

Separation and Divorce

Helping parents to help children

Dear Parent,

Each year an estimated 240,000 children in the UK experience the separation of their parents. Overall, more than one in three children will see their parents split up before they reach their 16th birthday.

This booklet has been written by renowned parenting expert Christina McGhee on behalf of Resolution, a group of family lawyers committed to taking conflict out of family disputes. Resolution lawyers abide by a code of practice which encourages solutions based on the needs of the whole family and particularly the best interests of children.

As lawyers, it is our job to help you through the legal process as best we can. However, we realise that many of our clients will be unsure as to how to best manage their separation in the best interests of their children. Many have crucial needs that may not be about legal issues. You may feel you don't have the information you need to support your children when making incredibly important decisions about their future during your separation.

You will need to find ways to address key issues such as understanding how to talk to children, supporting children's feelings while managing your own, minimising conflict between households or developing workable parenting arrangements. We believe that having access early on in the process to good information and resources is a key factor in how well you and your children will be able to manage this transition.

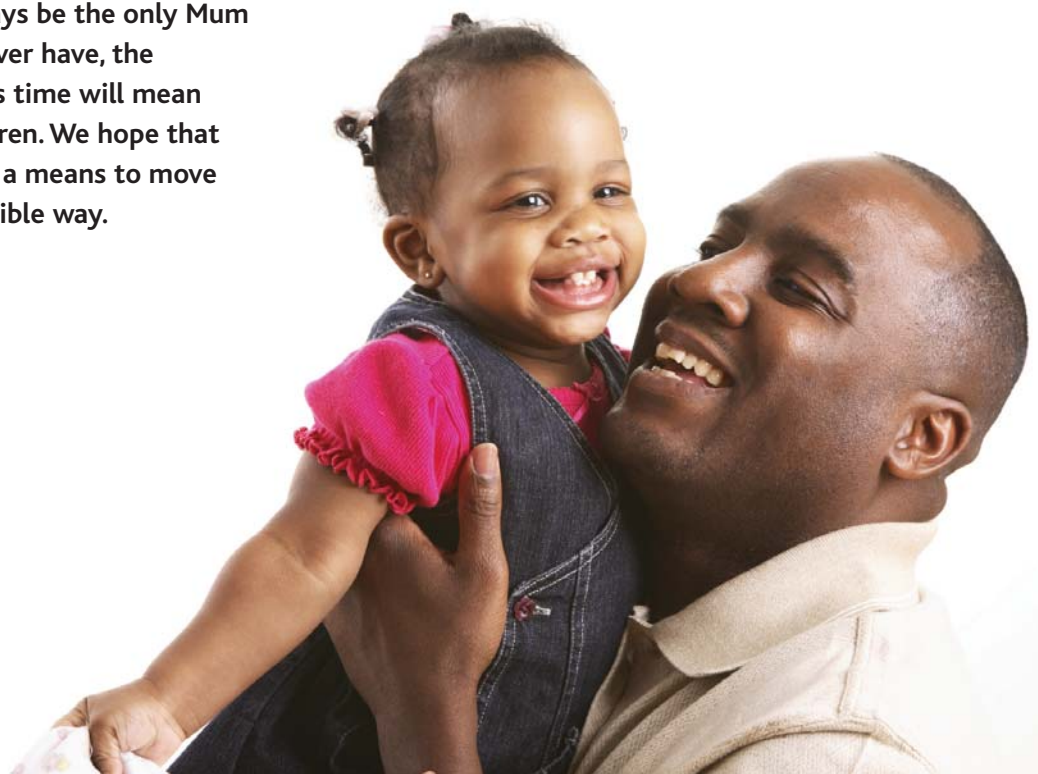
This booklet is designed to give you key information at the earliest possible stage and to guide you in making a positive difference for your children. It supports a child-centred approach - which research and experience suggests will help children to move from being a family under one roof to being a family in two separate homes.

The enclosed material covers a range of topics about the separation process as well as information about how children are affected and can be helped. We know that everything included may not be a part of your experience but we hope that you will find pieces that are personally helpful and useful.

Given that you will always be the only Mum and Dad your children ever have, the choices you make at this time will mean everything to your children. We hope that this guide will offer you a means to move forward in the best possible way.

Yours,

Resolution



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Chapter 1: What Should I Expect?

The Emotional Aspects of Separation and Divorce for Parents and Children

As life changes for you and your children it is normal to experience a significant sense of grief over that loss. Divorce ranks second only to death regarding the level of stress it generates in a person's life. Even though the whole family goes through transition at the same time, it is likely that your children's feelings about divorce will be different from your own. Therefore it is vital that you as a parent are able to keep your feelings about splitting up separate from your children's feelings.

Not only will your children's experience be different but you and your partner will probably have different feelings too. When a relationship breaks down, often one partner has begun to emotionally distance themselves before initiating the separation. This situation usually leaves one parent further along the emotional process than the other at the beginning. Regardless of which position you are in, understanding the process and how you, your children and the other parent are managing their emotions can be helpful as you move forward.

During this time you can help yourself and your children through this process by:

Taking care of yourself. Eat, sleep and exercise on a regular basis

Trying to stay mindful of your feelings about the situation

Accessing support so you can manage your feelings in a responsible manner

Making planned changes rather than reactive ones

Placing the needs of your children at the forefront of your decision making process

When divorce or separation occurs children will experience a wide range of emotions. Sometimes it can be difficult to know which changes in behaviour are normal and which are related to their parents splitting up. Although children may talk to you about their feelings it is also helpful to pay attention to their actions and behaviour. The following information has been designed to help you recognise various ways you and your children might experience this transition.

