime, it will lead to a tiring mind and body.

You may encounter different levels of grief and transformation, ranging from losing your relationships with your extended family and friends, a shift in parenting role and/or to a change in living or financial status. Understanding what this split can bring will strengthen your ability to accept and manage your own emotion. It also helps you realise your child might have experienced a painful process like their parents.



Confronting your emotions

Separation/divorce may bring you a chain of emotions:

Exhaustion

Separation/divorce arrangements can be very stressful leading to fluctuation in emotion.

Sorrow/ Anger

Failure in the marriage may bring you down, or even bring resentment towards each other.

Worry

The uncertainty for the future, and the impacts it will have on your children.

Guilt

Guilt towards your children and ex-partner.

Majority of people are aware of their unstable and overly sensitive emotions, and these feelings may strike anytime. Although we can't control how we feel, we have the ability to choose how to react to it. Keep in mind that how you manage your own emotions and how you treat your ex-partner will have direct impact on how your children adjust to this separation/divorce.

Inappropriate behavior

For the one living with the children

Treating the children as listeners, sharing and projecting negative feelings to your children.

When children become the center of everything, it can increase the chance of conflict in parenting.

Leverage them and use them as middle person to check up on the ex-partner or pursue claims. This will catch the children in the middle and destroy the trust between your children and the other parent.

Complaining about your ex-partner in front of the children leading to their resistance towards the other parent. Push the children to describe the process of their contact with your ex-partner and feel discontent when seeing the close bonding between the two during the ex-partner's contact with them because of the lack of confidence in your children. And even displaying the anger towards the ex-partner onto the children.



For the one not living with the children

Due to the worry that the relationship with the children will become distant, overly spoil your children in an effort to make up for the lack of bonding time.

Feel stressful and uneasy when the children react negatively during your contact with them and blame the other parent. Or because of conflicts between the two adults, eventually give up on visiting your children.

Afraid that the children are being brainwashed by the ex-partner and hence do not accept oneself.

Feel being unfairly treated, accusing the children for siding with the ex-partner and distant from oneself.

Tell the other parent off in front of the children.

Get information about the ex-partner through the children.

Feel sorry for the children and hence rely on materials to show your love and care or excessively accommodate the requests of the children.

Whether you live with your children or not, how you cope with your own emotions, and how you interact with them during this separation/divorce can lead to different levels of stress and unsettling feelings. In order to maintain a stable relationship and facilitate steady growth of your children, you must manage these feelings and seek a bright way out.

Treat yourself well

Managing your emotions

Regardless of the reason behind this separation/divorce, both parents are going through a very tough period of time. In order to walk out from the shadow of the ex-partner, and minimise the effects on your children, it is crucial to self-heal and manage grief in the correct way. The emotions of separated/divorced parents will directly affect how they proceed forward with their new roles; your children are very sensitive in how you interact with your ex-partner. Remember, the emotional impact between the parents and children goes both ways, therefore you should manage yours well and learn to let go.

Break ups can lead to a variety of negative feelings, keeping these feelings unchecked will cause more problems and bring harm to your children when you display anger onto them.



Negative emotions

Resentment

Feeling resentful when you see or hear about the ex-partner.

TIPS

Resolving resentment

Try releasing the energy through cardio exercises. You can also explore doing relaxing activities such as listening to music or meditating to sooth yourself. Constantly remind yourself to let go, block off any news about the ex-partner can also expedite the process.

TIPS

Accept the truth proactively

We often automatically turn into denial when facing undesirable situations. We need to accept the truth, cut ourselves loose from the past relationship and establish a new identity. For example, join activities that interest you and create opportunities to meet new friends; set a plan for change and stick to it.

Negative emotions

Denial

Reluctant to let other people know about the divorce, or purposely avoid going to the social events that you used to go as a couple.

Negative emotions

Depression

Break up can bring a chain of gloomy feelings, which can lead to depression, taking away our interest in everything and stopping us from doing things that we like. This cycle can go on and on, lasting for a few hours or days or worse. Without proper treatment, it will affect your daily routine, work and social life.

TIPS

Live healthy

First and foremost, we must bring ourselves back to a regular routine life. You may choose to join community activities that you like, participate in social events, interact with the others and stay away from negative thoughts. Increasing the amount of exercise can also rejuvenate our bodies and refresh our minds.



If you struggle to cope with your feelings arising from separation/divorce, you can talk to someone that you trust, or seek help from professional social workers and counsellors. The last thing you want is to take it out towards your ex-partner or children.

Acceptance and adjustment

In order to start a new chapter in life and lessen the fallout on the children, you have to accept the fact and try to establish a new partnership with your ex-partner in this separation/divorce. During the transformation, you will encounter changes in relationships and finances. For example, you will notice changes in the dynamics between you and your extended friends or family; there will also be changes in your financial status, which may require you to develop a new system to manage your finance. After acceptance and adjustment, you can slowly try and develop a new role and working relationship with the ex-partner, give a new definition to your life and re-evaluate your goals. Sometimes, your ex-partner might not be able to perform the father or mother role and share the responsibilities with you, but in the interests of your children, you need to step up and handle the situation with positivity and grace as under this family situation your children will particularly require your love and care.

Tips to treat yourself well

Tips

Hold on to the positivity. If you are afraid of the unknown, try shifting the energy to things that are within your control. If you feel lonely and helpless, try distracting yourself with interesting activities or join some support groups for single parent.

