

This fact sheet is for people who have separated or are thinking about separating. It has information on:

- how you might feel and react after separation
- how to care for yourself
- how to stay involved in your children's lives
- where to get help.

How will I feel after separation?

Separation can be a very difficult time. You may feel a sense of loss or grief after separating. You may feel you have lost your partner, family, home, routine, friends, role, dreams and children. You may feel you have lost trust in other people and in life.

Grief can happen at anytime and may feel very painful. You may feel like you are on a roller coaster of emotions from anger or deep sadness to relief.

It is important to remember that everyone experiences grief differently and at different times. For example, if you ended the relationship you may have started working through your grief before you actually separated. If your ex-partner ended the relationship, your grief may start quite suddenly after separation, or after some time has passed.

While it is normal to feel grief about separation, it can sometimes become a problem, for example if it continues for a long time, or is so great that you have thoughts of suicide. It is important that you get help from a doctor or other professional if this is happening. [See Where to get help.](#)

How do I look after myself after separation?

Separation is a time of major change. It is important to look after yourself and work out what is best for you.

Separation may be particularly difficult for you if you have depression, anxiety, other mental health problems or issues with drugs or alcohol. You may find it very helpful to get support from a professional during and after your separation.

There are many things you can do to help you through this time.

Ask for help

Try not to hide away and cope with everything on your own. Talking with a person you trust, such as a family member, friend, counsellor, community worker or doctor may help you feel better and more supported.

Look after yourself physically and mentally

It is easy to forget about yourself during a stressful time but it's very important to care for yourself. Doing things that make you feel better, however small, can make a difference. Going for a walk outside, getting some quiet time for yourself, listening to music, or writing down how you feel are all free and may help move you through a hard time. Continuing to do all the activities you usually do is important. Eating healthy food and being mindful about alcohol and other substances will help keep you well and able to carry on.

Stay involved in your children's lives

Your children will be feeling grief too and they need to know that you are there for them. Your role is to support them through this process. It may be tempting to lean on them but it is not their role to support you, though they may want to make you feel better. You can stay involved in your children's lives by:

- calling them or writing to them when they are not with you
- remembering their birthdays and other special occasions
- reading stories and playing games
- helping them with their homework, sport or music practice
- reaching agreement with the other parent or family member.

If they do not live with you, think about ways to let them know you are thinking about them and they remain important in your life. You can create new traditions for special occasions. It may feel hard at times, but try to have fun with your children when you can.

Give yourself time

It will take time for you to make sense of all the changes you've experienced. Over time, your grief will lessen.

Take time to make good decisions

Grief takes time to work through. While some decisions need to be made soon, others can wait. It is very important to take time when making big decisions. Think about discussing important decisions with your family, friends or a professional. They can give you feedback and help you think about the way forward.

Get other support

If you need help with making decisions with the other parent, a family dispute resolution service can help. Victoria Legal Aid has a family dispute resolution service called Roundtable Dispute Management that can help you reach agreement. Roundtable Dispute Resolution conferences can be set up in different ways. You and your former partner may be in the same room, different rooms or buildings, or on the phone. You can get more information about the service from your lawyer, or from Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help service. See Where to get help.

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:

- Being a parent 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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