

Effect of Separation on you

Parental separation is a painful process for most people. As a father you may feel shocked, lonely, sad or angry because the relationship with your partner has ended and you may be living apart from your child.

It is acknowledged that this is a stressful time, and you may be faced with a number of challenges. These can include having additional financial pressure, coping with your emotions, dealing with parenting apart, and managing contact with your children. You may well feel totally exhausted, and find it difficult to make good decisions.

Remember: Be sure to take care of yourself, and keep in good health for both your own sake and the sake of your child.

Effect of Separation on your Child

Children are affected by their parents separating - some more than others. Younger children may become clingy, tearful or anxious and, in some cases, show regressive behaviours such as sucking their thumb or bed wetting. Older children can often blame themselves for the separation and may need reassurance.

Be alert to any changes in your child's behaviour, give them time to talk about their feelings and seek support and advice so that you can be there for your child.

Remember: Children need to be given an age appropriate reason for the separation, and to know that it is not their fault and that Mum and Dad both still love them.

Getting Support

Support is available to you at all stages of your separation. Seeking support will enable you to find constructive ways to tackle your situation, and can help you to...

- Talk about your circumstances and why you might be feeling hurt, angry, lonely or sad.
- Understand the options available to you.
- Feel less isolated or helpless.
- Negotiate a fair and practical arrangement with your ex-partner which ensures that your child can have regular contact with both of you.

In the first instance, you may wish to consider contacting:

Parenting NI Tel: 0808 8010 722
Web: www.parentingni.org

Family Mediation NI Tel: 028 9024 3265
Web: www.familymediationni.org.uk

Or visiting the NI Direct Website:
www.nidirect.gov.uk/relationship-breakdown-and-your-children

Remember: Going to court to sort out your situation should be your last resort - not your first choice! A mutually agreed solution will be less traumatic for everyone involved, will cost very little, and the arrangements will last for longer.

Man Matters provides training and learning opportunities for men throughout Northern Ireland. It is a partnership between the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), Parenting NI, Home-Start NI and the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI). The project is supported by the Big Lottery Fund.

Tel: 028 9032 9718 Web: www.manmatters.org

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Parental Separation: A Father's Guide

This leaflet offers support to dads during and after a family separation



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Rights and Responsibilities

At the time of separation, you may be confused about your rights.

Dads have rights too.

'Parental Responsibility' is the legal name for the duties that a parent has to their child. It covers things like providing a home for the child and protecting them, as well as providing for the child's education and being responsible for the child's property.

You will have Parental Responsibility for your child if you:

- Were married to the mother when your child was born.
- Were unmarried, but jointly registered the birth with the mother or made a Parental Agreement with the mother.
- Obtained a Parental Responsibility Order through the Court.
- Were in a Civil Partnership and were registered as the child's legal parent.

Remember: If you have Parental Responsibility, you have the right to be kept informed about your child regarding their health and education. Contact your child's GP and school, and explain that you are now separated from your child's mother. Tell them you need to be kept informed about your child's wellbeing. You are entitled to receive full information from them on your child's welfare and on any issues that may arise. Don't forget to give them your full contact details.

Remember: While the relationship with your child's mother has changed, your child's needs have not. Having both parents involved will improve the emotional well-being and recovery of your child.

Co-Parenting

Your child should not lose contact with his/her parents because they have split up. Arrangements about co-parenting should be made without delay. When trying to sort out co-parenting, avoid getting into blaming conversations with your ex-partner.

Your child has the RIGHT to see you too.

Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that a child who is separated from one or both of his parents has the right to maintain regular contact.

Consider the needs of your child first and foremost. Issues or difficulties with your ex-partner should not be discussed in front of your child. Instead, focus on:

- How the child can best spend time with both of you.
- How you will manage at handover times.
- How you and your child can communicate between meetings.



Options

Some parents are able to negotiate contact arrangements between themselves with the help of friends or an organisation that specialises in family mediation.

However, in spite of making every effort, some couples do end up having to seek legal advice.

If you do need to seek legal advice:

- Instruct a solicitor with experience in family law.
- Encourage your solicitor to sort out the practical contact arrangements without having to go to court.
- Find out about the legal process involved, and know what will be required of you.
- Keep detailed records of visits and communication with both your child and your ex-partner.
- Be aware that what you say and do may be used in a negative way in court - this includes anything you may post on social media sites.

Remember: The court process may heighten tensions, could create more conflict, can be expensive, often causes delays, and can damage relationships further.

In this very stressful time, it is easy to become angry or frustrated. However, it is best to try and keep your emotions under control when dealing with your ex-partner or any professionals that may become involved in your situation.