Let go of the negativity; calmly and peacefully resolve conflicts with the ex-partner.

Grant yourself the luxury time to do things that you like.

If you have difficulty concentrating at work, speak to your supervisor or colleagues about your situation, and try to look for a solution that both sides can benefit from. May it be applying for leaves or reshuffling working hours for you to get more rest. Set a deadline to this arrangement. Understand your limit and also let the persons surround you know your situation.

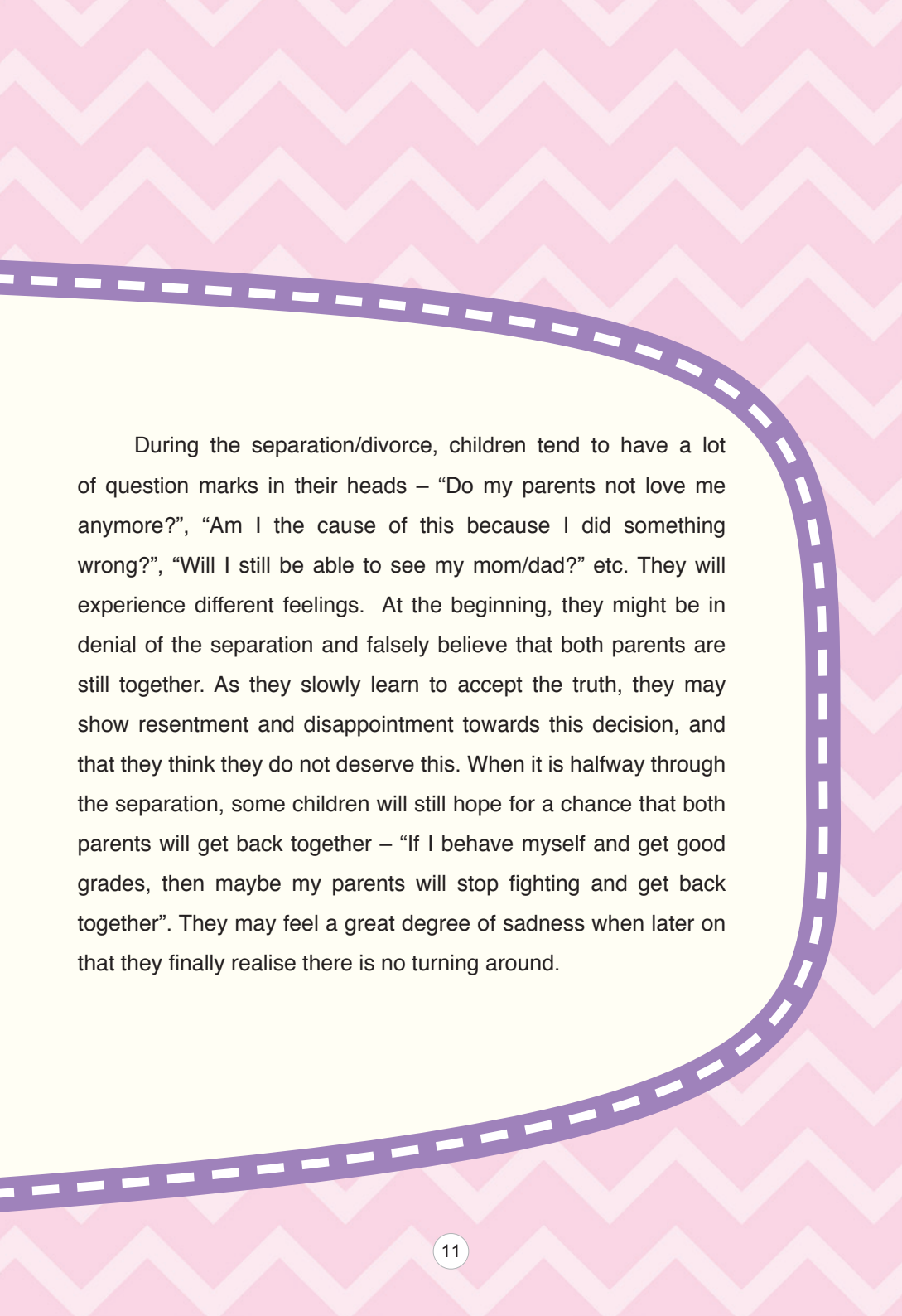
Before proceeding with any major changes, first identify the potential obstacles and only focus on the ones that are within your control. Let go of things that are inevitable. Set a goal and get to it step by step

If you still find yourself deeply affected and drenched by the separation/divorce, please seek help from professional social workers and counsellors.

(3) My children

Separation/divorce can lead to dramatic changes to both the adults' and the children's lives. When parents separate/divorce, the children are also being affected by this decision. Therefore, separated/divorced parents not only have to manage their own conflicting feelings, they also need to attend to the children's needs and demands.





During the separation/divorce, children tend to have a lot of question marks in their heads – “Do my parents not love me anymore?”, “Am I the cause of this because I did something wrong?”, “Will I still be able to see my mom/dad?” etc. They will experience different feelings. At the beginning, they might be in denial of the separation and falsely believe that both parents are still together. As they slowly learn to accept the truth, they may show resentment and disappointment towards this decision, and that they think they do not deserve this. When it is halfway through the separation, some children will still hope for a chance that both parents will get back together – “If I behave myself and get good grades, then maybe my parents will stop fighting and get back together”. They may feel a great degree of sadness when later on that they finally realise there is no turning around.

