

Tips for Separated Parents

Transition Challenges

Children approach the transition between their parents' homes differently, depending in part on their temperament and age.

Even when parents are cooperative with each other, children will often:

- Find it difficult to leave either parent or move between them (both coming and going);
- Act anxious or whiny, and act in ways that "test" his/her parents' follow through when it's time to make a transition.
- Be wound up, reserved, disobedient, or unhappy for a day or so after moving from one house to the other.

Parents are often quick to think children are reacting to something the other parent is not doing or is doing wrong. But these reactions may not be the fault of the other parent. They are the children's efforts at having some controlling their world. For most children, transitions will get easier over time.

Easing Transitions Between Homes

- Do follow a schedule and routine for your children's moving between houses.
- Do teach your child that your word counts by showing up on time.
- Do allow schedules to change from time to time to fit your child's age and stage of development.
- Do be as flexible as possible concerning scheduling changes in order to model cooperative behaviour to your child.
- Do give the other parent as much possible advance notice of changes of schedule, vacation times and travel plans.
- Do find activities that allow you and your child an opportunity to build your relationship so that you both look forward to time together.
- Do remember that time together between parent and child is more important than an activity itself.
- Do set up a place for your child's creations (art work, pictures, etc) in order to help him/her feel that "this is home". Encourage your child to bring games, favourite objects and crafts from each home to the other.
- Do, when possible, involve your child or put him/her in charge of packing and unpacking clothes, toys, etc. for change between homes. This helps him/her feel a sense of control.
- Do allow your child to bring friends along to each home sometimes.
- Do introduce your child to the neighbourhood children, so that he/she has friends to play with at each home.

What Children Need

- To know that they continue to be loved by both parents, even when times get difficult. Tell them again and again.
- Parents who remain warm and affectionate, but consistent and firm in their discipline. This means sticking to what you say (e.g. bedtime is 9:00). It also means staying calm and clear while managing your frustration or anger at your child.
- To continue to have a relationship with both parents whenever possible, which allows for talking with either parent about the separation / divorce, feeling (hurt, sadness, anger) and questions.
- Help expressing feelings rather than behaving in angry or hurtful ways. For example, children can be told, "of course you feel angry at t time like this. But we need to find another way for you to show your anger. Tell me your ideas and I can help you think of others."
- To understand the changes that are happening in their family, but without hearing all the adult details about what led to the separation / divorce, what is difficult for parents, what parents are fighting about, etc.
- To be given support for staying involved in their previous activities, friendships and interests.

Making the Separation Easier on Children

- Speak to your children about the other parent in ways that support the parent
- BE civil to your former partner when you happen to be together.
- Let your children talk about and show enthusiasm for the other parent's home and the activities they share.
- Encourage your children not to blame the parent who left the home or started the separation.
- Acknowledge your child's heartfelt wish for a reunited family without offering false hope or insisting over and over that it will never happen.
- Don't try to mediate conflicts or involve yourself in disagreements between your child and the other parent.
- Don't pump your child for information about the other parent.
- Don't drag your children into adult business by asking them to take messages to the other parent (such as pick-up times, child support, etc.)