

# Dealing with your emotions after separation

➤ a supporting separated families guide



- Understand where you are on your emotional journey
- Tools and tips to help you move on
- Help children deal with their feelings
- When and how to get professional help

# Sorting out separation

Web  
app

**Get help** with issues around your break-up with an easy-to-use web app **tailored to your needs** including:

- children and parenting
- relationships and conflict
- health
- housing
- work and benefits
- money
- legal

Over 50  
organisations  
who can help

Expert help at  
the click of a  
button

Find us on many websites  
including [cmoptions.org](http://cmoptions.org)



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Help and Support  
for Separated Families

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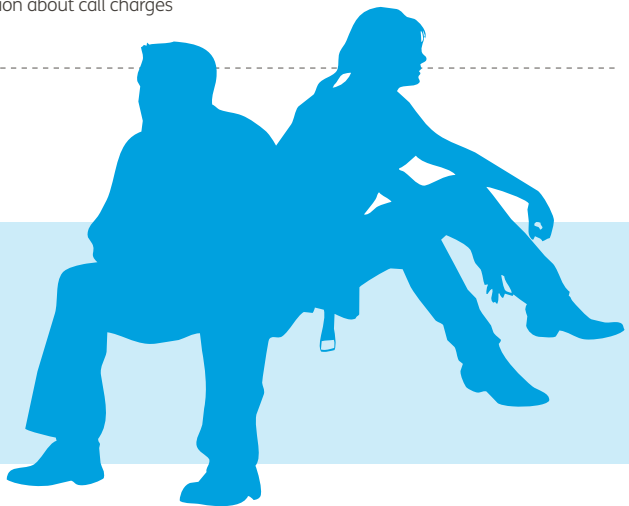
# Child Maintenance Options

is a free and impartial service that provides information, tools and support to help you make informed choices about child maintenance arrangements. We can:

- help parents set up a child maintenance arrangement between themselves (a 'family-based' arrangement) and give them the support to keep it going
- give you information about, and help with, other types of child maintenance arrangement
- offer practical information on a range of subjects linked to separation, such as housing, work and money, and put you in touch with organisations who can give you more specialist help and advice.

**Get in touch with Child Maintenance Options on 0800 988 0988\* or online at [cmoptions.org](https://cmoptions.org)**

\*See inside back cover for information about call charges



## Supporting separating and separated families

Most children, in most circumstances, benefit from having both parents involved in their lives in a positive way, whether they live with them or not. Child maintenance is one way of making this happen, but it's only part of the story. We have written this guide to help parents build relationships and work together, to make sure their children receive as much support as possible - financial and otherwise.

The information in this leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We recommend that you also get independent professional advice which applies to your circumstances. You can see a list of specialist organisations that may be able to help at the back of this guide. Although we have taken every care in preparing this guide, we cannot guarantee that information is accurate, up-to-date or complete, because it can change over time.

Child Maintenance Options does not endorse the content of any external websites.

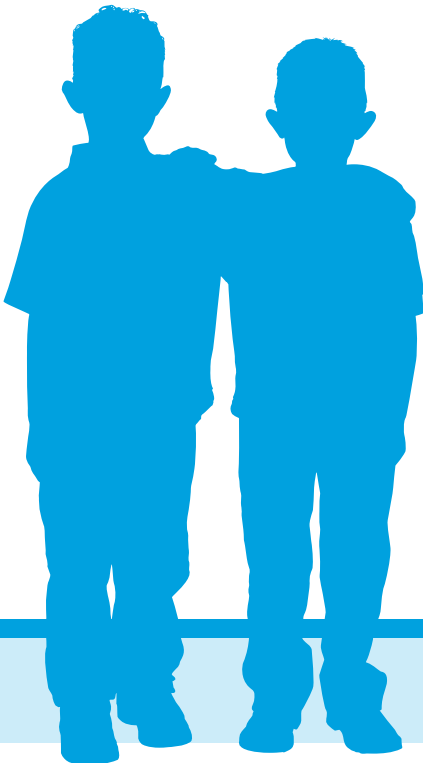


# About this guide

This guide is for parents who are trying to deal with their feelings about a separation or break-up. It includes practical ideas about how to cope with difficult emotions and how to move forward in a healthy way.

## It can help you to:

- understand that how you feel is completely normal
- have a workable parenting relationship with your ex-partner in future, even if you are having problems at the moment
- know when you might need more professional help, and where to find it.



# How to use this guide

When a relationship breaks down it can leave you feeling many different emotions that can be hard to get to grips with. The information in this guide aims to help you deal with your emotions, so that you can feel more positive about the future.

You may decide to read all this guide in one go. Or, if you want, you can read one section at a time, and have a break in between. It's completely up to you. If you'd rather read one section at a time, then take a look below to help you decide the best place to start.

- **Feelings all over the place?** Section 1 can help you start to understand your emotions.
- **Struggling to let go of the past?** You'll find practical ideas to help you move forward on page 23.
- **Overwhelmed by your feelings and need some extra support?** See page 30 for information on the help you can get.
- **Worried about how your child is coping?** Turn to page 26 for more about helping your child deal with their feelings.


