



# Part A

---

## Handouts

# For the Sake of the Children Parent Information Program Part A

## Table of Contents:

Handout #1: Adults' Experience/Adults' Needs and Children's Needs .....	3
Handout #2: Developmental Stages (Birth to Age Eighteen) .....	8
Handout #3: Parenting Plans .....	16
Handout #4: Emotional Separation .....	28
Handout #5: The Separation Experience .....	29
Handout #6: Effects of Conflict on Children .....	44
Handout #7: Parents Should Consider .....	45
Handout #8: Divorce: Children's Rights .....	46
Handout #9: Websites .....	47

## Handout #1

### **ADULTS' EXPERIENCE/ADULTS' NEEDS**

- **HIGH DEGREE OF CHANGE**
- **ENERGY REQUIREMENTS ARE HIGH**
- **NEED FOR SUPPORT**
- **NEED FOR INFORMATION**

**LEGAL RIGHTS AND REPONSIBILITIES**

**ECONOMIC NEEDS**

### **CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

- **HOW TO TALK TO THEM**
- **HOW TO COPE WITH THEIR REACTIONS**
- **HOW TO RESPOND TO THEIR REATIONS/NEEDS**

- **SELF CARE**

**EMOTIONAL ISSUES**  
**PRACTICAL ISSUES**

# **SUMMARY**

**WHEN EXPLAINING THE SEPARATION TO YOUR CHILDREN:**

**CHILDREN NEED:**

## **A SIMPLE NO BLAME EXPLANATION**

- Tell your children it was an adult decision.
- Children can't understand complex adult issues.
- The temptation to tell your story is great.
- If they hear these stories, they will feel they have to choose between parents.
- They will suffer low self-esteem from hearing "bad" stories.

## **CHILDREN NEED:**

### **TO KNOW THEY ARE LOVED** **BY BOTH PARENTS**

- Children do best when both parents stay involved.
- In certain situations supervision may be required.
- Unusual for no contact to be in children's best interest.  
Usually only considered if there is a risk for the child.
- If one parent does not stay involved with children, they need to know it was not their fault.

### **TO KNOW THEY WILL CONTINUE** **TO SEE BOTH PARENTS**

- Children need to know that they will have time with both parents.
- Children need to know the time sharing plan as soon as possible.
- Children need to know that they will be taken care of.

## **CHILDREN NEED:**

### **TO KNOW THAT THE SEPARATION WAS NOT THEIR FAULT**

- Unless told otherwise, children no matter what their age, tend to think the separation was their fault.
- Need to be told directly that the separation is an adult issue and had nothing to do with them.
- They did not cause it, nor can they change things now.

### **TO KNOW THAT THEY HAVE EACH PARENT'S PERMISSION TO LOVE BOTH PARENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

- Children cannot choose between parents – they love both.
- If a child is speaking badly of one parent, doesn't want to see her or him, the reasons need not be explored. The children may need help.
- Child/ren may be feeling caught in the middle between not just both parents, but both families.

## **CHILDREN'S ONGOING NEEDS**

- ❑ Regular/continuous contact with both parents.
- ❑ Reduction in parental conflict.
- ❑ Parental cooperation, where possible / non-interference where cooperation is not possible.
- ❑ Help working through their feelings of loss.
- ❑ To be informed about the separation and reassured that it was not their fault.
- ❑ Know what arrangements are being made for their care / for contact with both parents.
- ❑ Know that decision making is not their responsibility.
- ❑ Permission to love both parents.
- ❑ Consistency and structure.
- ❑ Clear boundaries.
- ❑ Reassurance.

## Handout #2

# BIRTH TO SIX MONTHS

### DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

- major task is to learn to trust
- learning to love – “bonding” to their family
- attention on physical needs being met

### POSSIBLE EXPERIENCES DURING PARENT’S SEPARATION

- due to complete dependency on parents, baby stressed if parents are not able to care for them
- baby is able to sense parents’ distress
- are distressed if routines change

### BEHAVIOURS THAT INDICATE DISTRESS

- changes in sleeping and /or eating habits
- baby may cry more, seem upset/fidgety (especially when senses that a parent is upset)
- baby may become very quiet/limp/unresponsive (especially when needs are not attended to over prolonged period) – medical attention should be sought
- baby may not learn new things sitting up, crawling, reaching for things, vocalizing(making sounds), as soon as they would if not distressed
- baby may not grow as he/she should – **THIS WOULD REQUIRE IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION**

