

Children's guide to separation

What happens to us when
our parents break up?



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When your parents break up, it can be confusing. You're probably wondering what's going to happen



This booklet will help answer your questions. It also tells you some helpful things like

- It's really common for parents to break up.
- Most kids find that things get much easier as time goes on.
- Most kids do keep seeing the people they love.
- Most kids keep doing the things they love doing.

- Your parents will always be your parents. They'll always love you.

If we don't answer your questions, don't worry. Just look at the back of this booklet – there's a list of people you can call for more help.

Does this happen to lots of other kids?

Breaking up happens a lot, even to families that have been together for a long time. Heaps of families in Aotearoa New Zealand split up each year. That means lots of kids belong to a family or whānau where the parents live in different homes.



Is it my fault?

No! You are not to blame. Your parents broke up because things went wrong for them. They still really love you.

Will it get easier?

For some kids, life gets easier after their parents split up. Other children say it takes a while. One thing's for sure, nearly everyone says things get better as time goes on.

Why do I feel like this?

It's OK if you have really strong feelings about your parents breaking up. Most kids do.

‘After my parents broke up, I was really uncomfortable with Mum and Dad even coming to a school event at the same time but now I’m more confident with them.’

You could feel lots of different things – even at the same time!

‘I was worried about how it would work. But you get used to it. Now things are OK.’

Sometimes you might feel fine and then really quickly feel bad. This can happen anywhere, like when you’re at school, playing with friends or in bed at night.

‘At first, I wanted Mum and Dad to get back together again. But now I can see they’re much happier and I’m OK too.’

Whatever you feel is OK. Lots of kids have gone through it. Most of them felt a lot like you do and they say it gets a lot easier.

You might feel

- angry
- scared
- relieved

You might feel

- guilty or
- worried.

You might even feel happy

What can I do to feel better?

‘Talk about your worries, even if it’s about your parents fighting. No one will know how you feel or what you need unless you talk about it.’

It really helps to talk about your feelings. Talk to your parents or grandparents. You can also talk to your brother or sister, or an adult you trust. You can talk to a teacher or school counsellor. If you know someone whose parents have broken up, you can talk to them too.



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What if I keep feeling really bad?



Most kids want to keep seeing both their parents. And grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. So let your parents know if you feel this way.

‘I’d been keeping it inside for weeks, then I was with my aunty in the holidays and I told her all about it and cried. Afterwards, I could talk to my parents and I started to feel better.’

Or you can call the people and visit the websites listed at the back of this booklet. They help kids all the time.

The people who answer can really help. Give them a call – especially if it’s hard to talk with someone face to face. They know tons of stuff about how to make tough times easier. They’re there to help and they know what you’re going through.

Will I still see everyone?

You'll probably want to keep seeing both your parents. And your grandparents and cousins, aunts and uncles too. Let your parents know. Tell them how

you feel about seeing all the family. Keep seeing your friends too – let them know what's going on.

Will things get back to normal?

It might take a while because there's a lot to get used to. You might have two homes. You might now spend some time with your mum and some time with your dad.

If you don't feel safe with one of your parents, you can be protected from them. It's your right to be safe all the time, no matter who's looking after you.

There might not be much chance of your parents getting back together again. But there'll probably be less fighting. As time goes on, your parents will probably get along OK.

If you're worried about your safety, tell an adult you trust. You can also call the phone numbers listed at the back of this booklet.

It's still the job of both your parents to make sure you're looked after.

If it's an emergency and you feel really frightened or someone is being hurt, dial 111 and ask to talk to the Police.

Who will I live with now?

Usually your parents will have a home each and you'll spend time at both homes.

If you normally stay with other people some of the time – like family and whānau or friends – you should be able to keep doing this if you want to.

Can I say who I want to live with?

If you're younger than 16, your parents will decide who you will live with. You've always got a right to say what you want to happen.

Your parents will probably ask you what you want.

If they don't ask, then let them know what you think.

Do I have to say who I want to live with?

No! You can say nothing if you want to. You never have to choose. You can leave it up to your parents to make the decisions for you.



But you can still let them know how you feel and what's important to you.

Why should I talk to my parents about where I should live?

