

This fact sheet is for parents who have separated. It has information on:

- how to make children's arrangements with the other parent as workable and positive as possible
- which decisions need to be made with the other parent
- being a parent when you have a new partner
- where to get help.

What can I do to help parenting arrangements after separation?

You have separated and are starting to move forward with your life. But having children together means you continue to be linked to your former partner.

It can be difficult making parenting arrangements with the other parent but for your children's safety, happiness and development, it is important to make parenting arrangements as practical and positive as possible.

All families are different and your parenting arrangements will depend on your individual situation and your relationship with the other parent.

There are things you may both be able to do to help make parenting arrangements easier, such as:

- focus on your children, not the other parent or the past
- do not ask the children to carry messages to or from the other parent. This can lead to mixed messages, manipulation and children feeling caught in the middle.
- concentrate on your own relationship with the children and let the other parent relate to the children in his or her own way, unless this puts the children at risk of harm
- stick to the parenting agreement you've made. Sometimes arrangements may need to change because of unexpected events like illness or school commitments. But continue to do what you both agreed on, the rest of the time.
- limit the times you see the other parent if you disagree about a lot of things. For example, arrange not to sit together at special events and pick a neutral place, such as school or a café, to pick up and drop off children.
- share information about the children's school, childcare, health and wellbeing with the other parent. This can be done face-to-face, by telephone, email, letters or by a communication book. A communication book is an exercise book where each parent makes notes about the children's care and any events that the other parent should know about. The book gets exchanged between parents on each visit.
- try to keep calm when talking with the other parent or making decisions
- recognise that the rules in each household do not have to be the same.

If you and other parent cannot agree on arrangements or if it is difficult or feels unsafe to try to discuss things, family dispute resolution may help.

Victoria Legal Aid has a family dispute resolution service called Roundtable Dispute Management, which can help people reach agreement. More information is available from your lawyer or from Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help service.

See Where to get help.

What do we need to decide together?

Even after separation or divorce, you and the other parent will usually be jointly responsible for making big decisions about your children's lives. These decisions include:

- where the children will live
- which school or what type of childcare they will go to
- their religion and how they will practice their culture
- what medical treatment they will receive
- whether the children can move to another area if the move would really affect the time they would spend with one parent.

Unless you both agree, or a court order says, that one parent can make some of these big decisions on their own, you are expected to make these decisions together.

If you cannot agree, you can use a family dispute resolution service such as Roundtable Dispute Management. If family dispute resolution does not work or is not suitable for your situation, the family law courts can make decisions about your parenting arrangements.

How does having a new partner affect me and my children?

You and the other parent are responsible for your children, but you can talk with your new partner about the children's care if they are involved.

Your children will be affected if you have a new partner. Your new partner may also have children which means your children will become involved in a new family.

The children's reactions will depend on:

- how old they are
- their overall development
- how long you and the other parent have been separated
- their living arrangements.

Younger children may find it easier to accept a new partner because they are still dependent on both their parents and want to be part of a family. Teenagers may find it difficult as they may be trying to make their own life and be separate from the family.

Where to get help

Victoria Legal Aid

Legal Help

Tel: 9269 0120 or 1800 677 402 (country callers)

Open Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

You can get legal information and help regarding separation, divorce, children, property and residency issues.

For more information about children, adults and separation, see our other information sheets:

- Caring for yourself after separation
- How will our separation affect the children?
- Family violence – how Roundtable Dispute Management can help
- How your children's ages affect your parenting arrangements

Community Legal Centres

For your nearest community legal centre:

Tel: 9652 1500

www.communitylaw.org.au

Family Relationship Advice Line

Tel: 1800 050 321 or visit www.familyrelationships.gov.au

for advice on parenting arrangements after separation, locations of Family Relationship Centres and other services in your area that can help.

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