

# Parenting through separation

## FACT SHEET 8

### Changeovers and helping your child move between their two homes

#### 1. What to expect at a changeover between parents

- Nearly all children find moving between two homes extremely stressful at first.
- Young children are often clingy, cry and put up a fight.
- Older children often complain and say they don't want to go.
- Children will feel more settled once their new arrangements have become their usual routine. This might take a long time.

#### 2. Understand why your child may be upset about moving between homes

- It's hard for your child to leave you behind, because they love you and don't want to be without you.
- Your child may feel guilty about going away to have a good time with their other parent because they worry about you being left behind.
- Older children can find a change of home base annoying and difficult to manage, especially with homework, seeing friends, sports and other activities.
- If there is usually conflict (arguments, criticism) between parents at changeovers, this can make moving between homes even more upsetting for children.

#### 3. What you can do to help reduce your child's stress

##### When your child is leaving you...

##### Do –

- Gently encourage your child about going with their other parent. Be relaxed and positive.
- Remind your child about the fun things they have done before with their other parent and about the good things about their relationship.
- Make plans with your child for some fun things you can do together when they get back.
- Help your child to manage their things they need to take: clothes, special toys, homework, sports gear.

##### Don't –

- Don't say "I'll miss you". Tell your child that you'll be OK and about the good things you've planned so they don't feel guilty.
- Don't put your child in to an awful position with your ex by asking them to take difficult messages or to act as a spy.
- Don't break into your child's time with their other parent. It can be too unsettling for them.

## **When your child is coming to stay with you ...**

### **Do –**

- Let them know before they come about the good things you've planned to do together so they have something to look forward to.
- Help them to adjust to the changeover by giving them extra love and care.
- If finances are stretched (as they usually are after separation) do lots of fun free things like gardening, going to the park or the beach.
- Help them to feel safe and at home and make sure they have a space for themselves and somewhere special to keep their things.
- Plan to take good care of their basic needs for food and sleep. Regular shared mealtimes are reassuring and sociable.
- Remember you need to be able to act as 'lifeguard' in an emergency (such as an accident or sickness) any time your child is with you.
- Encourage your child to have contact with their other parent while they are with you, maybe through a phone call.

### **Don't –**

- Don't add to your child's stress by making a fuss about things they haven't brought with them.

## **4. Manage conflict at changeovers**

- Avoid saying anything negative to your child's other parent at a changeover.
- Be reasonably flexible and understanding about unavoidable lateness with things like traffic problems.
- Save your concerns and criticisms for another time, away from your child.
- If contact with your child's other parent always leads to conflict, then use a third person or a school as a neutral drop-off point.

## **5. Understand why your child might be upset when they come back to your home**

- Your child may be tired and upset about leaving their other parent.
- Your child might be feeling guilty about having a good time without you, especially if you seem sad or too emotional when they get back.
- Your child may be upset by your questions. They may not know what to say without hurting your feelings or being disloyal to their other parent.

