



## ISSUES SPECIFIC TO PARENTS

ParentLink guides use 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your child's sex.



**Divorce is usually a painful process for all concerned—for the person who makes the decision to leave the family, the other partner, grandparents or other family members. It is the children, who have no say in the decision but who are usually the ones most affected. Many parents, when looking back, often think they would have made different choices if they had some idea how divorce would affect their lives and especially their children's. Thinking about what divorce can mean before you take the step might help you be better prepared to make the best decisions for your children.**

## Is divorce the best decision?

In a society where half of marriages end in divorce, it is easy to assume that divorce will solve all the problems when a marriage becomes difficult. For many families the personal and material costs of divorce to parents and children are often greater than the benefits. For some families divorce provides opportunities to rebuild with an environment free from violence and abuse. It pays to look carefully at the path you might take.

## What is the real problem?

Have you thought about:

- why you really want to do this and what is really the problem
- whether what you want comes before nurturing and supporting your partner and children
- whether you expect something from your partner and children that is not realistic
- whether your relationship has drifted to the point where it needs something to make a difference and you see divorce as the way to fill the emptiness
- whether you have tried all remedies to make it work, including counselling
- whether you can honestly say that you have given your marriage your 'best shot'?

If abuse or violence has been the problem in your relationship know that everyone has the right not to be abused and to leave a situation where abuse is happening.

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## What it can mean for your children?

Divorce is never easy for children to live through. It is a time of emotional upheaval and they usually feel insecure and powerless when their parents' marriage breaks up. Age is an important factor and it is often harder for children between seven and 13 years to adjust than it is for preschoolers or adolescents. Problems for children stem more from stressful family situations than the act of divorce itself.

Some of the difficulties children face are:

- not having both parents involved in their day-to-day care
- living in different homes
- moving away from the area and everything familiar
- changing schools and clubs
- losing friends and making friends
- getting used to being in a single parent home
- adjusting to parents' new partners
- sharing a room after being used to their own
- not having the same amount of money in the family
- struggling with the grief and loss of the family unit
- dealing with the conflict between parents
- a parent who has difficulty coping with the divorce.

## Changes for you as a parent

Be prepared for some of the difficult experiences that parents face. Consider:

- how much you will miss your children when they are not with you
- how difficult it can be to share parenting responsibilities such as transport to and from school, and holiday arrangements
- how awkward it will be for you to help your children stay in touch with all their relatives, particularly grandparents

- how sad and lost you may feel in not being able to be part of your child's everyday life experiences
- how to balance work and family commitments
- how hard it might be to see someone else taking your place in the family.

## Changes to your finances

A drop in family income can make it more difficult for children to adjust to divorce. It is not until after the divorce and property settlement that parents discover just what this means. Things like:

- how much money is left after the settlement (including legal costs and child support)
- whether you will be able to buy another home if you leave the current one
- the cost of setting up with household goods or car
- getting used to a different income, especially from a two income to a single income household.

## Changes to friendships

It is not always possible to predict how friends will respond. It can be difficult for friends to stay in contact with both partners. Be aware that:

- some may not approve or will not be able to handle the break-up
- your social circle may break up and you may lose some friends
- you might have to begin to make a new set of friends
- you might need to find new ways to socialise as a single person
- it can take some time to get used to being single after being part of a couple
- it may be difficult to find a new partner
- it can be difficult for family and friends to accept your new partner.

## Making a new relationship

Forming a new relationship can be exciting but it can also have difficulties. Be mindful that:

- your partner may not accept your children
- your children will need time to get to know, or may not like your new partner
- your family may not be happy with your choice and this creates friction
- you might not get on with your new partner's children
- you might have feelings if your ex-partner forms a new relationship and becomes involved in parenting your children
- you might find it difficult getting used to another person's way of doing everyday things that you and your children were comfortable with
- the same old problems can reappear if you haven't sorted out what went wrong in your marriage.

## If you have chosen divorce

One of the most important changes made to the *Family Law Act 1975* is about the strengthening of children's interests. The courts will now consider children's best interests before those of parents.

Try to remember that:

- your children need you, often more so
- your responsibilities to them will continue
- looking after yourself is important and you will need lots of support as you adjust to a new lifestyle
- it can take a long time (sometimes years) to get over the break-up—some people never do, and some carry the scars into their new relationships. With help, many people adjust.

## Reminders

- Have you given your marriage your 'best shot'?
- Divorce can become a great cost to all—emotionally and financially.
- If divorce seems the answer for you, think through all the issues so that you will be better prepared.
- Responsibility for your child is not affected by a change in your adult relationships.
- Children cope best if parents can work together to avoid conflict.
- You are still your child's mum or dad after divorce.

## Want more information?

ParentLink	<a href="http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au">www.parentlink.act.gov.au</a>	13 34 27
Parentline (9am–9pm Monday–Friday, except public holidays)		6287 3833
Child and Youth Health (parenting and child health information)	<a href="http://www.cyh.com">www.cyh.com</a>	
Child Support Agency	<a href="http://www.csa.gov.au">www.csa.gov.au</a>	13 12 72
Family Court	<a href="http://www.familycourt.gov.au">www.familycourt.gov.au</a>	1300 352 000
Family Relationship Advice Line	<a href="http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au">www.familyrelationships.gov.au</a>	1800 050 321
Health First	<a href="http://www.healthfirst.net.au">www.healthfirst.net.au</a>	6207 7777
Legal Advice and Information Line	<a href="http://www.legalaid.canberra.net.au">www.legalaid.canberra.net.au</a>	1300 654 314
Relationships Australia	<a href="http://www.relationships.com.au">www.relationships.com.au</a>	6122 7100

## See other ParentLink guides

- Family break-up
- After the break-up
- Being a mum
- Being a dad
- More than arguments—domestic violence
- Grandparenting
- Coping skills

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