

Children Can Handle It: How to Talk to Your Child About Their Family Situation



Many parents worry about talking to children about their family or changes in their family because of separation or divorce. As parents we want to protect our children from feeling hurt or upset. So, it can be really difficult to talk to children about painful or upsetting issues such as separation or a lack of contact with the other parent.

Whether you are a couple who have decided to separate, the parent of a child who has never met their other parent or maybe contact has recently ceased with the other parent, this information has been written to help you to feel more confident and positive about talking to your child about your family situation.

When preparing to talk to your child it is really important to remember that while children may feel sad or upset by family change or information about their family, what really helps them to adjust and cope is:



- feeling that they are part of the family and that they are being heard;
- honest and true information about what is/has happened;
- how well you are coping and how positive you are; and
- not being involved or used in conflict between parents

Why is it important to be honest with children about their family?

Children will always wonder about their parents or about the circumstances of a relationship break up. They can feel sad about their family situation, blame themselves or feel guilty for a parent not living with the family. Some children may think that if they are really good their parents will get back together.

Telling your child the truth, in a way that is appropriate to their age, can help them accept their family situation and feel more secure. Telling the truth builds trust between parents and children and gives children confidence in their family.

What are the most important things that children need to hear about their family?

- It's not their fault and they have done nothing wrong.
- It's okay for them to talk about the other parent.
- Hearing positive things about both parents can make them feel more positive about themselves
- They are loved and that they will be loved no matter what happens.
- They are free to talk about how they are feeling and that it's okay to feel sad, lonely, hurt, angry, relieved etc.
- They are not responsible for fixing their parents problems.
- There are many different types of families. Some children live with their grandparents, some with two parents, some with one, and some children have adoptive parents and step parents.

Having 'that conversation'



Try to put a boundary around your own feelings toward the other parent

Remember your feelings and experiences are not those of your child. So, although you may be feeling angry, hurt or rejected by the other parent don't put those feelings onto your child.

Remember that although your relationship with the other parent has changed, your child has a right to his/her own relationship with the other parent

Where possible, parents who are separating should tell their children about the separation together. Then decide together the best way to tell your children. For some families with children of similar ages and understanding, it may be best to tell them all together. For other children, it may be best that they are told individually so that you can focus all of your attention on them and any worries or questions they may have.

Explain the situation gently but clearly

Be honest, but remember that the news may be a huge shock to your children and they may find it hard to take in what you are telling them. Be prepared to answer hard questions.

Don't over explain

Trust that your child will come back to you for more information if they need it. Better still tell them that they can always ask questions or talk about their family anytime

Time for questions

It's really important to leave plenty of time for children to ask any questions or raise any worries they may have. In separation, children may want to know about practical things like where will I live? Who will I live with? How often will I see Dad/Mum? Be open and let your child know that it is okay to ask anything and that you will do your best to answer their questions and talk with them about the situation whenever they need to.

Listen

It is really important to give your child time to say how they are feeling. Don't try to rush them or move on with something else.

Further Help

askonefamily National Helpline 1890 66 22 12 or email: support@onefamily.ie

Our non-judgemental and confidential helpline service provides telephone support and information to all members of all one-parent families. We also provide free [counselling](#) to one-parent families. See www.onefamily.ie for more information.

Barnardos National Children's Resource Centre

Offers information to parents and professionals on all aspects of family life. For details of regional offices contact Barnardos's Head Office
Callsave: 1850 222 300
Web: www.barnardos.ie

Family Resource Centres Many Family Resource Centres offer low-cost counselling services. For details of your nearest Family Resource Centre and for a copy of the *Support for Families Directory* contact the Family Support Agency
Tel: 01 611 4100

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP)

Tel: 01 230 0061
Email: iacp@irish-counselling.ie
Web: www.irish-counselling.ie

Irish Council for Psychotherapy

Tel: 01 272 2105
Email: info@icpty.ie
Web: www.psychotherapy-ireland.com

Parentline

Support, guidance and information on all aspects of being a parent Helpline: 1890 927 277

Rainbows Ireland Support groups for children after separation and bereavement.
Tel: 01 473 4175 Email: ask@rainbowsireland.com Web: www.rainbowsireland.com