



Teenhelp

menu

Separation - What will happen to my family?

Q. How will the separation affect my parents?

A. Everyone is affected by the separation. Your parents are struggling to cope with their emotions too. Feelings such as loss, anger and worry are common. Every situation is different. For instance, if there was a lot of fighting between your parents, both might be upset but relieved that the situation has ended. If one parent left because of a new relationship, they might feel guilty at the upset caused. The parent left behind might feel hurt, rejected and lonely.

Parents do need time to get used to their situation.

You might be able to see some of these emotions in your parent's behaviour, such as crying, sighing, not sleeping, being tired, irritable, angry, distracted or distant. These are all normal reactions to the family changes, particularly in the early stages. It won't always be like this. But parents do need time to get used to their situation. When you think about it, parents have to make a lot of adjustments in their lives. They have to accept that their relationship is over, tell people outside the family, come to terms with being single again, be without their children sometimes or parenting alone for periods of time.

Remember

You can't change this situation for your parents or protect them from their feelings.

'Me mam is just carrying on, but the first time it happened she was real sad about it and now she's just carrying on as happy as she normally was.' (Boy, aged 14)

Q. What if I'm worried about how one of my parents is coping?

A. The important thing to remember is that it's not your job to fix this. You are the child and they are the adult. It's important to be as kind and considerate as possible but this doesn't mean

you take on their problems and make them yours. It's better if adults talk to other adults about their problems.

- Suggest to your parent that they talk to a friend or other adult member of their family for support.
- If you are worried, talk to your other parent or another adult in your wider family.

Remember

There are lots of services out there for parents to help them deal with the separation.

Q.

What if I'm worried about one of my brothers or sisters?

A.

If you are worried about how your brother or sister is coping (e.g. spending long periods alone, not eating, angry all the time), try talking to them about it or to one or both of your parents. This is very important, especially if you think the situation isn't getting any better over time. You can also check out the [Finding Help](#) section.

Q.

What if my parent has a new partner?



A.

It can be quite difficult to think about one or both of your parents with a new partner. You might have had hidden hopes that your parents would get back together some day. This is now a clear sign that they are moving on with their lives. You may feel sad, angry or confused.

- It's normal to feel uncomfortable about meeting their new partner for the first time.
- Let your parent know when you feel ready to meet them. When it happens, it's best to be polite and give the new partner a chance. Remember, it's up to you how you feel about them but it's important to treat them with respect.
- Deciding you like them and want to be friends does not mean you are being disloyal to your other parent. Whether you become close to your parent's new partner or not, your parents will always be your parents.
- If you want your parent to spend more time with you alone, let them know.
- It's a big change for you, so take all the time you need to adjust.

Q.

What if my parent's partner has children or they have children together?

A.

You might have a stepbrother or stepsister. You might be spending some time with them or living in the same house. This is another big change, so you will need time to adjust.

**Talk to your parent
or someone you
trust about how you
are feeling**

It can be hard sharing your parent with other children, particularly if there is a new baby needing lots of time and attention. You might feel upset, angry or rejected by your parent and worry that their new family is more important to them. Talk to your parent or someone you trust about how you are feeling.

Q. What can I do when I don't like the way my parents are behaving?

A.

During and after separation, sometimes parents might:

- Argue in front of you
- Say mean and hurtful things to you about the other parent
- Ask you to give messages to your other parent
- Ask you for information about the details of your other parent's life

If any of these behaviours are happening, it's important to speak up. You have the right to ask your parents to stop. Let your parents know what it's like for you and how their behaviour is making you feel. Tell them you love them both, want a relationship with both and don't want to take sides. It's possible that they might not have realised how their behaviour was affecting you. When parents argue, it's perfectly okay to leave the room if you want. You don't have to stay to listen or to take care of them. They are both adults.

Remember

Sometimes parent's fighting can get so out of control that people end up getting hurt. It's not okay for parents to be violent to each other or to anyone else in the family.

'My mum tells me one thing and my dad tells me the other. I do feel confused, yes.' (Girl, aged 15)

See [Finding Help](#) for where you can get help to cope with this.

Q. What if a parent cancels visits a lot or turns up late?

A.

If a parent cancels visits a lot or continually turns up late, tell them that you feel let down and disappointed by their behaviour. You could also make other back-up plans on days that visits are due. In this way, if visits are cancelled you won't be at a loose end.

If you don't feel comfortable talking to your parents about these issues, speak to someone else that you trust. You can also check out the [Finding Help](#) section for information on other sources of advice and help.

Q. What if it's hard to talk to my parents?

A.

You can't expect other people to know automatically what you are thinking. You have to talk to them to help them understand your perspective, opinions and feelings. It's also a good way for you to understand theirs. Communication is a two-way process.

- Let your parent know that you would like to talk. Choose a time and place free from distractions, if possible.
- Plan in advance what you want to say. It might help to write things down beforehand.

- Try to face your parent and sit or stand at the same level so you aren't looking up or down at them.
- Be honest and clear about what is on your mind.
- Try to make sure your body language reflects what you are saying. Your posture, tone of voice, facial expressions and eye contact all say something about how you are feeling.
- Take turns to talk. Listen to what your parent is saying.
- Be willing to compromise and look at issues differently sometimes too.
- Be clear at the end about what you have decided together
- Or, agree to talk and think about it. Decisions can be made later if you both want.

If it's too hard to talk to your parent:

- Try writing what you want to say in a letter or email. You could choose to sit with them while they read it or talk about it later when you feel comfortable.
- Ask a family member or someone else that you trust for help and advice.



What if one of my parents doesn't stay in contact after the separation?



It is tough when this happens. You might feel sad, angry or guilty about it. But remember, there is nothing that you said or did that caused this.

Why might this happen?

Every situation is different. Sometimes, a parent might become caught up in their own problems, work or new relationships. Or there may be an underlying mental health issue like depression or problems with alcoholism, abuse or violence.

What can I do about it?

- Get support from someone you trust.
- Remind yourself that you have family and friends that love you and care for you.
- Stay in contact with your absent parent's family.
- Write down happy memories of your parent in a diary or journal.
- Keep photographs, keepsakes and other items that hold happy memories for you of your parent in a special place.
- Remember, a parent is never forgotten.

Check out the [Finding Help](#) section.

Take a look at the [How am I going to cope?](#) section for more information on coping with feelings.