Reaction towards parents' separation/divorce in different ages:

0 - 3 years old

Emotions and characteristics

- They do not understand the split but are sensitive to the intense atmosphere. They may act anxiously and cry.
- They rely heavily on the parents and are afraid of the split. They will miss the parents after the separation.
- They can easily get angry, worry and possibly with behavioural regression as it is a channel to let out their anxiety.
- They are consistently testing people's boundaries through disobedience.

What they need

- Physical intimacy from the parents (e.g. hugging or feeding), and a stable living environment to grow.
- A regular schedule to be with each parent and spend quality time together.
- Clear and consistent parenting style from both parents to establish a sense of security.
- Do not expose your children to any argument or disagreement between you and your ex-partner.
- Tell them you still love them.

4 - 8 years old

Emotions and characteristics

- They feel sad about the separation and consistently think of the other parent.
- They may think they are the cause of the separation and feel guilty for it. They fantasise seeing the parents getting back together.
- They have dilemma of which side they should be on and feel caught in between.
- Blame one of the parents for this separation and let out their anger towards him/her.
- Overly sensitive about the conflict or emotional change between both parents.

What they need

- Explain to them the reason behind this separation, give them support and comfort.
- Assure them of your love verbally and physically. Comfort their emotion.
- Maintain a stable and regular life routine; give them notice before making any changes so they are mentally prepared for it.
- Avoid involving them in conflicts between you and your ex-partner.
- Allow them to have affection towards the other parent and spend time together regularly.

9 - 12 years old

Emotions and characteristics

- They have a very basic understanding of the situation and how the parents feel.
- They make moral judgment on parents' behaviour and judge that one is "good" and the other is "bad".
- They may experience different unsettling feelings, such as anger, despair, helplessness and loneliness.
- Their self-esteems are lowered because of the unfavourable image of the parents.
- Their grades on studies may drop.

What they need

- They need healthy relationships with not just one, but both parents.
- Avoid arguing in front of them or criticising the other parent. Respect your ex-partner as your children's mother/father.
- They need a stable and regular schedule to spend time with each of the parent.
- Listen to how they feel and try to understand their frustrations.

13 - 18 years old

Emotions and characteristics

- They think the conflict between the two parents is childish. They are ashamed and annoyed by it.
- They understand the reason behind the break up and feel frustrated for not being able to help their parents.
- They feel burdened because of having to share the responsibility of taking care of younger siblings and comforting the parents.
- They struggle to pick sides, and once they do, they will distance themselves from the other parent.
- Instead of spending time on their studies, they focus on creating problems as an attempt to grab attentions from parents.
- They are tired of being the emotional support for the parent and feel neglected. They therefore act rebelliously and may even run away from home.

What they need

- Opportunities and healthy channels to express their feelings and thoughts.
- Do not rely on the children for emotional support or depend on the elder one to take care of the younger siblings.
- Do not give them the pressure of having to stand by one's side.
- For the parent who doesn't live with the children, try to understand your children's views and be flexible when scheduling the bonding time.

How to assist children to adapt to the separated lives:



Explain the situation to them in their comprehensible language; ensure them that this is a decision made by the two adults, and that there is nothing for them to feel liable for.

Assure them of your love and care through action. They are very vulnerable during this period of time, and they need your love and support – it could simply be by telling them you love them verbally over and over again.

Be sensible and listen to their conflicting emotions caused by this separation/divorce; provide them a healthy channel to express these feelings.

Tell them the specific living arrangement after divorce, such as their daily routine, caring and living arrangement, bonding schedule, schooling... etc. Listen to their views as far as possible so that they can be prepared psychologically and settle more easily.

Try to provide a stable environment for the children the best you can – attending the same school, keeping in touch with the existing group of friends, as well as keeping the same living and resting schedule. Do not rush into making any big change. Let them know beforehand so they can be mentally prepared, and gradually progress step by step.

As the parent that lives with the children, try and spend as much time as possible with them to build up a sense of security; as the parent that doesn't live with the children, try and visit them regularly, so they feel loved and protected. That way they can cope with the separation better.

Assist and encourage the older children to build good relationships between their siblings, classmates, teachers and neighbours, so they can gain more support in dealing with the parents' separation/divorce and rebuilding their esteem and confidence.



What will help the children most – things that parents can do

- ✓ Make sure your children understand they are not the faults to this separation.
- ✓ Try not to express inhospitality towards your ex-partner when your children are around.
- ✓ Stay silent if there is nothing positive to say about your ex-partner.
- ✓ Do not expose your children to the anger or conflicts with your ex-partner.
- ✓ Despite the disagreements between you and your ex-partner, try to align on the same direction in parenting, at least in front of the children.
- ✓ Cherish the time you get to spend with your children.
- ✓ Ensure them that there is nothing wrong with loving the other parent as well.
- ✓ Do not blame your ex-partner for your children's anxiety, fears and problems. Do not complain to either your children or ex-partner.
- ✓ Try your very best to help your children cope with the separation/divorce, and ensure them that there is no need to feel ashamed by the separation/divorce.
- ✓ Do not introduce your children to too many changes at once.
- ✓ Manage the chores systematically so that you can still manage the household properly without your ex-partner.
- ✓ Do not quiz your children on whom they love more or whom they want to live with more.
- ✓ Encourage your children to continue their daily routines and activities.
- ✓ Do not give them false hope or angrily deny them for wanting to see you and your ex-partner getting back together though it is their wish. Maintain your calmness.