It's normal for separation to cause conflict, but in most cases it's possible to work through this so that you can both be the parents your child needs.

However, if there is a risk of violence or abuse this may not be possible. If these issues affect you, you might want to talk to someone who can give you specialist advice. Child Maintenance Options can help you get in touch with organisations that can do this.

# Child Maintenance Options offers a parents deal with common separation

## How to order our other leaflets



You can order our free leaflets by calling **0800 988 0988\***. They can also be downloaded from our website: **[cmoptions.org](http://cmoptions.org)**



**Information for parents with the day-to-day care of their child**

- a child maintenance decisions guide



- Understand your child maintenance choices
- Tools to help you set up a child maintenance arrangement



**Information for parents living apart from their child**

- a child maintenance decisions guide



- Understand your child maintenance choices
- Tools to help you set up a child maintenance arrangement



**Helping someone you know**



- a child maintenance decisions guide

- Help parents make decisions about child maintenance arrangements
- Understand the role you can play
- Know about the help available for parents




**Family-based arrangement form**

- a child maintenance decisions guide



**Child maintenance and staying safe**

- a child maintenance decisions guide



**Talking about money**

- a child maintenance decisions guide

- Take control of your finances
- Think about the types of financial support your child might need
- Tips for talking about money with your child's other parent





# range of practical guides to help on issues.

### Practical support for separating parents

• a supporting separated families guide




- Help with making arrangements with your children's other parent
- Information about your housing and employment rights
- Where to find more help and support

Child Maintenance options

### Parenting together after separation

• a supporting separated families guide




- Building a working parenting relationship with your ex
- Practical tools to help you parent together successfully

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### Getting in contact with your child's other parent

• a supporting separated families guide




- Understand common fears and concerns
- Tips to help you find someone and get in touch
- When and how the statutory child maintenance services can help

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### Managing conflict with your child's other parent

• a supporting separated families guide




- Learning how to deal with conflict
- Practical tools to help you avoid arguments or have fewer arguments

Child Maintenance options



### How to complain about Child Maintenance Options

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### How Child Maintenance Options uses your personal information

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# Understanding your emotions

## You're only human

Emotions are an important part of being human. They are a natural reaction to the things that happen to us when we experience something good or bad.

If you've gone through a break-up, you'll probably have some negative feelings about it, and that's okay.

## Everyone's different

Everyone deals with situations in life differently. Some people can come to terms with a break-up quite quickly, while others find the same thing hard to accept.

Research has shown that how well you cope with your feelings may depend on a few different things, including:

- the state of your relationship when you separated. People who argue a lot often feel less shocked about the break-up
- your relationships with other people. People with lots of family and friends supporting them may find it easier to get used to their new situation
- your physical and mental health. People who have low self-esteem can experience more stress and anxiety. Not getting enough sleep or being stressed about other things can also make it harder to cope
- the way your relationship ends. Your emotions may be different depending on whether you've grown apart, reached a 'crisis point' in your relationship or something completely unexpected has happened.

You may find you and your ex-partner seem to be feeling and reacting very differently after you break up, which can be confusing and sometimes hurtful.

It's actually very normal though. People react to separation in similar ways, but they often do so at different times and to different degrees. This can leave both people feeling very misunderstood. So, if you can, try not to be too hard either on yourself or the other person.

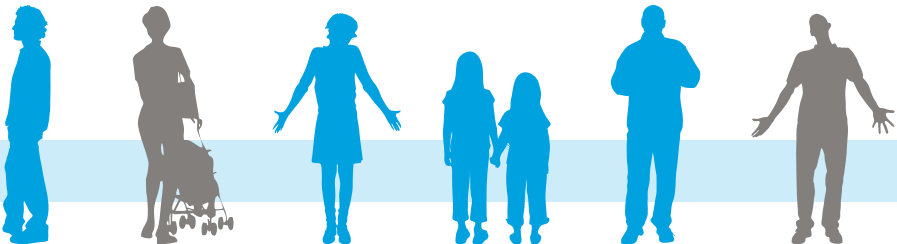


You can get more help understanding this from the Parent Connection website. Go to [www.theparentconnection.org.uk](http://www.theparentconnection.org.uk) and take a look at the articles 'The leaver and the left' and 'What to keep in mind when separating'. You'll find them in the Separating section.

## Dealing with negative emotions

While it's natural to feel bad for a while after separation, eventually you'll want to deal with those negative feelings. Otherwise it will be really hard to let go of the past and look to the future.

You're not alone – many people have felt like you do and managed to turn things around. Remind yourself that you can take control of your emotions.



We don't have all the answers and there may be no 'quick fixes'. But there are lots of things you can do to make it easier on yourself. One of the most important things you can do is this:

### **Ask for help**

Simply talking things through with someone may help you to cope with your emotions. Make sure that you confide in someone who has your best interests at heart, and not someone who's going to say "I told you it would never work".

