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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 in a situation where 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
- 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.

Other organisations that can help and support you in talking to children about their family situation are listed in our [Useful Links](#) page under “Help and Support”.