

Questions & Answers about separation for Children



Family Court Counselling

Introduction

Children are usually unsure of what is happening when their parents separate. Parents may be unsure themselves and find it hard to answer their children's questions.

This booklet attempts to answer the most commonly asked questions in simple terms a young person can understand.





Marriage and living together – what is it all about anyway?

When a person gets married or decides to live with someone they think their relationship will last forever.

However lots of parents find that after a while their love is fading away. People fall out of love as well as “falling in love”.

If you asked all the children in your class about their parents you would probably find quite a few of them have parents who are separated or divorced.

This means a lot of children are growing up living with parents who live separately. Even if your parents do not live together you are still part of a family.

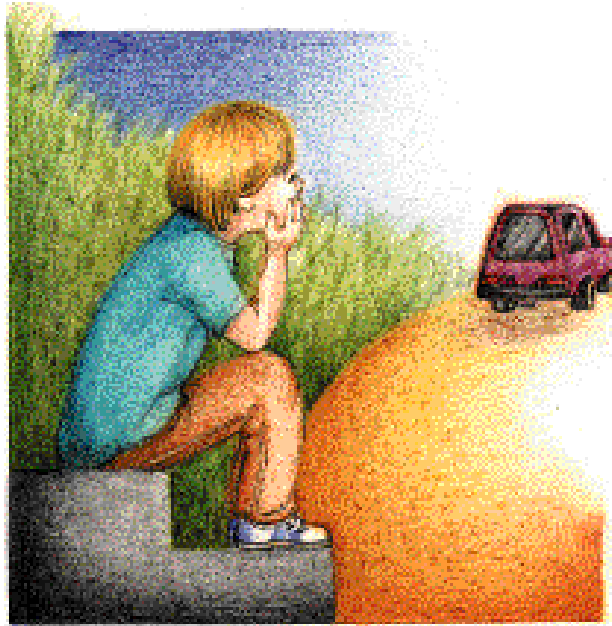
Why are Mum and Dad fighting?

The reason is that Mum and Dad want different things.

Mum might want to do things that Dad does not want to do. Dad might want to do things that Mum does not want to do.

We all change as we get older. You are a different person now from the way you were two years ago. Parents understand how children grow up and change.

Parents grow up and change too. Your Mum is a different person now compared to before you came along. So is your dad. Both your parents are different people now from when they first met and they might want different things now.



Why do I feel unhappy?

Many things in your life have changed. One of your parents might not live with you. You may have moved house. You may be going to a new school and be making new friends. Mum and Dad might have less money than before.

Even if these things haven't happened you probably feel different and you might find this hard to talk about.

Like a lot of other kids in your position you might be sad because you don't see one of your parents as much as you used to or as much as you want to.

You might be worried that Mum or Dad won't work things out and feel scared about what is happening.

Is it my fault?

Definitely not. It is not your fault if your parents decide not to live together. It means that they have grown in different ways and now they find it hard to remember good things they felt about each other. Parents may blame each other for the changes but the chances are that both have changed a lot and don't realise it.

Whose side am I on?

It is very easy to blame someone else when something goes wrong. We all do this sometimes. Usually it is not just one person's fault when parents separate, but there will be times when you are angry with one or both of them. Sometimes when parents are angry with each other they say things about each other that can upset children. Children don't usually like hearing bad things about their parents. Children often feel that both parents want them to be on their

side in an argument. This can be confusing. Remember that although parents may no longer love each other they still go on loving their children.

What can I do?

Although you might not want to upset or worry your parents it is important to ask them questions. You should also tell them things that you don't like about what is happening, or things that worry you. Some children talk to other relatives or friends.

Writing a letter or making a 'phone call is a good way to keep in touch with the parent who does not live with you. Parents who no longer live with their children really enjoy keeping in touch with them. It is also important to still do things that you enjoy, so tell your parents when you need to go to something, such as a party or a sporting event. They can take you just like when you all lived together.





Where am I going to live?

You probably feel sad and confused about your parents separating, but most of all you want to know what is going to happen to you. The best thing is for both parents to sit down with their children and tell them what they have decided to do.

There are no rules to say when you should spend time with each parent. It is up to your parents to decide but they might want to know what you think about it.

If you feel strongly about how much time you want to be with each parent, then you could tell both parents what you would like to happen, or you might want to talk to a friend or relative about what worries you. Usually it is up to your parents to make the final decision about these things.

Sometimes parents cannot agree where you should live. Then they can talk to a mediator who may help them to decide. Mediators have special training to help families try to work out problems.

The mediator may also want to talk to you or perhaps you may want the mediator to help tell your parents how you feel. That is okay. Tell your parents you would like to see a mediator and they might be able to arrange this.

Sometimes parents are so hurt and angry at each other that they still cannot agree. Then they can ask a judge to make a decision.

Many things are hard to arrange if parents live a long way away from each other or if they stay angry at each other.

Judges might make decisions that parents find hard to make together. That might include when you see each parent.

It may be hard not to take sides while your parents are trying to sort things out because sometimes parents want others to see things the way they do and they don't want to be blamed for the separation.