If you want to talk to someone outside your circle of friends and family, why not find out about local support groups or talk to a health professional such as your GP or health visitor?

If you're looking for information or advice, or simply want to chat about how you feel, many websites can also help you speak to experts and other parents in similar situations.

## Working out how you feel

The first step towards dealing with your emotions is to identify exactly what it is you're feeling. If you're experiencing a lot of different emotions, this can be a hard thing to do. But it's worth taking the time to try, because it can make it easier to express how you feel and move forward.

The following activity may help you work out how you're feeling.

### Activity

Circle the words that best describe how you feel. This should help you see which 'stage of separation' you are in. Once you've done that, you'll have a better idea of what you're dealing with.

1	2	3
Disbelieving	Uncertain	Cross
Panicked	Unsure	Unforgiving
Overwhelmed	Indifferent	Hostile
Confused	Rejected	Bitter
Hurt	Dismissive	Jealous
Fearful	Questioning	Mean
4	5	6
Guilty	Empty	Determined
Regretful	Hopeless	Focused
Sorry	Lonely	Calm
Ashamed	Distressed	Understanding
Weak	Unhappy	Strong
Confused	Scared	Motivated

## Next steps

- If you've circled more words in the first four boxes, it sounds like some negative feelings are still holding you back. The next chapter can help you work through the different stages of separation.
- If you've circled more words in box 5, then sections 5 and 6 explain more about these feelings and where you can get extra help. You'll find a list of organisations starting at page 37.
- If you've circled more words in the last box, it sounds like you're heading in the right direction. But boosting your self-esteem is still a good idea. Turn to page 23 for some practical ideas.

Don't worry if your feelings are all over the place at the moment. It's common to feel a mixture of emotions from the different boxes. Some days you may feel you've moved forward a stage only to move back again. Again, this is very normal.



# The stages of separation

It's likely that you'll experience some pretty difficult emotions as you go through separation. This is perfectly normal, although it might feel at times that your world is falling apart. Some experts\* say that there are a number of different stages that separating parents (and children) go through. The five below are common ones:

- Stage 1 – shock
- Stage 2 – denial
- Stage 3 – anger
- Stage 4 – grief
- Stage 5 – acceptance

If you're reading this guide, then you're probably at one of the five stages now.

But understanding what stage you're at could help you feel more able to understand and deal with your own emotions. The following pages give you some practical tips.

Remember that these stages are just a guide to how you may be feeling – different people go through them in different ways. People can also move back and forwards between stages, and find that some last longer than others.

## Stage 1: Shock

Shock is a natural reaction when something shocking or stressful happens. The end of a relationship can cause huge feelings of loss, and may leave you feeling insecure and anxious for a while.

\* See The Guide for Separated Parents: Putting your children first, Karen and Nick Woodall (publisher: Platkus 2007).

This is especially true if the separation was unexpected, or left you feeling powerless to change things.

Shock causes all sorts of emotional reactions. For example, it's common to feel very frightened about what might happen in the future. You might also be feeling confused, disbelieving, numb, edgy or withdrawn.

These feelings do fade over time, as you start to deal with the shock, but in the early days it's important to take extra care of yourself.

- Try to spend at least 20 minutes every day doing something you enjoy. Go for a walk, watch TV or do whatever else helps you unwind.
- Get plenty of sleep. This is really important to help you start feeling emotionally stronger. How much is

'enough' is up to you, but most people need around six to eight hours.

- Making healthy choices about your diet can help you feel emotionally stronger as well. You're doing something positive for yourself, which lifts your self-esteem. And a good diet helps your brain and body to work well.
- Give yourself time. The flurry of emotions and mood swings you may be going through can make it feel like you're going crazy, but it's actually very natural. You don't need to push your feelings to one side or force yourself to get back to normal straight away. Instead, make a conscious effort to allow yourself space to deal with how you feel.





Shock can sometimes lead to stress, making it hard to sleep or relax. But it doesn't have to be that way. For tips on how to manage your stress levels, turn to page 30.

## Stage 2: Denial

Denial is a natural way of coping with things that we don't want to deal with. Instead of facing up to the situation, we pretend it's not really happening.

If you're in denial about your old relationship being over, you may start to use conflict to stay connected to your child's other parent. And sometimes, you may start to convince yourself that if things were different the problem would go away. This is called 'bargaining'.

### Common concerns:

- This is just a passing phase, they'll come back when they get over it.
- At least when we argue, I know they're feeling something.
- We've had ups and downs before, surely we'll get back together?
- If they knew how I felt, I bet they'd realise it's all a mistake.
- I'd change such and such about myself if they'd just come home.

- Be honest with yourself. Did you ignore signs that there were problems with your relationship? Are you ignoring the situation now because you don't want to believe it's really happening?
- Try to understand what went on under the surface. For example, if you grew apart, think about how you've changed since you first met.
- Take responsibility for your part in the break-up. Most separated parents admit that both parties were at least partly to blame for their break-up.