It's their job to look after you and they'll do what they think's best for you. But they might not know what you think. The best way to make sure they do is to talk to them.

What if my parents look too busy to talk?

‘My mum’s gone away but we often have phone calls and we text each other most days.’



Parents get really busy sorting things out when they break up, but your feelings are important to them.

If it’s hard to get them to listen, try some different ways.

Try when it’s just the two of you – like in the car.

Ring or text them, or leave them a note on their pillow. It might be easier than talking face to face.

What if it’s hard to find the right words?
It might feel scary – but just talk! Let them know how you feel and what you think about what’s happening.

What kind of plans work?

You can decide on all sorts of different plans that work for you and your family. Here are some examples:

‘I still have some school holidays with my grandparents and my cousins and the rest of the whānau.’

‘I spend about a week with each parent. I keep half my things at each house. It was tricky at first but now it works.’

‘I like having two homes.’

How do we sort out where I’ll live and other stuff?

Your parents will usually work out what they think is best for you. They’ll do this after asking you what you want. If they don’t ask, let them know if you want to have a say.

How can I help make the new plans work?

Ask your parents to tell you the plans and mark them on a calendar. Also mark the plans for holidays and birthdays, and the days and times you’ll be with each parent.

It helps to be organised. Ask for a special place just for you to keep your things at the different houses you stay in.

What if one of my parents moves away?

There are ways to keep in touch – ask about visits in school holidays and on long weekends. You can keep in touch by texting or writing letters.

Getting on with your parents

What if I don't like the way my parents behave when I'm around?

It's natural not to like it when your parents argue in front of you. You don't have to stick around to listen. Leave the room if you want.

Tell your parents if you don't like it when they're mean about each other in front of you.

Tell them if you don't like it when they ask you to give messages to the other parent.

Tell them if you don't like it when they ask you about the other parent.

If they break a plan with you, tell them you don't like it because you feel let down.

What if I feel pressured to take sides?

You don't need to choose between your parents and who's right. It's OK to love them both.



New partners

‘I was jealous when my new step-brothers and sisters came on the scene but I just gave them a chance. I figured they were feeling just as weird as me. It took a while, but we get along fine now.’



What if my parent has a new partner?

It's best just to be polite, even if you don't feel like it. Give them a chance. It's not fair to blame them. Tell your parent if you want to spend more time alone with just them.

What if my parent's new partner has kids?

It will take time to get used to other kids being around. You might find some things different. It might be harder for you to find a quiet place.

It's best to be nice. Remember, it's the same for them. They could feel the same way you do. Talk to your parent about any problems.

Where can I go for more help?

<p>What's Up 0800 WHATS UP (0800 942 8787) Monday to Friday 12pm–11pm; Saturday and Sunday 3pm– 11pm. Online chat Monday to Friday 1pm–10pm, Saturday and Sunday 3pm–10pm. whatsup.co.nz</p>	<p>Free phone counselling service for everyone up to 18 years old. Counsellors are specially trained to talk with kids and teenagers. They aren't allowed to tell anyone what you say.</p>
<p>Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children 0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459) Any time (24/7) Email contact@ot.govt.nz orangatamariki.govt.nz</p>	<p>A government agency focused on children. It can protect and help you if you don't feel safe or aren't being cared for properly.</p>
<p>Skylight 0800 299 100 Monday to Friday 9am–5pm Email info@skylight.org.nz skylight.org.nz</p>	<p>Helps and supports kids dealing with trauma, loss and grief. Lots of great resources for kids on their website.</p>

<p>Manaakitia a Tātou Tamariki – Children’s Commissioner 0800 A CHILD (0800 224 453) Monday to Wednesday 9am–5pm, Thursday 9am–4pm Email advice@occ.org.nz occ.org.nz</p>	<p>Advice about your rights and welfare.</p>
<p>Youthlaw 0800 884 529 Monday to Friday 10am–4pm Email nzyouthlaw@gmail.com youthlaw.co.nz</p>	<p>Free legal help for children and young people.</p>
<p>Te Tāhū o te Ture – Ministry of Justice 0800 2 AGREE (0800 224 733) Monday to Friday 7am–9pm justice.govt.nz/family</p>	<p>Information for families including children about how the family justice system can help them.</p>



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