You should seek professional help if you have the below problems:

★ Your children's depression lasts for a long period of time and hasn't shown any improvement.

★ You feel helpless on how to make the situation better for your children.

Q & A – how to answer your children's questions

The children will face a tough time adjusting after the parents have been separated. They are unsure about the cause for this split and will have a lot of questions in mind. Answer their questions honestly with positivity. This will help minimise their anxiety.

Is it my fault that my parents are divorced?

The reason why mom and dad are divorced is because they can no longer get along with each other. It was a decision made by the two of them, and that it is absolutely not your fault.

How can I help resolve the conflicts between my parents?

There is no need for you to try to resolve adult's problems, or take sides. If possible, try and leave the room where the conflict is taking place, distract yourself by doing something else such as chatting with a friend over the phone, listening to music or watching a movie.



Can mom and dad get back together?



The decision to separate/divorce is an outcome of rounds of thinking and considerations. It is most likely that they will not get back together.



Why do I feel sad and unsettled?

When facing such a big change in the family, you might experience anger and sorrow towards your parents' divorce, and you will have doubts about your future. It is natural to feel this way.



Should I inform my friends or classmates about the parents' divorce?



Although mom and dad no longer live together, you can still meet and spend time with both of them. If you have any needs or thoughts about this arrangement, feel free to talk to mom/dad about it.



What should I do when I feel sad and depressed?



Do not hide these feelings. Talk to someone you trust, it could be your teacher, school social worker or elder people that you trust.



Whom should I live with? Will I still be able to see mom/dad?

There is nothing for you to feel ashamed for and there is no need to hide it from your friends or classmates. Perhaps some of them have experienced that as well. If they make fun of you or pick on you, don't take it too personally and let it go. If you need support or help, you can always turn to your parents, teacher, counsellor or school social worker.



(4) Communication between separated/divorced parents

It will be of great benefits to the children if both separated/divorced parents can respect and cooperate with each other even after the separation/divorce. If the relationship between the parents is broken and filled with hatreds, the negativity will be directly reflected on the way they treat each other.



Conflicts and contradictions

Although you and your ex-partner are no longer married couple, at some points you will still need to talk to each other about your children. Sadly however, the unfortunate and sour past often gets in the way of this, leading to the following conflicts and struggles:

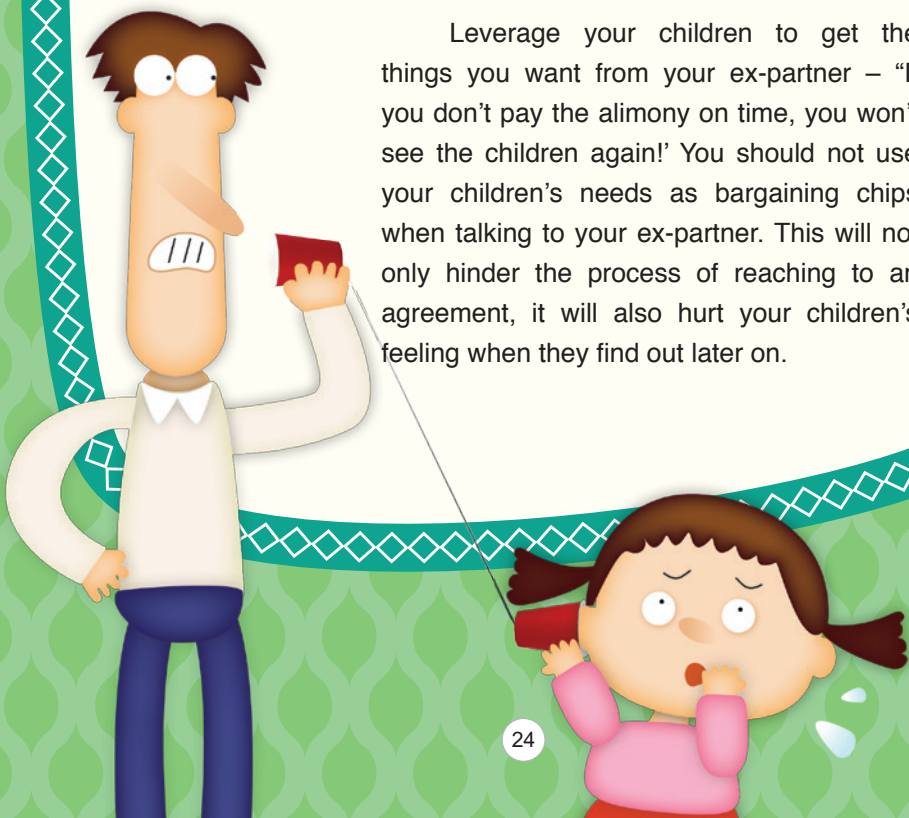
- 1) Both parents hold different priorities / disciplines – e.g. one focuses more on the grades and tutoring schedules; whereas the other leans more towards developing children's hobbies.
- 2) Disagreement on executing caring agreement or visiting arrangements – e.g. the parent living with the children asks the other parent to stop visitation during the children's exams but he/she refuses.
- 3) Dissatisfaction on your ex-partner's behavior or attitude – e.g. dislikes the loose parenting discipline from your ex-partner.
- 4) Discrepancies in parenting– mom/dad is against video games but the other parent, as per the requests of the children, buys it for them anyway.