Mediation can help parents discuss practical arrangements for the future in an open and honest way, which in turn might help you move forwards. Find out more about what it involves in our guide ***Managing conflict with your child's other parent.***

## Stage 3: Anger

These days, we're often told not to show our anger. This means that a lot of people keep their anger bottled up inside, which can lead to health problems like high blood pressure, heart attack and depression. At the opposite end of the scale, many people feel like they can't keep their anger under control.

But like all emotions, anger is a natural reaction to things we're not happy about. And it doesn't have to be a problem – as long as you deal with the reasons behind your anger.



## Look at what makes you angry

When you feel yourself getting angry, stop and think – are you angry about what’s happening now or about what happened in the past?

If you’re angry that the other parent hasn’t brought your child home on time, for example, ask yourself if what you’re really feeling is a loss of control over the situation.

Often, the things parents end up arguing about the most may

cover up deeper issues. But if you can uncover what’s really going on it can help you move forwards.

## Don’t worry about things that aren’t important

Concentrate on what’s important rather than worrying about every little thing that’s annoying you. This will mean you can deal with the more important stuff better. And of course, the most important thing is your child and what’s best for them.



While it’s natural to feel angry, if this turns into outright conflict with your ex-partner, this can be very harmful to children. Our guide ***Managing conflict with your child’s other parent*** can help you spot the warning signs and take steps to deal with conflict before it gets out of hand.

## Stage 4: Grief

Once the reality of your situation has hit home, grief or sadness may follow.

Most people grieve or feel really sad when they lose something or someone important to them. In this case you've lost your old relationship. This may make you feel like you've lost your dreams of the future, your sense of security, or even your sense of who you are. You may have also lost your home, or have had to give up your job.

But it will get better over time, and there are ways to make the healing process easier.

- **Let yourself feel sad**

It's okay to feel sad. In fact, crying releases tension. But try to keep it away from your child. You don't have to pretend everything is completely normal, but they shouldn't have to look after you as well as deal with their own feelings.

- **Give yourself time to recover**

These feelings will pass eventually. If you're still grieving at the moment you might not believe this. There isn't an instant fix, but after a while you'll get to a point where you'll be ready to move on.

**When you do get to this point, try to:**

- get out of the house for a walk, a cup of coffee or just some fresh air
- be around other people – this helps you start to feel part of normal life again
- start smiling – it may sound silly, and you may not feel like it at first, but smiling

encourages others to smile back and may help you feel more positive

- stick to a simple routine – having things to do will help take your mind off things
- do something new – if you feel like you're stuck in a rut, this can help you feel like you're discovering new things about yourself.



Grief can sometimes lead to feelings of depression. If you think that you're suffering from depression you should think about talking to a professional. Turn to page 30 for more information about depression.

## Stage 5: Acceptance

You'll know you've reached the acceptance stage when you're ready to move on with your life and are no longer feeling sad or angry. That doesn't mean you'll have forgotten how painful it felt at the time. But it means there will come a point when you feel ready to accept the separation for what it is, and move on.

There are also a number of things separated parents need to accept about each other and the future. This means coming to terms with the fact that:

- the relationship you had with your ex-partner is over
- your future relationship with them will be different, and based on parenting together
- your child has a right to a relationship with their other parent

- working together as parents is usually the best thing you can do for your child
- both parents need to make changes and compromise to do what's best for their child
- there may be things about the other parent and their new situation that you simply can't control
- things will change as your child grows and goes through different stages.

## Next steps

- No matter which stage you're at, improving your self-esteem can help you to deal with your negative emotions. See across the page for practical ideas on how to do this.
- If you think you need professional help, you can find information about the help you can get on page 33.



# Learning to let go

An important part of dealing with your emotions is letting go of the past. Now that your old relationship is over, try to get into the habit of thinking of yourself as ‘I’ rather than ‘we’. It’s also a good idea to start building new routines and a way of life without your ex-partner.

Boosting your self-esteem and feeling like you’re in control of your new life are the keys to success here.

## Improve your self-esteem

Self-esteem is the way you feel about yourself. Low self-esteem is when you feel bad about yourself, and high self-esteem is when you feel good about yourself.

Separation is one of the things that can lower our self-esteem. Even though the end of your relationship doesn’t make you worth any less, it can sometimes feel that way.

The good news is there are ways to boost your self-esteem. And here are some of them.

### Treat yourself like a good friend

Most of us would like to think that when our friends come to us with their problems, we respond in a positive but honest way. So, when you start to put yourself down, stop yourself and think, “Would I say that to my best mate?”

For example – if you’re searching for reasons for your break-up, you might start to feel guilty about the hours you spent at work. If you’ve got low self-esteem, you might think to yourself, “I’m so selfish no wonder they wanted to leave”.

But if a friend said the same thing to you, you’d probably say, “It wouldn’t hurt you to work a few hours less, but you weren’t the only one responsible for the break-up. He had his faults too”.

The trick here is to start taking your own advice.

