

Thinking of separating

If you are thinking of ending your relationship, it is good to be realistic about what it might mean for everyone in the family. Children have no say in a separation but it changes their lives. It is important that they feel safe and secure.

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To stay or not to stay

Long-term relationships change over the years. The rosy glasses of romance come off as life settles into daily routines. You can become very busy running a household and raising children. A couple may come to see things about each other that they don't like or have different ideas about raising children. If things become hard it can help to:

- think about the big issues behind arguments, and deal with them
- be realistic about what you expect of each other and the children
- make time to really talk and have happy times together
- not blame each other for problems
- seek help from friends or counsellors.

Remember why you fell in love in the first place! Having children changes things but you are still the same people you were before.

If there is violence

If there is violence in a family, separation or divorce can be a way to keep children safe and build a new life.

Violence in a family is never OK. You have the right to be safe. Get help if you are scared or being hurt.



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Parenting partners

It is easy to think that ending a relationship will solve all your problems. If you have children, you will need to work together for a long time to raise them. You will change from being a couple to being parenting partners. Both parents are still responsible for their children, whether they live with them or not.

Even if you separate or divorce, as parents you still need to work together to raise your children.

Changes for children

Separation is never easy for children. How they respond depends on their age and temperament. Some may worry and feel sad about:

- losing their family
- not being with both parents every day
- moving house or changing schools
- losing friends and making new ones
- changing to a single-parent home with less money
- conflict between their parents
- a parent having a new partner.

Some children feel responsible for the break-up so it's important to tell them it's not their fault. Reassure them that you are OK, even if you don't look happy all the time. It's important they don't feel they have to support a parent who is not coping.

For children who have lived with violence, it can mean less stress and the chance to feel safe and secure.

Changes for parents

Sometimes separation can be a chance to start fresh and have a new life. There can be new opportunities and things to learn and do.

However, many parents find that:

- they miss being with their children every day
- it is hard to do everything on their own such as shopping, housework and taking children to school and activities. If they are working it can be even harder
- it takes a lot of effort to keep children in touch with the other parent, relatives and friends
- it can hurt when an ex-partner has a new relationship.

Finances

Separation or divorce can change your finances.

You will need to work out:

- what you will have to live on
- how you will cope on a single income if you are used to two incomes
- how you will manage if you are paying child support
- where you will live and what it will cost
- will you be able to buy your own home or set up a new household?



Friendships

Friends can be a great source of support, but you can't always know how they will react. It can be hard for them to stay in touch with both of you, and you may lose some friends. You will have to get used to socialising as a single person and making new friends. This can be fun but may be hard at times too.

New relationships

It's best to sort out what went wrong in your relationship before starting a new one, or the same old problems can re-appear.

Remember:

- it can take time to find someone new who meets your needs
- it's best to introduce a new partner to your children slowly. It can be hard for them to accept someone new
- a new partner may have different ideas about raising children. How will you manage this?

Resolving disputes

If you can't agree how you will care for your children, a Family Dispute Resolution Service can help you make a parenting plan (phone the Family Relationships Advice Line on 1800 050 321).

If this doesn't work, or if there is violence, you can go to court and get a parenting order. The *Family Law Act 1975* says that children's best interests come first.

It is important to get help if you need to. Talking with someone can help you make difficult decisions.

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