

Parenting When Separated – Handovers

For parents who are separated, supporting their children when handing over their care to the other parent often brings up so many emotions, challenges and questions about how best to approach it. For many children and young people, it can be stressful as their parents are in a space together following separation, children can worry about arguments or even just be concerned about their parent's wellbeing. Closely watching the interactions between them. With that in mind, here are some suggestions which may assist both parents and children feel more confident about managing access visits whilst supporting their children's wellbeing and reducing stress.

1. **Create a ritual** for when your child is leaving and returning to your care
Rituals help ground us and are often something we remember even in adulthood. Having a ritual prior to leaving your care or returning will support your child settling back into being with you more easily. Try and think of ways that incorporate the 5 senses – listening to a particular song in the car, spraying your scent on a soft toy or blanket that they can snuggle, a special handshake, a healthy snack. Whatever your ritual, make it something you always do prior to their leaving or returning to you.
2. **Keep communication positive and encouraging:** Avoid talking to their other parent about things like maintenance, access changes, or parenting issues you disagree with. These issues should be discussed or communicated away from your child and not at the handover meeting point. Keeping the conversation light and positive helps children feel less stressed. If children see their parents arguing regardless of what it is about they feel it is because of them, they love you both and hearing you argue impacts their emotional wellbeing. Avoid negatively talking about their other parent, children naturally identify as being part of both of you so hearing negative comments about their other parent can hurt their feelings even if you don't mean it.
3. **Communicate with your child's other parent:** We may wish to avoid communicating with our children's other parent post separation but there are key areas which will support your child whilst they are in the other parents care, things like health issues (visits to GP, medication, trips or falls they may have had that day), education (parent teacher meetings, informal communication from teachers, issues at school, or success at school). Health and education are 2 key areas but you may wish to communicate other things like visits with extended family, friendships. It is best to do this prior to handing over your child to the other parent via phone call, text or email. If communication is a challenge, can you agree on a third party to communicate through? A mutual friend or family member? It may assist keeping things polite.
4. **Be organised:** Help your child to pack what they need, it will avoid tears later. Also, if you can make longer term plans well in advance e.g. holidays, birthday

celebrations etc. Write out a to do list with older children the day before, to help them remember what they need.

5. **Maintain the quality of your parenting:** When we are stressed it naturally impacts the quality of our parenting, seeking support or doing things that help your self-care will support you being the best parent you can be when they are with you.
6. **Be consistent:** Avoid over compensating with toys, gadgets, material things. Have clear rules and routines for your home and let your child know that whilst in your care these are the rules/routines to follow. You and your child's other parent may parent very differently and that is ok, we cannot control other people only ourselves. Have a routine that includes fun/playtime as well as the not so fun tasks like homework, a set bedtime, chores etc will support your child's overall development.

Creative ways to stay connected:

For some parents, actively staying connected with their children post separation is challenging for a variety of reasons, teenagers for example naturally take time with their parent for granted. Here are just some ways to connect when this is difficult: These ideas may also assist parents who travel for work and want to support a child when they are away.

1. For younger children you can record yourself reading them a story and send it on with the story book.
2. With older children you can write or invent stories for them to read which you can send to them in the post or by email. Even writing out your most treasured memories from your own childhood if you are not feeling very creative.
3. Send postcards when you go on holidays or are away.
4. Go out and buy copies of your child's school books or the games they like so you know what they are doing and thinking about.
5. Keep a diary of what is happening in your life and keep them for your children as they get older. (Stay focused on you and avoid writing about their other parent).
6. Use photos – take photos of something your cooking or watching and share with your child, maybe take photos when you have outings together for them to keep as a reminder.

Seek support if you need: Youghal Family Resource Initiative run a parenting when separated programme, our next one will be in the Autumn. Or pop into our drop-in clinic any Tuesday morning if you'd like to discuss a particular issue or wish to have a chat about post separation challenges you are experiencing. **You can contact Shirley on 0860471060 for more information or email info.youghalfri@barnardos.ie**