SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH

Separation or Divorce

Parent Worksheets and Planning Guides

For parents and caregivers

How to use these worksheets

These pages are designed to help parents prepare for conversations and transitions related to separation or divorce. Use them privately, with a co-parent where appropriate and safe, or alongside a trusted professional.

Educational use only

These worksheets do not replace individualized legal, parenting, medical, or mental-health advice.

Important safety note

A joint conversation is not always appropriate. If there is family violence, coercive control, intimidation, active substance-related instability, severe conflict, or concern that a parent may frighten, manipulate, or pressure a child, prioritize safety and seek support from an appropriate professional before planning the conversation.

1 Parent Conversation Planning Sheet

Telling Children About Separation or Divorce

Children do not need a perfect conversation. They need adults who can offer honesty, reassurance, emotional steadiness, and as much practical clarity as possible.

Use this page before talking with your child or children.

STEP 1: Is this the right time to tell them?

☐ The decision to separate or live in different homes is reasonably clear.

☐ We can tell our child at least some practical information about what will happen next.

☐ We are not asking our child to carry adult uncertainty or decide whether we should stay together.

☐ There is enough time after the conversation for questions, comfort, quiet, food, play, or rest.

☐ We are not telling our child immediately before school, bedtime, an exam, a birthday, a holiday, or a handover between homes.

☐ We have considered whether telling the children together is emotionally and physically safe.

The date and time we plan to talk:

Where we plan to talk:

Who will be present:

Who can support the adults, if needed:

1 Parent Conversation Planning Sheet

Continued

STEP 2: Our shared message

Children benefit from hearing a consistent message. Keep the first explanation simple, calm, and age-appropriate.

What is changing:
"We have decided that

What is not changing:
"You will still

The message about responsibility

"This is an adult decision. It is not because of anything you did or did not do. You did not cause this, and it is not your job to fix it."

The message about love and care:
"We both love you, and

STEP 3: What practical information can we share now?

Children often focus on everyday questions. Write down what you can answer truthfully.

Where will each parent live?

Where will the child sleep during the first few weeks?

What will happen with school, daycare, activities, or transportation?

When will the child see or speak with each parent?

What will happen with pets, important belongings, birthdays, holidays, or upcoming plans?

What do we not know yet? How will we explain that honestly?
"We do not know every detail yet. We will tell you what we know as soon as we can. Right now, we do know that

1 Parent Conversation Planning Sheet

Continued

STEP 4: Prepare for likely questions

Your child may ask questions immediately, later that night, or days afterward.

Your child may ask...	Our calm, truthful response
"Is this my fault?"	"No. Children do not cause parents to separate. This is an adult decision."
"Are you getting back together?"	"We have decided not to live together as a couple. We will both continue to be your parents."
"Where will I live?"	
"Will I still see both of you?"	
"Will I have to change schools?"	
"What will happen to our pet?"	
"Can I still see my friends?"	
Other question: _____	

STEP 5: Plan for feelings, not just words

Your child may cry, become angry, ask practical questions, become quiet, change the subject, or appear unaffected. These reactions can all be understandable.

How will we respond if our child cries?

How will we respond if our child becomes angry?

How will we respond if our child says, "I do not care"?

How will we respond if our child does not want to talk?

A helpful phrase to keep available

"You do not have to talk right now. You may have questions later, and you can always come back to us."

1 Parent Conversation Planning Sheet

Continued

STEP 6: What will happen after the conversation?

☐ We will keep routines as predictable as possible.

☐ We will avoid asking our child to choose sides or carry messages.

☐ We will avoid criticizing the other parent in front of our child.

☐ We will tell a trusted teacher, school counsellor, daycare educator, or caregiver only what they need to know to support our child.

☐ We will check in again within the next few days.

☐ We will make space for questions more than once.

Our next check-in with our child will be:

Adults who can support our child:

A practical routine or comfort plan we want to protect this week:

Reminder

A child may return to the same questions more than once. This does not necessarily mean that you have explained it badly. Repetition can be a way children make sense of a major change over time.

A steady, simple message can be enough for today.

Children benefit most from truthful information, reassurance, predictable routines, and repeated opportunities to ask questions.

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