Things that will harm your children

Whether it is intentional or not, separated/divorced parents often drag children into the battlefield. For example, expecting the children to take sides. If they get the sense that the children are closer to the other parent, they will blame them for not being loyal, criticize them, or even push them further away. Most separated/divorced parents don't wish or foresee things like this to happen, but when they do, they will hurt the children in many ways.

Threat

Leverage your children to get the things you want from your ex-partner – “If you don't pay the alimony on time, you won't see the children again!” You should not use your children's needs as bargaining chips when talking to your ex-partner. This will not only hinder the process of reaching to an agreement, it will also hurt your children's feeling when they find out later on.



Spying

Attempt to obtain updates on your ex-partner through your children – “Whom did your dad watch movie with this weekend?”, “Whom is your mom having dinner with tonight?” Your children do not want to be used, or lose the trust from either of the parents. The last thing they do not want is to trigger your anger by bringing you the news they have obtained.

Messenger

Pass messages to the other parent through your children – “Ask your dad to pay for your textbooks fee!” Being a messenger can cause your children a lot of stress and pain, and therefore both parents should avoid exposing them to the above by directly talking with each other.



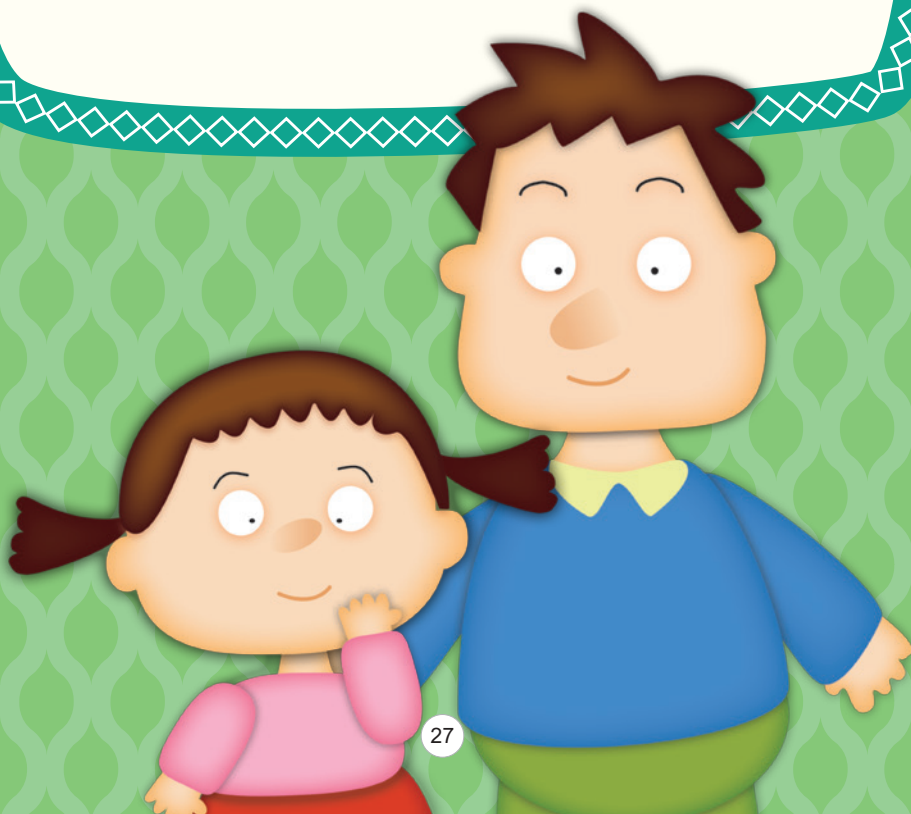
Criticise each other

“Don’t be a coward like your dad”, “Don’t be irresponsible like your mom”. Separated/divorced parents might bad-mouth the other parents in front of the children as a channel to let out their frustrations, or to destroy the relationship between the children and the other parent. They want to prove how bad the other parent is so they can win over children’s trust and love or they strongly believe in his/her bad characters and want to let the children know the truth. However, most children believe they belong equally to both parents, so they will take it personally when they hear criticisms of either of their parents. These verbal attacks will hurt their feelings and lower their self-esteem.

If separated/divorced parents can’t stay away from the past heated conflicting communicating mode, stay on their emotion and own wants, and continue to fight for power and control, all the fightings and bad-mouths will leave marks in children’s hearts, causing them agony.

Resolving conflicts and solving problems

Your children should never have to sacrifice their happiness to this separation. It is crucial for separated/divorced parents to let go of the past and focus on the present and their children. If there is no safety concern, they have to learn to relate with the other parent, so that the children can feel loved by both parents.