## Find something you're good at

Doing something you're good at or enjoy, such as cooking or simply doing the crossword, is a great way to build a sense of achievement. This will boost your self-esteem and make you feel like you can cope with your situation.

Remember though, that some things which seem enjoyable at the time may make you feel worse in the long run – such as eating lots of unhealthy food, drinking alcohol, or even shopping if you're on a tight budget.

## Learn to appreciate your own company

Being alone doesn't always mean that you'll be lonely. Try to learn to enjoy having some time to yourself. Learning how to do things on your own will also give you a sense of achievement.

## Do something to help others

People who help others find that they often become better at coping with challenges in their own life. For one thing, helping other people deal with their problems puts your own into perspective. And doing something good makes you feel, well, good!

You can start small – maybe by finding out about volunteering in your local area. This can be a good way to meet new people and may lead to new opportunities too.

## Think positively

Look for the positives in your life. Write a list of three things at the end of every day that went well, or which you're grateful for or happy about.





## Take control of your new life

### Make an action plan

If you've gone through separation it's common to feel like you have no control over your life.

A practical way of dealing with this is to make an action plan for the months ahead.

The first step is to write down all the things you're happy with, and then write down what areas of your life could do with a bit of work.

Then, write a 'to do' list that will help you do more of the things that make you happy, and to work on the areas you want to improve on.

For example, if you know you struggle with loneliness in the evenings, think of small ways to deal with those feelings. Arrange for a friend to come over once a week, rent a film or borrow some books from the library to take your mind off things, or take up a new interest or hobby.

### Set goals for the future

This can make you think more calmly and start to deal with your emotions. Think about the things you couldn't do while you were in a relationship. For example, you might have given up a hobby or even your career because your partner didn't want you to do it. Now you can do the things you really want to do.

### Next steps

- If your negative emotions are getting worse, you might want to think about getting professional help. See page 33 for information about this.



If you're feeling confident about the future, it might be time to start thinking more about co-parenting. Our guide ***Parenting together after separation*** has lots of information and practical ideas about how to do this.

# Helping children with their feelings

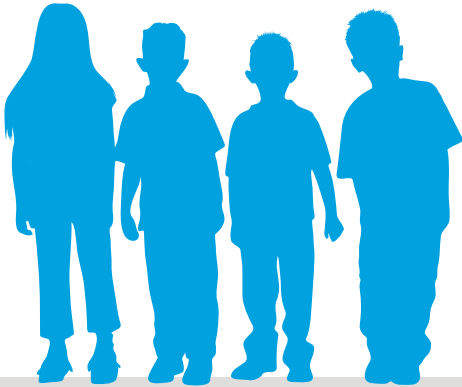
## How children can react to separation

Children can feel many different emotions when their parents separate. They might feel angry, sad, worried, relieved, confused, guilty, embarrassed or nervous.

Many children find it difficult to talk about these kinds of emotions. They may even keep their feelings from you on purpose, especially if they can see you're already upset and don't want to make you feel worse.

But they will probably react in some way, so it's important to keep a close eye on them and react in the right way when they do.

Children's reactions to separation may be different depending on their age. All children are different, but here are some things to watch out for.



## **Aged 2 to 5**

- Your child may be more angry, tearful or sad.
- Boys may become restless, withdrawn or disruptive; girls may try to become 'little adults' and try to take care of either parent, which isn't healthy.
- They may go back to behaviour they had stopped some time ago, such as bedwetting.

## **Aged 6 to 8**

- Your child may feel rejected and unloved.
- You may notice a drop in school performance or hear that they have become disruptive in class.
- Boys will very often miss their father and may not say so.

## **Aged 9 to 11**

- Your child may become angry, especially towards the parent they believe is to blame for the separation.
- They often feel frightened and just want you to get back together again.
- They may have more headaches, sickness or nightmares.

## **Older children**

- Your child may become more independent and focus their energies outside the family while the parents are preoccupied.
- They may drift away from the family and look for approval from their friends.

## Helping them cope

### **Tell them what's happening**

If you say nothing, your child may start to feel insecure and anxious. They may also have their own ideas about the reasons for your separation, including blaming themselves. Think about the age of your child or children when you're deciding what to tell them – a 15 year old will be able to cope with hearing more of the details than a five year old. With younger children, you may still be able to describe the situation in a way that helps them understand that things have changed.

### **Comfort them**

Regularly tell your child that both their parents love them, and that they're not to blame for the separation. Try really hard not to criticise the other parent in front of your child.

### **Make sure they keep in touch with both parents**

Help your child keep in touch with their other parent regularly – unless, of course, this puts them at risk of harm. This could be

a daily phone call or a weekly visit. Try to stick to the arrangement you make.

### **Create new routines – and stick to them**

Children need routine and stability to feel safe and secure. But the shape of your family has changed. So, in time, think about introducing new activities into your lives. If you're only with your child for a few hours every week, there are still lots of things you can do together. For example, trips to the library or the park, or a hobby that they do just with you, like swimming or a particular sport.