### CHILDREN’S NEEDS

- smooth and consistent routine
- to have all their physical needs met
- regular medical attention
- physical interaction with caregivers(hugs, talking to baby, smiles, holding, rocking)
- frequent contact with both parents
- low levels of conflict between the parents/low levels of stress

### TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

- primary residence with one parent
- frequent and predictable contact with the baby’s other parent
- baby can manage longer periods of time when contact is more frequent
- baby’s routine needs to be maintained
- overnights generally not recommended
- baby can benefit from contact daily or every second day, as long as not exposed to conflict



PLEASE NOTE THAT CHILDREN AGES SIX MONTHS TO EIGHTEEN MONTHS HAVE BASICALLY ALL THE SAME NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURS, AND THAT THE SAME TIME-SHARING CONSIDERATIONS APPLY. HOWEVER, CHILDREN IN THIS AGE GROUP (AND SOMETIMES EVEN OLDER CHILDREN) BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE SOME "SEPARATION ANXIETY" i.e. THEY DO NOT LIKE TO LEAVE THEIR PARENTS. IN SITUATIONS WHERE PARENTS ARE SEPARATED, THIS DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE MAY BE DEMONSTRATED THROUGH THE CHILD HAVING MORE DIFFICULTY GOING FROM ONE PARENT TO THE OTHER. THIS IS ESPECIALLY LIKELY TO OCCUR, IF THE CHILD DOES NOT HAVE CONSISTENT CONTACT WITH ONE PARENT.

## **AGE EIGHTEEN MONTHS TO THREE YEARS**

### **DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS**

- major task is to become "their own person"
- need to explore (away from parents)
- want to be individual, but still want to feel safe/know they are taken care of

### **POSSIBLE EXPERIENCES DURING PARENTS' SEPARATION**

- children become anxious if exposed to conflict (they are good at noticing it)
- children of this age think they are "the center of the universe", that they cause things to happen, and therefore can feel very guilty about the separation
- most children cannot explain how they feel and may act out frustration
- children still highly dependent on parents and may be afraid that they won't be taken care of/that both parents will leave them

### **BEHAVIOURS THAT INDICATE DISTRESS**

- "regressive behaviours" – children act younger than their age e.g. may need a diaper again, want more "baby" attention, want to sleep in crib again or with parent
- child may be clinging, whining, crying
- child may appear sad, lonely and will pull away from people
- child may become more fearful of common things
- child may have more nightmares
- changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- child may show more distress before and after "transition periods" - going from one parent to the other
- child may show aggressive behaviours, especially if aggression has been witnessed

### **CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

- child needs a safe, trustworthy base from which to explore
- child needs reassurance – that they are loved, that they will be taken care of
- child needs lots of affection/do not force if child is pulling away
- child needs parents' understanding when "acting out" their upset/should not be punished for "acting like a baby"
- child needs good boundaries (limits) and for parents to stick to them
- smooth and consistent routine still important

## **TIME-SHARING CONSIDERATIONS**

- frequent contact with both parents
- child should not go longer than 3 or 4 days without contact from either parent
- child can manage overnights when contact is regular
- weekends not recommended – several times per week more suitable

## **AGE THREE TO FIVE YEARS**

### **DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS**

- major task is intellectual development – learning many new skills
- development of conscience – knowledge of right and wrong/ability to feel guilt
- thinking is egocentric – they still think that they are the cause of things
- play is everything – their thinking is “magical” – fantasy seems real

### **POSSIBLE EXPERIENCES DURING PARENTS’ SEPARATION**

- child may think that they caused the separation (e.g. because they forgot to put their toys away) and feel extreme guilt
- child may feel bewildered – question whether they can trust anything to stay the same ever again
- child may be afraid that when a parent leaves them (e.g. to go to work) they will never come back
- separation anxiety becomes an issue again
- child may dwell on things that frighten them such as being left alone, a parent being dead)
- child will often try to “wish” the separation away
- child may pretend that the separation has not happened (me and mom and daddy live in a big, beautiful house)

### **BEHAVIOURS THAT INDICATE DISTRESS**

- child may say that they caused the separation
- child may try and “be very good” to reverse the separation
- child may attempt to control the situation – starts organizing everything – attempts to create a sense of security
- as with younger children “regressive” behaviours such as bedwetting, needing more “baby” attention, having temper tantrums, more difficulty with tasks that have been mastered, acting fearful and exploring less, ability to remember decreases
- child may stop playing with friends
- child may appear sad and lonely-child may appear frightened or confused
- child may lose their sense of fun
- child may show more aggressive behaviours, especially if aggression has been witnessed
  - girls tend to turn anger inward – overly quiet, depressed, sulky
  - boys tend to direct anger outward – bullying, fighting