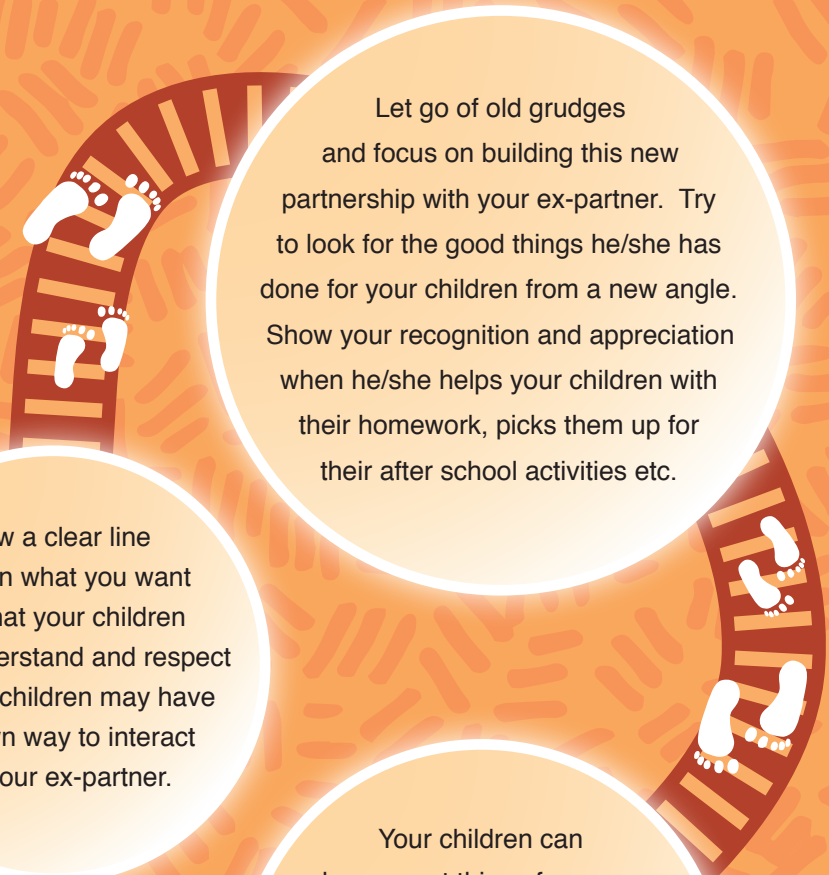
Resolving Conflicts

Tips

There is no need to bring up the past. Avoid any unfriendly languages. Respect your ex-partner and their personal space. Do not interfere with their private lives.

Embrace the new partnership with your ex-partner as the parents of your children, and build this partnership with the mutual love and care you both have for your children.

Acknowledge that your relationship has ended, but you and your ex-partner are still the parents of your children.



Let go of old grudges and focus on building this new partnership with your ex-partner. Try to look for the good things he/she has done for your children from a new angle. Show your recognition and appreciation when he/she helps your children with their homework, picks them up for their after school activities etc.

Draw a clear line between what you want and what your children need. Understand and respect that your children may have their own way to interact with your ex-partner.

Your children can learn great things from you through how well you manage the conflicts between you and your ex-partner. This can also boost up their trust and confidence on you to take good care of them and move on.



- Wisely choose where and when to discuss about your children with your ex-partner. Make sure both sides are up-to-date with children's studies, behaviours, and emotions etc.
- Agree on one main channel to communicate with each other, may it be via email, phone SMS, instant mobile messaging applications, etc. Set some boundaries on communication format, time, frequency and avoid using words that are too subjective or emotional.
- The conversation between you and your ex-partner should evolve around your children, and problem solving based.
- Try to communicate in the role of "partners running a business of the children's well-being", i.e. to establish a "business partner" type of communication or working relationship among colleagues with your ex-partner can make things smoother.
- Start with simple and concrete issues, allow you and your ex-partner some time to get used to this new way to communicate before making long-term or major decisions for the children.



Effective communication



● Always discuss with the other parent for their opinion when making big decisions for your children. May it be about schooling, important medical arrangement, or plan leaving Hong Kong etc.

● Patiently listen to your ex-partner, ask for clarification when needed.

● Respect or try to understand the decisions your ex-partner makes for your children.

● Avoid arguing on minor issues. Respect each other and show your will to compromise when there is difference in opinion.

● Avoid by all means quarrelling in front of your children, putting them in a tough situation.

Have you ever felt this way before?

(Dad was supposed to pick up the children but he is 30 minutes late)

You are late again! You have no respect for people around you at all. If you don't want to see the kids, so be it!

The traffic was really bad, you didn't have to be mean about it. If it isn't for the kids, I won't even bother coming over or talking to you.

I don't want to see you either! I don't care if they lose a father like you. You can't care less about the kids anyway, so stop pretending...



You can try this

(Dad leaves a message on mom's mobile telling her he will be 30 minutes late due to traffic jam)

Sorry, I am late. Good that you got my message.

I hadn't left the door yet when I got your message, so we could stay at home for a bit longer before coming over. No worries, have fun!

Same as before, come pick the son up at 5pm.

How about 5:30 p.m.? Just so you don't need to rush?

Good idea. 5:30 p.m. it is!

When discussing or making decision about the children, separated/divorced parents should communicate and show understanding towards each other.

(5) Co-parenting

What is co-parenting

Instead of sliding all the responsibilities to just one single parent, co-parenting means both parents are committed to working together in raising their children. This will allow children to have close relationships with both sides of the parents.

Married parents are obligated to raise and look after the children together, through all the good and bad. When the marriage ends, both parents should still work together, share the parental responsibilities and make plans for the future growth of their children. Both parents should ensure the children can still receive the love and care they are entitled for even after the divorce.