### **Ask them to tell you how they feel**

Encourage your child to tell you how they feel. If they're quite young they could describe their feelings by talking or drawing pictures. If they don't want to open up, let it go and try again later – don't push or try to force them to talk. It's better to let them know they can talk when they're ready because, like you, they will probably feel different things at different times.

### Let them talk to someone else

Being able to talk to someone other than a parent is sometimes very helpful for children. Grandparents or other relatives, friends, teachers or even a counsellor can all offer support.

### Be careful not to give mixed signals

Make it clear that the separation is for good. For example, while it might be nice to have their other parent round for tea, be sure to tell your child that they are only there for the evening.

### Remain an adult

Do your best to keep your anger, hurt and other feelings about the separation away from your child. You don't want them to worry about your adult problems, however old they are.

**If you're concerned about your child and the feelings they may be having, see your GP for advice. Or, if your child is under five, you can discuss this with a health visitor. When they reach school age you can talk about it with the school nurse.**

**You may also want to tell the school that your child might be upset by changes at home for a while.**

## Next steps

- If you think you or your child need professional help, you can find information about the help you can get on page 33.



You can get more advice about who to tell when you separate, and who can support you, from a booklet called ***Parenting plans: A guide for separating parents*** which is free to download from [www.nfm.org.uk](http://www.nfm.org.uk)



The Young Minds Parents Helpline can provide confidential support for anyone worried about the emotional problems or behaviour of a child or young person. You can find their contact details in the back of this guide.

# Dealing with stress and depression

If you've recently separated, are separating, or even if you've been separated a while, the chances are that you'll be feeling stressed. How much stress you're feeling will depend on your personal situation.

## Recognising the signs of stress

Being stressed can affect the way you think, the way you feel and the way you act. It can also show itself as physical pain or discomfort.

<b>Thoughts</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative attitude</li><li>• Making bad decisions</li><li>• Worrying all the time</li><li>• Moodiness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Loneliness</li><li>• Isolation</li><li>• Depression</li></ul>
<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Physical signs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting things off</li><li>• Avoiding people</li><li>• Over-eating or not eating properly</li><li>• Drinking too much</li><li>• Smoking or taking drugs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Headaches or neck pains</li><li>• Stomach upsets or feeling sick</li><li>• Dizziness</li><li>• Chest pains</li><li>• Rapid heartbeat</li><li>• Panic attacks</li><li>• Problems sleeping</li></ul>

## Stress-busting tips

You can use a lot of the tips we've already talked about when dealing with stress. For example:

- sharing your worries with friends and family
- thinking positively
- taking some time out to relax
- taking up a new hobby, for example swimming, yoga or gardening.

But if you only do one thing, then a golden rule for beating stress is:

### Get some exercise

Even a little bit of exercise releases chemicals in your brain that lift your mood. This can help you to sleep better and have more energy. Exercise will also help you clear your thoughts so you can deal with your problems more calmly.

Choose an exercise that you enjoy. If it helps, do it with a friend or listen to music at the same time. Aim for 30 minutes, three times a week.

Even a brisk walk can help lift your mood. If you don't take care of yourself, stress may lead to depression.



## What is depression?

Depression is a feeling of continued sadness and powerlessness. It can affect many different aspects of your life, from your appetite to your sleep.

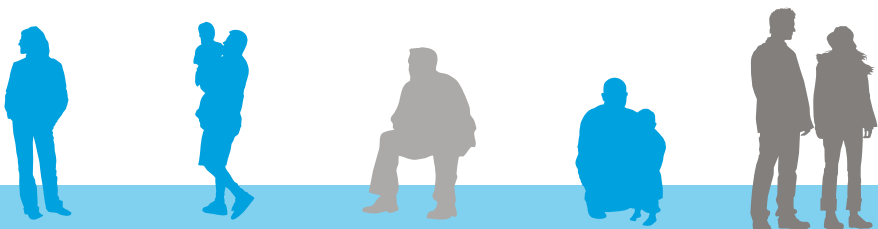
Feelings of depression can be common among parents who live apart. The end of a relationship with the other parent, missing a child, trying to cope alone and parenting apart may all bring on depression.

## Dealing with depression

If you're suffering from depression, tell someone. There are plenty of people who are ready to help you. There's absolutely no shame in asking for help – it's much better to reach out to someone than to suffer in silence.

## Next steps

- No matter how you're feeling, improving your self-esteem will help you to deal with your negative emotions. Turn to page 23 for practical ideas on how to do this.
- If you think you need professional help, you can find information about the help you can get on the next page.





# Getting professional help

If your negative feelings are getting worse as time goes on, if they start to affect you physically, or if they affect your relationships with other people, you might want to think about talking to a professional. This is sometimes called ‘talking therapy’.

## How to get help

**See your GP (or, if you are pregnant or have a small child, your midwife or health visitor)**

If you think you may need professional help, your first step should be to see your GP – or another health professional you feel comfortable with – and tell them how you’re feeling.