## **CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

- child needs lots of reassurance that the separation was not their fault
- child needs to be reassured that you love them and that nothing will ever change that
- child has a strong need for physical contact (not forced)
- child needs a regular routine in terms of daycare, bedtimes, sharing time with family and friends
- child needs to know when you'll be seeing them again (give verbal information and also set up calendars the child can check in each home)
- child needs encouragement to talk about their feelings (mad, sad, scared)
- child needs help talking about what scares them (nightmares/scary thoughts)
- child needs approval – tell them what they are doing right
- child needs parents' understanding when they are "acting out" their upset
- child should not be punished for "acting like a baby"

## **TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS**

- child needs a very predictable schedule and to be constantly reminded of when they'll be doing what and with whom
- child needs both parents involved on a regular basis
- child can manage parenting plans that include full weekends with each parent
- child can manage week long periods away from one parent for the purposes of holidays, as long as this does not happen too often
- longer than one week away from either parent not recommended

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN AGES FIVE TO SIX IS BASICALLY THE SAME AS FOR THREE TO FIVE YEAR OLDS. HOWEVER, THESE CHILDREN ARE BEGINNING TO HAVE THEIR NEEDS MET OUTSIDE OF THE HOME/ARE BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF PLACING SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THEIR PARENTS**

## **AGES SIX TO NINE**

### **DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS**

- major task is intellectual development - understanding cause and effect/ability to organize concepts
- major skill development occurs

### **WHAT CHILDREN MAY EXPERIENCE WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE**

- child may feel that they are being rejected by both parents
- extreme sadness is common, along with guilt, anger and loneliness
- longing for the parent they are not with (note: although child has transferred some interest outside the home, family is extremely important to this age group)
- increased possessiveness of parents – idea of new partners for parents can be frightening
- child may feel they do not have enough time with either parent

- child may see everyone else as having more than they do  
e.g. “everybody else has a mommy & daddy living together”

### **BEHAVIOURS THAT INDICATE DISTRESS**

- child cries often
- child may deny his/her feelings
- child spends more time alone
- child has difficulty concentrating at school
- child tests parents’ love by acting out (“if I make you angry will you still love me?”)
- child may show more fear – biting nails, stomachaches and headaches can be common
- child who is very distressed may have suicidal fantasies
- aggressive behaviour is common in boys who have witnessed aggression

### **CHILDREN’S NEEDS**

- child needs parents to show understanding and acceptance
- child needs parents to help them talk about feelings
- child needs parents to say good things about each other (or at least not bad)
- child needs permission from each parent to love both
- child needs both parents to spend as much time as possible with him/her
- (if new partner is involved make sure child still has time alone with parent)

### **TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS**

- child can manage longer periods of time away from primary residence e.g. full weekends
- (child can understand the time-sharing plan)
- child is most content when contact with the parent with whom they do not reside primarily is several times a week/contact at least one to two times per week beneficial
- child can manage longer periods of time away from parents for holiday purposes, as long as they have contact with the other parent (telephone, share time with other parent if in same area)

## **AGES NINE TO TWELVE**

### **DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS**

- child needs to grow more independent from parents
- child develops sense of justice/code of ethics – tends to see everything as black and white – dislikes ‘grey areas’
- child’s sexuality is awakening – aware of changes in own body, aware of opposite sex / identifies more with parent of same sex

### **WHAT CHILDREN MAY EXPERIENCE WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE**

- child may feel that she/he needs to choose between parents

- child may feel conflict over what they want for themselves as opposed to what they want for others
- child may feel intense anger – this is often directed toward parent they feel caused the separation
- child may feel ashamed or embarrassed about the family situation
- child may worry about parents, whether they are going to be o.k.
- **(may become overly responsible/take on adult role)**
- child may feel rejected by the one or both parents
- child may have a shaken sense of identity

### **BEHAVIOURS THAT INDICATE DISTRESS**

- child may act like the divorce is no big deal
- child's ability to concentrate may be decreased
- child may act out in school
- child may worry about a variety of issues (being forgotten or abandoned/becoming a burden/their needs being overlooked/what will happen if a parent dies)
- child may become sexually active
- girls may become aggressive
- girls are more likely to try very hard to please (caution: it is easy to think this is a good thing)
- boys may become very aggressive, especially when they have witnessed aggression
- child may have many accidents
- extremely distressed child may attempt suicide