What is the purpose of co-parenting

Children will experience different kinds of unsettling feelings when their parents separate. Some of them might be too young to comprehend or acknowledge adult's problems, naively believe that as long as they stop fighting, or if mom stops asking dad for money, the problems will go away. In some cases, they tend to blame the parent who initiates the separation.

As a parent, you should understand your children's fear and anxiety of leaving either one of the parents. The thought of losing parent's attention and love makes them feel insecure, which will make it harder for them to trust other people in the future.


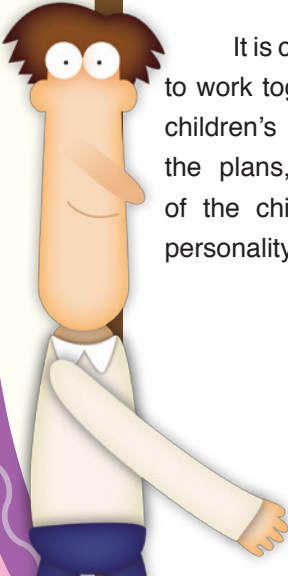
If both parents can peacefully resolve and overcome their disputes, cooperate and take on their shares of parenting duties, ensure the children receive love and care from both parents, the children won't feel being abandoned. This can set a good role model for the children and lessen the negative impact on your children's emotions, studies, as well as behaviors. This can also assist them to adjust to the changes of the family and help them to develop a positive self-image.

Allow your children to grow under both parents' love and care

Divorce is an end to a marriage, but that doesn't change the role of you as the parent of your children. No matter with whom your children are living, they should never have to lose the connection and love of the other parent; and it is your job to help sustain and nurture your relationship with your children. A divorced family does not mean the family is broken. Parents are blessed and are obligated to take care of their children, and this doesn't end with the marriage.



Sharing parental responsibility agreement



It is crucial for separated/divorced parents to work together hand in hand to work out the children's caring arrangement. When making the plans, they should consider the needs of the children according to their age, personality, and developmental stage.

Children's needs include:

The right to know the truth and any up-coming plans -

explain the situation and future arrangements in a way that they can understand.

Stable life routine -


such as maintaining relationship with family and friends, living environment, social network, as well as any social activities.

Communication -

encourage them to stay in contact with people they care via phone calls, emails, or even meet up with them face to face.

Parents' active listening and acceptance -

listen to and accept your children's thoughts before making any major decisions.



Parental responsibility agreement outlines the responsibilities of both parents in raising their children and the share of the bonding time with their children. The focus should be on what is in the best interests of the children. In majority of cases, allowing the children to have close, stable and continuous relationships with both parents is in their best interests. The definition of “children’s best interests” will vary in different households, for example, both parents taking up the equal amount of bonding time might seem ideal for some families, but not to the others.

There are a lot of things to look out for when making care arrangement plans for your children, and it might be overwhelming at first. For that reason, we have created a chart below on co-parenting with all the essential items listed on the left, which will help separated/divorced parents divide and conquer, making this process smoother and more comprehensive.





1) Arrangements on schooling, living and daily caring arrangement

Remarks

Living arrangement

Caring arrangement on school days

Caring arrangement on holidays (non-school days)

Caring arrangement during long holidays
(e.g. Christmas, Chinese New Year, Easter and summer vacation, etc.)

Caring arrangement for special occasions
(e.g. birthday, Chinese New Year Eve dinner, etc.)

Medical appointment and treatment

Caring arrangement in case of emergency
(e.g. parents/children are being hospitalised)

2) Child contact arrangement

Remarks (frequency, time, form, how and where to pick up etc.)

Contact arrangement with the non-residing parent on a school day

Contact arrangement with the non-residing parent on a non-school day

Other ways to connect with the non-residing parent besides visitation

Contact arrangement with both parents' relatives

Others (e.g. contact arrangement if anyone is late/sick, when unexpected issue pops up or relief arrangement)



3) Children's expenses

Remarks (amount, who, how
and when to pay etc.)

Daily expenses (e.g. meals, clothing,
transportation, pocket money, etc.)

Educational related expenses (e.g.
school fee, school textbook fee,
tutoring fee)

Medical/Dental cost

Insurance fee

Extracurricular activities, vacations,
and other expenses

4) Academics arrangement

Remarks

School contacts (by mother or father)

Daily supervision

Study plan

Tutoring class

Extracurricular activities



5) Parenting arrangement

Remarks

Parenting discipline

Reward and punishment

Religion

6) Parent's communication

Remarks (types of messages, communication frequency etc.)

Sharing information (e.g. notice from school, academic report, photo, medical report, etc.)

Communication medium and arrangement (e.g. face-to-face, phone call, email, text message, etc.)

7) Others (feel free to add other items when you see fit)

Remarks

Application for children tax deduction

Out-of-town vacation arrangement

Solution when not being able to fulfill the agreement occasionally

Other arrangement if there is the need to amend the agreement.





Co-parenting

Tips



★ The biggest obstacle in co-parenting is your emotions. Shifting the focus on your children can help you let go of the negativity.

★ Instead of figuring out ways to win the fight or argument, your priorities should be around what's best for the children.

★ Avoid having heated conversation or conflicts in front of your children (such as during child contact or exchange). If needed, schedule another time and someplace else for settling controversial issues.

★ When discussing about your children with your ex-partner, try to let go of old grudges and not to bring up what he/she has done wrong in the past. Criticism, mocking, and threat are also unhealthy for the relationship.



