

Eyes on



## Divorce and separation

Paying attention to your child's needs



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
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*child development*



***“The first few months after a divorce or separation are a very stressful period. Your patience, consistency and discipline are likely to suffer. Your child may be affected by these changes.”***

## What do we know?

- Divorce and separation can trigger intense negative emotions in your child. He may feel sad, angry, guilty and confused. Your child may worry about what is going to happen to him. However, many children do not talk about these feelings and worries with their parents.
- The first few months after a divorce or separation are a very stressful period. Your patience, consistency and discipline are likely to suffer. Your child may be affected by these changes.
- Most children from divorced or separated parents adjust well to the new arrangements, and do not experience any serious, long-term negative consequences even though divorce is stressful for everyone in the shorter term.
- However, children of divorced or separated parents are more likely than other children to have problems in school, low self-esteem and problems adjusting in general. In the long term, they are more likely to abuse drugs, have run-ins with the law, get pregnant at a young age, and have money, emotional, health and relationship problems as adults.
- Some factors can worsen the negative effects of divorce or separation. These factors include: conflicts between parents, not enough supervision, money problems, and a lack of stability at home.
- The exact amount of time that you both spend with your child doesn't influence your child's development in the long term. What matters is that you both love your child, work together as parents, and, to the extent you can, be involved in your child's education, play, discipline and care.
- Some programs help children and their parents to deal with divorce and separation. Programs for children help them manage stress and express their feelings. Programs for parents help them coparent, build a good relationship with their child, discipline their child and control their emotions.

## Paying attention to...

## What can be done?

... your child's needs at different ages.

- From 0-3, your child will benefit from predictable and responsive caregiving and from access to both parents. Frequent and brief contact is better than overnight stays.
- By age 4, overnight stays can help strengthen the bond between your child and the other parent.

... the way you communicate with your child.

- Use daily routines (e.g., meals) to listen openly to your child's feelings.
- Be emotionally sensitive, especially during transitions to different houses.
- Hug your child often and tell him that you love him.
- Enrol your child in a program to help him learn to deal with stress and express his emotions.

... how you and your ex-partner collaborate in parenting your child.

- Avoid making changes to your child's routine.
- Learn how to deal with conflicts.
- Set, explain, and enforce clear rules.
- Join a parent-focused program to find out more about effective coparenting, emotion regulation and child discipline.

... developing a flexible parenting plan.

- Prioritize your child's needs and modify the plan as your child develops. If possible, provide access to both parents, stability, close ties with siblings and members of the extended family.
- Develop your parenting plan in mediation rather than in court, if possible.

... your own well-being.

- Find healthy ways to cope and release stress.
- Take care of yourself to be an effective parent.
- Wait before getting involved with a new partner.
- Seek professional help when you feel overwhelmed.
- Develop a support network of friends and family.



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## Information

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For a more in-depth understanding of Divorce and separation, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.



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