

Supporting Children Through Separation

It's not easy when a couple separates to know what decision will be best for the whole family.

All families from time to time have some conflict. Research shows that children can manage conflict between their parents when it is not violent, infrequent, can be resolved and they are not to blame.

In fact they can learn good coping skills if they are not too stressed by what is happening in the family.

Parental conflict, not separation, troubles kids the most

Some parents can resolve differences with a separation and allow healing to start. For many, conflict grows around the time of separation and continues long after divorce. This is very stressful for both children and the parents

- Ensure both parents have meaningful involvement in their child/ren's lives
- Protect the child/ren from harm, including exposure to family violence
- Ensure parents meet their responsibilities concerning their child/ren.

Children who cope best in this situation have parents who:

- Keep their conflict away from the children as much as possible
- Listen to how the children feel about things
- Tell the children they are trying to sort it out
- Explain that it's not the children's fault.

As well as family conflict, children can face issues such as financial stress, loss of loved ones, change of school, puberty and peer pressures.

Every child reacts differently and some handle the changes better than others.

Our aim is to help them understand and manage the changes they are experiencing.

The outcomes we aim to achieve for children and young people are:

- An increased ability to better understand and manage their feelings
- Reduction of self-blame and feeling responsible for stopping their parents' conflict
- Decreased levels of distress and challenging behaviours
- Improved communication and problem solving
- An increased ability to trust and form healthy relationships.

Some important factors to consider when parenting after separation are:

- Dealing with your own feelings
 - Make sure they do not control your behaviour
 - Find a way to communicate your feelings either to a friend or a counsellor
 - Take time for you
- Communication
 - Make communication respectful, consistent, clear and purposeful
 - Keep the children the focal point of the discussions
 - Make requests instead of statements
 - Listen, remain calm and if you become uncomfortable, resume the conversation another time
- Make important decisions as a team
 - Be consistent as possible in your approaches to parenting particularly around boundaries, discipline and schedules
 - Decide who will be the primary contact for medical needs, education,
 - Decide on who has responsibility for each of these things as well
 - Make an agreed way to record shared expenses
 - Be respectful in relation to transitions with the children, be on time and take turns with responsibilities

Above all, keep the best interests of your children first

Available services to support children

We provide a range of services to support children from preventative education to individual counselling.

As part of our **Family Dispute Resolution** service, we offer school aged children an individual session where a specially trained Child Counsellor may ask about things such as:

- What they think about the separation/divorce
- What they would like to see happen
- What questions they have for their Mum or Dad
- Whether they would like us to talk with their Mum and Dad about anything.

This session is not counselling and is referred to as **Child Informed Mediation**. The purpose of this is to make sure each child has his or her wishes, unspoken developmental needs and experiences of the family separation better understood by their parents. This helps parents make more appropriate decisions affecting children and for many parents, is a turning point in resolving their dispute. Children are never asked to make decisions.

Individual Counselling and **Sibling Counselling** provides the child with an opportunity to express their feelings in a safe environment. Professionals utilise a range of techniques such as drawing, play and story-telling.

Education Programs

We have developed a range of education and skills training programs for primary and secondary school aged children/young people.

Group work is particularly helpful in getting children to realise they are not alone in their situation. Knowing that others have similar experiences and thoughts creates room for support and understanding. Group sessions are run as short courses and as school holiday programs either in schools or at FMC premises, at minimal cost.

Post Service Follow Up

Following closure of your service, Better Place Australia will contact you in approximately 3-6 months' time via a short email with a questionnaire to follow up on your progress.

If you require assistance before this time please contact **1800 639 523**.

Interpreters



You can ask us for an interpreter in your language.

What Do I Do Now?

If you feel your situation would benefit from Family Dispute Resolution or Child Counselling or you would just like to know more, please call **1800 639 523** or send an email to enquiry@betterplace.com.au with your contact details.