★ Focus on the present and the future, stay in the reality and aim for efficiency. Try and build a co-worker type of relationship with your ex-partner.

★ Listen to your children's thoughts. Do not force your children to pick side between you and your ex-partner.

★ You and your ex-partner will most likely have different parenting disciplines, but you both should always try and do things in a consistent way. If compromising seems impossible, embrace the difference and make sure your children are clear of the rules in different homes.



★ Consider scheduling regular meetings (could be once a month) with your ex-partner to discuss about your children's life and their school performance.

★ Align on a way of communication that can work for both you and your ex-partner when discussing about your children, may it be face-to-face, via phone, text, or email.

★ Both parents should communicate with each other on a frequent basis, and update one another of any new contacting method.

★ Both parents should get together every now and then to evaluate this co-parenting arrangement, make new plans or adjustments according to the development of your children.



★ Inform each other of any change of status (could be financially or about marital status) in order to keep both sides up to date and discuss way out.

★ If agreements are impossible to be reached, please seek help from third parties such as your trusted relatives, social worker, or mediator etc.

(6) How to maintain your relationship with children who don't live with you

If your children do not live with you, it is natural for you to worry about the potential distanced relationship, which leads to kinds of negative thoughts. For example, you may think they are better off without you, or reduce meeting your children because of your reluctance to see your ex-partner, or because of children's indifferent attitude towards you. Please remember, children need parents' continued support, love, and nurturing. Your children might be scared from the shattered relationship or intense fights you had with your ex-partner, therefore you will need to spend extra time and effort to rebuild their security and trust. If children are able to receive love and maintain stable relationships with both parents, they are more likely to have better self-esteem and healthy development.

Perhaps you have been too busy in the past or for other reason neglected your children. You can build a close relationship with your children by spending time with them one-on-one, and in many different ways.



Learn more about your children

Try to familiarise yourself with your children's daily routines, for example their after school activities, daily schedule and social activities etc. You will be able to have more topics to talk to your children about if you know the details of their daily lives. You can also keep notes of any special occasions such as birthdays, Father/Mother's days etc. Plan your schedule around it, think about what to do, what present to buy, and whom to invite etc.

Ways to stay in contact with your children

Child Contact Arrangement



Arrange bonding time in advance, plan the activities with your children so they can feel more involved and enjoy every moment of it.



Try collecting interesting news articles or small items into a box, or put together a scrapbook or album so you can share them with your children.



Try doing activities that both you and children can participate in, such as playing chess, drawing, exercising, or watching movie.

Phone call



If you don't get to see your children often, you can maintain the relationship with them through the phone. Keep each other up to date and ensure they can feel your love and care.



Call your children on a regular basis so they can look forward to having the call with you. Try and do it only when they are free, not when they are doing homework, having dinner, or on their way out for activities.



If you don't quite know what to talk to your children about, try and give it a think before picking up the phone. The more you talk to your children, the more you will get to know them and therefore will have more topics to talk to them about.



What have they done since the last call? Let them know you are interested in the things they do when they are not around you. Mark them down on a notebook or calendar. Share your childhood memories with them – this can encourage your children to share things with you as well. You don't have to know the correct answer to everything all the time, just listen to them and show that you are interested.

SMS text / email / mobile instant messaging



A very convenient way to reach them anytime, anywhere, letting them know what you are up to recently.

Maintain contact with school / organisation holding extra-curricular activities



- 💡 Contact your children's teacher to get a better understanding of how they are doing in school, that way your children will know that you care about them.

- 💡 Attend school events such as parents' day or other extracurricular activities.

Be a part of your children's lives



- 💡 Discuss with your ex-partner on ways to help or participate in your children's sports events or activities.
- 💡 Keep them company when heading to practice, performance, activity, or social gathering.

- 💡 Assist your children with their homework and exams preparation; help them gather the materials they need.

Let your children feel they have a second home

- 💡 Your children now have two homes, one with mom; another with dad. If you ever want to move, consider moving to an area that is close to them. If possible, provide your children a room to themselves, and help them decorate their own space.

- 💡 You should provide your children some private space if having their own room is not quite an option; for example, give them their own bed, desk, and cabinet. Decorate them with some family photos and small items that they like, it could be their favorite toys, books, or games.

- 💡 Set some basic rules for your children, it could be on their resting schedule, what tasks to be done, or general discipline, etc. (It would be ideal if you could discuss with the other parent beforehand, and come up with a plan that is tailored for your children).

There is no need to take your children to special places or buy them expensive toys in order to maintain the parent-child relationship if you don't live with them, what matters is the amount of time you spend with them. Doing ordinary things such as chores or going out for a walk is good enough for them to feel your presence in their lives. If you have more than one child, try and spend quality time with them individually, tell them stories, watch movie or TV with them, or tell them any interesting news you know.

Facing challenges

Accept short child contact arrangement. Younger children might not want to spend the night outside of home, but they will be willing to spend the day with you.

You may feel devastated if your children refuse to spend time with you. Please understand this could be a result of being stuck in the middle of two parents, and that they are fear of the potential conflicts between you two. Be patient and respect their views. Let them know they can reach you anytime they want, through phone, text, or email.

Understand teenagers may not want to be stuck at home as they want to spend time with their friends.

Understand your children might not like staying with your new partner or friend together at first, as things like this will take time.



