

TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

Written by Dr Kaylene Henderson, Child Psychiatrist

Parental separation and divorce is increasingly common and inevitably impacts on all family members. Children, particularly young ones, can become frightened, confused and worried that they are somehow responsible.

Talking to your child about divorce and separation can be very difficult.

Here are some tips that you might find helpful when speaking with your child about your separation or divorce:

- Try not to keep your impending separation a secret or let her know just at the last minute.
- Sit down with your child and, ideally, with your partner, to let your child know about your separation or divorce together. You will then both be able to answer any questions she might have.
- Keep the information simple and be sure to specifically tell your child that your relationship breakup is not her fault.
- Do not blame your partner or discuss each other's faults with your child.
- Try to avoid arguments in front of your child. Research shows that children fare best in these challenging situations when their parents avoid conflict and commit to cooperating on behalf of their children.
- Acknowledge that this will be a difficult and upsetting time for all of you. You all feel sad that you will no longer be together as a couple and your child can come to both of you with her feelings if she is finding this new change hard to adjust to.
- Reassure your child that even though you won't be a couple, you and your partner will always be her parents. Your love for your child has not and will never change. Nor will your interest and involvement in your child's life.

- Don't lean on your child for help or comfort. You will need your own support through this challenging time and it's important not to add to the stress experienced by your child.
- Read books on this subject with your child which can help normalise his/her experience and bring comfort and understanding. A list of children's books that deal with this topic can be found here: <http://www.littleparachutes.com/subcategory.php?sid=15>



Children often find the separation of their parents difficult to adjust to. Sometimes this is reflected in their moods, sleep, appetite and behaviour. If you or your child are struggling to cope with your separation or divorce, it's best to seek professional help. When children learn helpful coping strategies to assist them in dealing with stressful situations, they acquire useful skills that they can use throughout their lives.

To find out more about Dr Kaylene Henderson and her popular resources, go to: www.drkaylenehenderson.com. Or to download her online Advice Packs on a range of topics such as anxiety, resilience, school readiness and tantrums, head to A Dose of Awesomeness: www.adoseofawesomeness.com.