Supporting Children Through Separation or Divorce

Two Homes Transition Checklist for Parents

For parents and caregivers

Moving between two homes can be emotionally demanding for children, even when both homes are loving and safe. This checklist is designed to make transitions more predictable and reduce the chance that children feel caught in the middle.

Not every item will fit every family. Use what is realistic and appropriate.

A. Create Predictable Routines

- ☐ Use a shared calendar that your child can see, when developmentally appropriate.
- ☐ Tell your child about upcoming transitions in advance.
- ☐ Keep handover times and locations consistent where possible.
- ☐ Let your child know who will pick them up and when.
- ☐ Use clear language rather than vague promises.
- ☐ Keep school, activities, bedtime, meals, and homework routines as stable as possible.
- ☐ Prepare your child for changes to the schedule before they happen.

The child's current transition schedule:

_____

_____

The visual calendar or routine we will use:

_____

B. Help Children Feel They Belong in Both Homes

- ☐ Make space for the child's clothes, toiletries, books, and comfort items in both homes.
- ☐ Avoid making the child feel like a visitor in either home.
- ☐ Let the child bring comfort items between homes when helpful.
- ☐ Keep duplicates of essential items where possible.
- ☐ Include the child in age-appropriate decisions about their room or belongings.
- ☐ Make sure the child knows they do not need to "pack their whole life" for every transition.

Comfort items my child may want to bring between homes:

_____

Items to keep in both homes:

☐ Toothbrush and toiletries	☐ Pajamas
☐ School supplies	☐ Medication, if applicable
☐ Favourite books	☐ Comfort object or stuffed animal
☐ Clothing	☐ Sports or activity equipment
☐ Other: _____	

C. Keep Children Out of Adult Conflict

☐ Do not use the child as a messenger.
☐ Do not ask the child to report on the other parent.
☐ Do not ask the child to keep secrets from the other parent.
☐ Do not criticize, mock, or blame the other parent in front of the child.
☐ Do not ask the child to choose sides.
☐ Do not discuss legal, financial, dating, betrayal, or parenting disputes with the child.
☐ Use adult-to-adult communication methods whenever possible.
☐ Keep handovers brief, calm, and focused on the child.

A phrase to remember:

“Adult problems need adult solutions. Children should not have to carry them.”

D. Prepare for Handover Days

Some children become quiet, irritable, tearful, clingy, overly energetic, or physically uncomfortable around transitions. These reactions may reflect stress, anticipation, loyalty concerns, or the ordinary difficulty of changing environments.

Before a transition, consider:

☐ Tell the child what will happen next.
☐ Give enough notice without repeatedly building anxiety.
☐ Allow time for packing, food, bathroom needs, and emotional settling.
☐ Avoid starting arguments or difficult discipline conversations immediately before handover.
☐ Keep the goodbye simple and reassuring.
☐ Avoid asking, “Do you want to go?” in ways that make the child feel responsible for the adult arrangement.

A helpful goodbye phrase:

“I love you. I will see you on _____. You can call or message me at _____.”

My family’s goodbye phrase:

_____

E. Support Communication With Both Parents

Where safe and appropriate:

☐ Establish predictable times for calls, video chats, or messages.

☐ Keep calls child-focused and free from pressure.
☐ Do not make the child feel guilty for enjoying time with the other parent.
☐ Allow the child to miss the other parent without taking it personally.
☐ Respect that children may want privacy when speaking with the other parent.

Our communication plan between visits:

_____

_____

F. Notice Signs Your Child May Need More Support

Many children show temporary stress during separation and transition. Consider additional support if changes are persistent, severe, or interfering with daily life.

☐ Ongoing nightmares, sleep disruption, or severe separation anxiety
☐ Persistent sadness, withdrawal, hopelessness, or loss of interest
☐ Major changes in eating, school attendance, learning, or friendships
☐ Frequent intense anger, panic, aggression, or emotional shutdown
☐ Repeated self-blame or statements of worthlessness
☐ Fear of a parent, disclosures of harm, or concerns about safety
☐ Self-harm, statements about wanting to die, or other urgent safety concerns

Trusted supports for our child:

_____

Professional support we may consider:

☐ Family physician
☐ Child therapist
☐ School counsellor
☐ School social worker
☐ Parenting coordinator or family professional
☐ Other: _____

Final Reminder for Parents

Your child does not need you to make separation painless. They need you to make it less confusing, less lonely, and less likely to become their responsibility.

The most protective messages are often the simplest:

“This is not your fault.”

“You do not have to choose sides.”

“You can love both of us.”

“You can ask questions whenever you need to.”

“We will keep taking care of you.”