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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT CHILDREN DURING SEPARATION

Supporting Children During and After Separation.

1. Explain the separation.

- Both parents together if possible.
- Age appropriate explanations.
- Be clear it's not their fault.

2. Be open to talk about their feelings.

- Listen and acknowledge whatever feelings they have.
- Encourage other forms of expression (e.g. artwork, writing).

3. Listen to your children's opinions and feelings about care arrangements

- They need to know their thoughts are important.
- Decisions are the parents' responsibility.
- Arrangements need to incorporate interests and sport activities.
- As children grow into teenagers, their input into decisions needs to increase.

4. Promote a healthy ongoing relationship with both parents

- Length of time and frequency of contact with both parents will depend on age and developmental needs of each child.
- Children need to know that neither parent will demand their exclusive loyalty.
- Avoid put-downs and talking negatively about the other parent when the children are present.

5. Avoid conflict between parents

- Children benefit from seeing their parents co-operate and it helps children better adjust to the separation.
- Any disagreements should be kept away from the children's knowledge. i.e. they should not hear or see you argue, or listen to you speaking to others about arguments.
- Parents are role models for their children on how to resolve differences and deal with people they may not like.
- Have mutually clear guidelines for communication, e.g. if you begin to disagree, agree to stop talking, defer to later, cool down and take 'timeout'. Never use your child as a messenger. (See Sheet 1.2).
- Never allocate the other parent's resources (e.g. time or money) without their permission.
- Be on time and stick to agreements as much as possible.

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6. Consider your children first.

- Do not ask your child what is going on in the other parent's life or household.
- Do not ask your child to keep a secret from the other parent.
- Understand that sometimes your child may share exaggerated or fabricated information with you.
- Post a calendar or schedule in both homes where your children can see it.
- Be cautious about over interpreting your child's reluctance at changeover time.
- Introduce new partners slowly and cautiously.
- Retain 'normality' and routines as much as possible e.g. basketball practice.

7. Continue contact for the children with other important people

- Maintain contact with other significant people in your children's lives, e.g. grandparents, cousins, friends, neighbours, sporting groups, faith groups.
- Consider advising other significant people about the separation, e.g. teachers, sporting coaches.

8. Seek professional help

- Remain calm, patient and positive, and remind yourself children need sufficient time to adjust.
- If your children appear to feel distressed, angry, sad or display significant behaviour changes, talk to a professional, e.g. your GP or a counsellor.

Getting Help

LifeWorks provides counselling services across Victoria, to find your nearest office call 8650 6200 or visit the website at www.lifeworks.com.au

More details are available on LifeWorks' website: www.lifeworks.com.au.