The Birth to Five guide, which is free for all parents from the Department of Health, has this advice about getting help:



## Pay for private counselling\*

You can choose to pay for your therapy privately if you want to. A one-hour session can cost between £40 and £100. If you want to go private, it's a good idea to ask your GP if they can recommend a local private therapist.

There are no rules about who can advertise 'talking therapy' services. So it's really important to check that the therapist you choose is listed on one of the registers of approved practitioners.



For more information on counselling and to find an approved or registered therapist in your area go to [www.nhs.uk/conditions/counselling](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/counselling)

## Charities

Some charities offer cheap or free support.

### These include:

- Mind – for mental health problems
- Relate for Parents – for counselling on relationships and co-parenting
- Samaritans – if you're in a crisis and need to speak to someone straight away.

You can find the contact details for these charities in the back of this guide.



\* Correct as of September 2011

## Other options

Some employers provide counselling for their employees and many colleges and universities offer free therapy to students who need it.

## The kinds of help available

There are many types of counselling and therapy to help you deal with your emotions. Your GP can help you decide what type is right for you.

### Self-help books

The main advantages of this type of therapy are that it's cheaper than face-to-face counselling and you can do it in your own time, when it suits you.

#### **If you want to go down this route, look for books that:**

- have been written by a qualified counsellor with lots of experience
- have been endorsed by a professional organisation or health professional.

## Computer counselling

This involves doing a series of exercises on your computer. The Department of Health recommends that you get help from your GP or a qualified therapist when doing any computer counselling courses.

## Phone and email

This is just like having a face-to-face session except that you talk to a counsellor over the phone. You can also have three-way conversations if you want the other parent to join in on the call.

Phone counselling might be the right choice for you if:

- you're shy or you don't want to meet the therapist
- you can't find a therapist in your area
- you're short of time or struggling to find childcare.

## Next steps

- if you feel like you've taken one step forward and two steps back, you may have 'moved back' into one of the earlier stages of separation. See page 23 for more ideas about dealing with these feelings.



If you're feeling confident about the future, it might be time to start thinking about co-parenting. Our guide ***Parenting together after separation*** has a lot of information and practical ideas on how to do this.

## Final note

You're clearly determined to put the past behind you and build a new life for you and your child.

Hopefully you've reached the point where you can think about your ex-partner without feeling angry or frustrated about your old relationship, or at least you know that you are in control of your emotions.

And you're ready to face the new challenges of working together to raise your child.

## Useful contacts

### Parenting and parenting apart

#### Centre for Separated Families

[www.separatedfamilies.info](http://www.separatedfamilies.info)  
[advice@separatedfamilies.org.uk](mailto:advice@separatedfamilies.org.uk)

Online and email support for parents and other people affected by separation or parenting apart.

#### Family Lives

(England and Wales)

[www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

Family Lives helpline:

**0808 800 2222**

**Monday to Sunday**

**24 hours a day**

Help for parents, families and step families dealing with stressful situations. Runs a helpline, live chat and other services.

### **Families need Fathers**

[www.fnf.org.uk](http://www.fnf.org.uk)

**(England and Wales)**

[www.fnfscotland.org.uk](http://www.fnfscotland.org.uk)

**(Scotland)**

**Helpline: 0300 0300 363**

**Every day 7am to midnight**

**(England and Wales),**

**Monday to Friday**

**6pm to 10pm (Scotland)**

Help with issues caused by relationship breakdown and parenting apart. Help to involve both parents in a child's life after separation. Services include a national helpline and local branch meetings across the UK.

### **Gingerbread**

**(England and Wales)**

[www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)

**Lone Parent Helpline:**

**0808 802 0925**

**Monday 10am to 6pm**

**Tuesday, Thursday and Friday**

**10am to 4pm**

**Wednesday 10am to 1pm**

**and 5pm to 7pm**

Information for single parents about a wide range of legal, financial and parenting matters.

### **ParentLine Scotland**

[www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk)

**0800 028 2233**

**Monday to Friday**

**9am to 10pm**

**Saturday and Sunday**

**12noon to 8pm**

Free confidential support for parents and carers in Scotland who need help with family or relationship issues.

### **The Parent Connection from One Plus One**

[www.theparentconnection.org.uk](http://www.theparentconnection.org.uk)

A website for parents who are separating or are separated. It provides a wide range of tools and information adapted from face-to-face mediation techniques that parents can use for themselves.

## Money and work

### Child Maintenance Options

[cmoptions.org](http://cmoptions.org)

0800 988 0988

Text 'OPTIONS' to 66644

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm,

Saturday 9am to 4pm

Free, impartial information and guidance to help separated parents make informed decisions about supporting their children.

### Money Advice Service

[www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk](http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk)

Money Advice Line:

0300 500 5000

Textphone: 18001 0300 500 5000

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm,

Saturday 9am to 1pm,

excluding Bank Holiday

Information and advice on all types of financial matters, including about parenting, separation and divorce.

Can arrange face-to-face sessions to help parents put budgets together.

