

親子情永在 Parenthood Goes On

It brings a huge change in life for anyone involving in a divorce or marital separation. While the broken-up couples have to adjust to the mode of living anew, their children may also have to face the adjustment problems arising from the separation of their parents. However, in the mind of the children, you and your ex-partner would be their "parents forever," the fact that can never be changed. If the parents can continue cooperating and actively participating in the upbringing matters of the children, this will lessen the adverse impact of parental divorce/separation, and thus facilitate the children's development. This is a precious gift for the children.

The possible reactions of the parents in face of divorce / separation

- Feel exhausted physically and mentally, encounter emotional disturbances easily, reluctant to communicate with the ex-partner.
- Feel frustrated upon marriage failure, harbor resentment against the other party or feel guilty.
- Worry about the impact of divorce/separation on the children.
- Worry about the living afterwards.
- Feel sorry for the children.
- Likely to project one's own hostility and anger to the ex-partner onto the children, or expect the children to side with one's own view about the ex-partner.

For the one living with the children

- Tend to take the children as the focus of life; more likely to develop conflict with the children because having to take care of and provide guidance to the children single-handedly.
- Tend to take the children as listeners of one's grievance for emotional comfort.
- Try to get information about the ex-partner through the children.
- Feel discontent or unhappy because the children appear happy during the ex-partner's access, and even display negative sentiment to the children.

For the one not living with the children

- Worry that the relationship with the children will become distant because of not living with them.
- Unable to face the uneasiness when visiting the children, thus giving up visiting them.
- Feel being unfairly treated, thinking that the children side with the ex-partner and distant from oneself.
- Afraid that the children are brainwashed by the ex-partner and hence do not accept oneself.
- Try to get information about the ex-partner through the children.



The possible reaction of children at different ages in face of parent's divorce / separation

1. Infants (age 0-3)

- Unable to understand the matter, but can feel the tension around and keep yelling all the time.
- The caring of the infant may be affected if the parent is emotionally unstable.

2. Toddlers (age 3-5)

- Feel confused, anxious and fear for the change in the family.
- Cannot accept parents' divorce/separation and think they will come together again.
- Feel guilty and self-reproaching regarding that parents' divorce/separation is due to the toddler's own fault.
- Show regressive and childish behavior, expressing anxiety and fear in their mind.

3. Junior primary (age 5-8)

- Exhibit sad emotion upon parents' separation.
- Miss the departed parent.
- Find loyalty to one of the parents conflicting, feeling being caught in between them.

4. Upper primary (age 9-12)

- Recognise comparatively more the cause of parents' conflict and separation.
- Make moral judgment on the parents' behavior and feel angry and ashamed.
- Lowered self-esteem.
- Declined academic performance.
- Exhibit behavioral problems.
- Develop loyalty conflict.

5. Adolescents (age 13-18)

- Feel burdened and have emotional disturbances because of having to share the responsibility of taking care of younger siblings and comforting the emotion of the parent with whom the adolescents is living together.
- Feel ashamed of or disgusted with the conflict of the parents as they regard their behavior as childish.
- Develop loyalty conflict.
- Feel being neglected or otherwise fed up and exhibit rebellious behavior such as running away from home.



What is “Shared Parenting”?

“Shared Parenting” refers to the continued communication and cooperation between the separated parents to maintain “partnership” in parenting the children in order to facilitate their development.

Practical tips:

Examine and manage the negative emotion induced by the divorce / separation

- Put aside the negative sentiment such as anger, be calm in handling disputes with the ex-partner.
- Do not criticize the ex-partner in front of the children.
- Do not put your children in the middle of the parents' disputes, such as prying into the ex-partner's private affairs through the children, or passing on messages to the ex-partner through your children.
- If you find yourself still disturbed by the divorce/separation or feel uncomfortable in contacting your ex-partner, you may seek help from professionals such as social workers.

Communicate with the ex-partner

- Set aside a time to discuss about the children's matters, keep both sides informed of the children's development, such as the children's study, behavior and emotion.
- Select an appropriate communication channel such as email, phone SMS, instant mobile messaging applications, etc.
- Try to communicate in the role of “partners running a business of the children's well-being”, i.e. to establish a mode of communication and collaboration similar to that of “business partners”.
- Focus of the topic of discussion should be the children, with an aim of resolving difficulties.
- Start with simple and concrete matters, discuss long term and crucial matters only after both sides have got used to the mode of communication.
- Seek the ex-partner's view regarding important decisions concerning the children (e.g. school selection, further study, important medical arrangement, or travelling abroad).
- Learn to listen with patience, clarifying what the other really wants to say.
- Respect or try to understand the ex-partner's decision regarding the children.
- Take the attitude of mutual respect and compromising when there is difference in opinion.
- Avoid arguing on minor issues.
- Avoid by all means quarreling in front of the children, putting the children in difficult situations.



Work out a shared parenting agreement jointly with your ex-partner and carry out accordingly

1. Set up the caring and daily life schedule of the children

- Decide on the children's daily life and caring arrangement including time-table for daily routine, tutoring, and extra-curricular activities.
- Align as much as possible with the ex-partner the parenting style and the daily life schedule; at the same time respect the difference in style of living between the two parties, and help the children adjust to the different life styles.

2. Arrange time together with the children for both parents

- List out some important days, holidays and events, decide how to allocate the time together with the children on these days and who will attend those events.
- Reach consensus in advance with the ex-partner on how to pick up the children, including the pick-up time, the place, the route, and if some other persons will assist in the task.
- Inform the children the details regarding the arrangement for he or she meeting and spending time together with the non-residing parent.
- Set up and follow the timetable for spending time together with the children, but at the same time entertaining ex-partner's additional request flexibly.
- Allow the children to stay alone with the ex-partner and respect their privacy.
- Try to understand why the children refuse to meet the non-residing parent and handle the issue appropriately.

3. Facilitate both parents' better understanding of the children

- Let the non-residing parent know about how the children are doing in their study and the arrangement of other activities, including pursuing academic reports, school circulars and student handbooks, etc.
- Coordinate both parents' collaboration and participation in the children's daily and school activities.
- Let both parents know about the activities and the condition when the children are with the other parent.

4. How to share the expenses on the children

- Set out the expenditure on the children (e.g. stationery and books, fees for extra-curricular activities and other additional expenses) and decide on the respective contributions from each parent.
- Establish a regular and effective payment method (such as bank direct debit).