Sometimes kids blame themselves but you have to remember it is not your fault. It takes two people to make a relationship work and there are usually many reasons why parents decide to separate.

Is there anything good about separation?

Yes there is.

Parents who spend a lot of their time fighting when they are together may have more time for you when apart. You can have the best of both parents even if you cannot have them together.



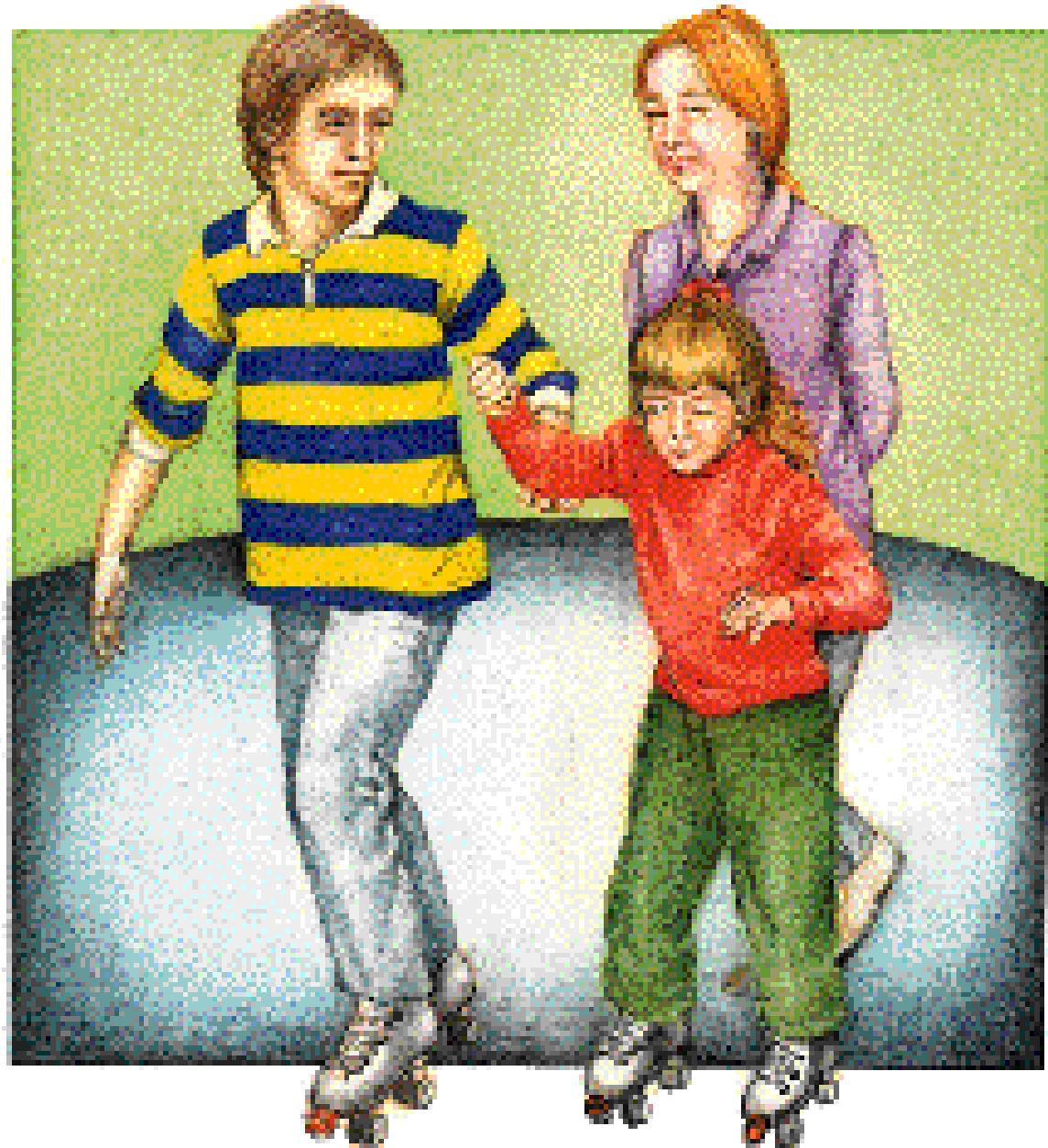
It can take time, but often when parents are separated or divorced they don't fight as much and are able to talk to each other again. This does not mean they have forgotten all the things that pushed them apart, but they might not feel so upset or angry with each other.

Sometimes you will get to celebrate special occasions twice or celebrate things in new ways.

Do I have to like Mum's or Dad's friends?

After parents have separated they often feel the need to be with another adult. As much as you love your mum and dad they still need adult friendships.

You may feel that being friendly to your parent's new friend will upset your other parent or make them angry. Decide how you feel about your parent's friends by what they do and say to you. It is okay for people to have different opinions.



Will things get better?

Everything might look like a big mess while mum and dad are sorting things out but slowly your life will settle down and there will be lots of interesting things to do with both parents. Mum and Dad may have separated but remember they still love you and it is o.k. for you to keep loving both of them.