### National Debtline

[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)

0808 808 4000

Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm,

Saturday 9.30am to 1pm

24 Hour Voicemail

Free and confidential helpline for advice about dealing with debt.

## General advice and support

### Citizens Advice (England and Wales)

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

Advice line England:

0844 411 1444

Advice line Wales:

0844 477 2020

A popular source of free, independent and confidential advice about legal, money and other problems. Can put you in touch with a local Citizens Advice Bureau.

### Scottish Citizens Advice Bureau

[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

[www.adviceguide.org.uk/](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/)  
Scotland

Free, independent and confidential advice through its network of bureaux in Scotland.

### Gov.UK

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Government website providing information about parenting, money, benefits and work, and access to online government services.

## Legal advice and mediation

### Community Legal Advice (England and Wales)

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

Helpline: 0845 345 4 345

Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm,

Saturday 9am to 12.30pm

A free, confidential and independent legal advice service.

### Family Law Association (Scotland)

[www.familylawassociation.org](http://www.familylawassociation.org)

An online information and advice centre explaining family law in Scotland.



You can also download **Parenting Plans** from [nfm.org.uk](http://nfm.org.uk)  
It's a free guide that can be a useful source of information for parents dealing with divorce or separation.



## Relate (England and Wales)

[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

**0300 100 1234**

Relationship counselling for individuals and couples, and counselling for children and young people.



Relate has a sister website that provides online advice and support for parents and families: [www.relateforparents.org.uk](http://www.relateforparents.org.uk)

## Relationships Scotland

[www.relationshipsscotland.org.uk](http://www.relationshipsscotland.org.uk)

Relationship and family support across Scotland, including mediation services and child contact centres.

## Resolution

### (England and Wales)

[www.resolution.org.uk](http://www.resolution.org.uk)

**01689 820 272**

**9am to 5.30pm**

National organisation of family lawyers that helps families reach solutions to problems in a non-confrontational way. Can provide information about all aspects of family law.

## Scottish Legal Aid Board

[www.slabb.org.uk](http://www.slabb.org.uk)

**Legal aid helpline:**

**0845 122 8686**

**Open 7 days a week**

**7am to 11pm**

The organisation responsible for managing legal aid in Scotland, providing funding for people who qualify for it.

## Dealing with domestic violence

### Mankind

[www.mankind.org.uk](http://www.mankind.org.uk)

**Helpline: 01823 334 244**

**Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm and 7pm to 9pm**

Support for male victims of domestic abuse and violence. Provides information, support and access to local police, counselling, housing and other services.

### National Domestic Violence Helpline

[www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk)

**Helpline: 0808 2000 247**

**Open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day**

Free helpline available around the clock to give emotional support and practical advice to victims of domestic violence and abuse.

## Emotional wellbeing

### Drinkline

**Helpline: 0800 917 8282**

**Weekdays 9am to 8pm,  
weekends 11am to 4pm**

Information and support for anyone worried about their own or someone else's drinking.

### FRANK

**[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)**

**Helpline: 0800 776 600**

**Open 7 days a week,  
24 hours a day**

Free confidential information about drugs and the support available if drugs are a problem in your life or someone else's.

### Mind

**[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)**

**Mind infoline: 0300 123 3393**

**(Monday to Friday,  
9am to 6pm)**

Confidential mental health information and support and help with finding services in your local area.

### NHS Choices

**[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) (England)**

**[www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com) (Scotland)**

**[www.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.wales.nhs.uk) (Wales)**

Information from the National Health Service on conditions, treatments, local services and healthy living.

### Samaritans

**[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

**Helpline: 08457 909 090**

**Open 7 days a week,  
24 hours a day**

Free, confidential emotional support for people experiencing stress, anxiety, despair or similar feelings.

### Young Minds Parents Helpline

**[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)**

**0808 802 5544**

**Monday to Friday  
9.30am to 4pm**

**[parents@youngminds.org.uk](mailto:parents@youngminds.org.uk)**

Confidential support for anyone worried about the emotional problems or behaviour of a child or young person.

## The main sources of research used to write this guide are:



### \*Call charges

Calls to 0800 numbers are free from BT land lines but you may have to pay if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

Calls to 0845 numbers from BT land lines should cost no more than 4p a minute with a 15p call set-up charge. You may have to pay more if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p a minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider.

the **centre** for  
**Separated  
families**

— Reg Charity No. 1055173 —

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- Andrews, S., Armstrong, D., McLernon, L., Megaw, S. and Skinner, C. (2011) Promotion of child maintenance: Research on instigating behaviour change. Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission Research Report
- Wikeley, N., Ireland, E., Bryson, C. and Smith, R. (2008) Relationship separation and child support study. DWP Research Report 503
- Rodgers, B. and Pryor, J. (1998) Divorce and separation – Outcomes for children. Joseph Rowntree Foundation Research Report.

to use ideas and information in ***The Guide for Separated Parents: Putting your children first***, Karen and Nick Woodall (publisher: Piatkus 2007).



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