SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH

Separation or Divorce

Children's Separation Questions

A Parent Response Worksheet

Why this worksheet may help

Children may ask questions repeatedly, indirectly, or at unexpected times. A question is often not only a request for information; it may also be a request for reassurance, predictability, or permission to feel.

Use this worksheet to prepare calm, truthful, child-centred responses.

1 Questions About Responsibility

"Is this my fault?"

What your child may be worried about:

"I caused the fighting," "I was bad," or "If I behave better, I can fix this."

A helpful response:

"No. This is not your fault. Children do not cause parents to separate. This is an adult decision, and it is not your job to fix it."

My own wording:

_____

_____

“Can I make you stay together?”

What your child may be worried about:

They may be trying to regain control or protect the family.

A helpful response:

“I understand that you wish things could be different. But this is a decision for adults. You do not need to solve this. Your job is to be a child, and our job is to take care of you.”

My own wording:

_____

_____

2 Questions About Love and Belonging

"Do you still love me?"

What your child may be worried about:

"If parents can stop living together, maybe they can stop loving me too."

A helpful response:

"Yes. We both love you, and that does not change. Adults can make changes in their relationship with each other, but we will always be your parents."

My own wording:

_____

_____

“Do I have to choose who I love more?”

What your child may be worried about:

They may feel loyalty pressure or fear disappointing one parent.

A helpful response:

“No. You are allowed to love both of us. You do not need to choose sides, protect either of us, or decide whose feelings matter more.”

My own wording:

_____

_____

A response to keep nearby

“You can love both of us. Our adult relationship is not your responsibility. You do not have to take care of our feelings.”

3 Questions About the Future

"Where will I live?"

What your child may be worried about:

Loss of routine, belongings, friends, neighbourhood, or access to a parent.

A helpful response:

"For now, this is the plan: _____. We will show you the schedule and keep telling you about changes before they happen."

My own wording:

_____

_____

"Will I still see Mom/Dad?"

What your child may be worried about:

Fear of losing a parent or uncertainty about contact.

A helpful response:

"Yes. You will see or speak with _____. The plan right now is _____."

My own wording:

_____

_____

"Will we ever be a family again?"

What your child may be worried about:

They may be grieving the family structure they knew.

A helpful response:

"We will always be your family, even though our family will look different now. We will not be living together as a couple, but we will both continue to love and care for you."

My own wording:

_____

_____

4 More Questions About the Future and Daily Life

"Are you getting back together?"

What your child may be worried about:

Hope, fear, uncertainty, or a wish for reassurance.

A helpful response:

"We have decided that we will not be living together as a couple. I know that may feel sad or confusing. We will both continue to be your parents and take care of you."

My own wording:

_____

_____

"Will I have to change schools?"

What your child may be worried about:

Worry about friends, learning, teachers, transportation, or a sense of belonging.

A helpful response:

"Right now, the plan is _____. We will tell you as soon as possible if anything changes."

My own wording:

_____

_____

“What will happen to our pet?”

What your child may be worried about:

Fear of another loss or worry about a relationship that feels safe and familiar.

A helpful response:

“Our plan for the pet is _____. We know that your relationship with your pet matters, and we will talk about ways to make this easier.”

My own wording:

_____

_____

5 Daily Life and Questions That Sound Like Statements

"What happens on my birthday, holidays, or special days?"

What your child may be worried about:

Uncertainty about traditions, belonging, or whether meaningful days will feel different.

A helpful response:

"We are still working out some plans. What we know right now is _____. We will tell you more before the day comes."

My own wording:

_____

_____

Children do not always ask directly. Notice the feeling underneath.

A child may say…	They may be communicating…	A possible response
"I do not care."	"I feel overwhelmed," "I do not know what to say," or "I am angry."	"You do not have to talk right now. I will be here when you are ready."
"I hate you."	"I feel hurt, powerless, or scared."	"I hear that you are really upset. You are allowed to be angry. I will listen when you are ready."
"I want things to go back to normal."	"I miss predictability and safety."	"I understand. A lot is changing. We will keep talking about what stays the same and what comes next."
"Do not make me go there."	"I may be anxious, angry, or worried."	"I want to understand what feels hard. You do not have to explain everything at once."

WHEN YOU DO NOT HAVE THE ANSWER YET

Questions I Am Not Ready to Answer Yet

It is okay to say you do not know, as long as you return to the question. Children benefit from hearing honesty without being asked to carry adult uncertainty.

Question I cannot answer yet:

_____

_____

_____

A truthful response I can offer now:

"I do not know the full answer yet, and I do not want to make something up. What I do know is _____."

_____

_____

_____

_____

When I will return to this question:

_____

_____

A final reminder

You do not have to produce a perfect response. Aim for a response that is truthful, steady, and centred on your child's need for safety, reassurance, and practical clarity. Return to questions when new information is available.

MentalOptimist parent resources are educational tools and do not replace individualized legal, parenting, medical, or mental-health advice.