### **CHILDREN'S NEEDS**

- child needs to know that parents can take care of themselves/that they have friends or counselor to talk to/child does not need to be the one responsible
- child needs to know that they are not being asked to choose between parents and that they should not choose/should not be involved (separation is an adult issue)
- child needs permission to still "be a kid"
- child needs encouragement to stay involved in physical activities/with their friends – needs parents to work with their schedule
- child needs permission to love both parents
- child needs permission to talk to parents and others about their feelings
- parents need to stay aware of what is happening with school and friends

### **TIME-SHARING CONSIDERATIONS**

- child can manage longer periods away from each parent
- child's time-sharing schedule needs to consider his/her activity schedule
- child's schedule should not interfere with relationship with either parent
- child's own ideas should be considered HOWEVER parents must make final decision

# **AGES THIRTEEN TO EIGHTEEN**

## **DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS**

- major task is to “break away” – to become " his/her own person"
- learn to understand realities of life (child is not yet fully developed either morally or emotionally)

## **WHAT CHILD MAY EXPERIENCE WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE**

- child may think their behaviour caused the separation
- child may feel neglected or rejected/sometimes see separation as “proof” that parents don’t really love them
- child may feel embarrassed by separation
- child may feel angry/resentful towards parents for “messin’ with their lives”
- child may feel frightened by parents’ neediness
- child may have feelings of loss re their view of what a family is supposed to look like
- child may feel fearful of the future and their own ability to maintain a relationship
- child may feel anxious about leaving home

## **BEHAVIOURS THAT INDICATE DISTRESS**

- child becomes distant or withdrawn
- child becomes extremely critical of parents
- child loses interest in activities/friends
- child avoids home/threatens to leave/runs away
- child delays own goals/is afraid to leave home (if I leave will there be a home to come home to?)
- child acts out: increased sexual behaviour, substance abuse, suspensions from school/drop in school performance, physical fighting, arguments with friends, lots of accidents, self injuring behaviours, trouble with the law

## **CHILDREN’S NEEDS**

- child needs parents to show how to manage feelings in a positive way
- child needs encouragement to talk about his/her own feelings(sense of embarrassment may cause them to assume an “I don't care attitude”)
- child needs to be encouraged to take care of self
- child needs parents to take care of themselves/to talk with others about their feelings (not child)
- child needs love, encouragement and support
- child needs to have time with both parents as well as time for their own schedule - parents need to be creative about spending time with teens
- child needs parents to understand if they spend more time at one parent’s home than the other’s (usually has to do with friends/school/activities)

- child needs parents to keep parenting – too early to be “friends” – child still needs limits
- child needs parents to keep adult activities private – are not ready to view parents as sexual beings

### **TIME-SHARING CONSIDERATIONS**

- child requires less time with each parent
- child needs parents to create a “sense of home” in both residences – otherwise child may have difficulty spending longer periods of time
- if older children find weekend time-sharing difficult (due to part-time job/rehearsals/activities) ensure regular contact on a weekly basis
- child’s wishes should be considered HOWEVER parents must make the final decision

## Handout #3



*For the Sake of the Children*

## Parenting Plans

Developed by Family Services and Housing Manitoba  
Presented and reprinted by Justice New Brunswick  
with permission

Funding assistance has been provided by the Federal  
Department of Justice



## MAKING A PARENTING PLAN

Creating a parenting plan is a helpful way for parents to set out how they will carry on with their parenting responsibilities following a separation. The sooner a parenting plan can be put into place, the better, even if it is a temporary one. This way everyone knows what is supposed to happen and when. You might want to consider having a written parenting plan. This is a good way to avoid misunderstandings.

A good parenting plan will usually include:

- How a child will spend time with each parent
- How major decisions about a child's health, education, religion and activities will be handled
- How parents will communicate with each other about the needs of their child
- How parents will negotiate future changes based on their child's changing needs
- How parents will work out differences that might arise in the future

Parenting plans help adults and children most when they have a lot of detail. A detailed plan is especially necessary for families where there are higher levels of conflict. A plan that describes time-sharing as "reasonable", "generous", or "as mutually can be agreed upon" is too loose and open to different interpretations, especially when you and the other parent are not getting along. Even for families where there are lower levels of conflict, a detailed plan helps avoid confusion and is something parents can fall back on during times of higher stress.

***One of the key issues to work out in your parenting plan is how your child will spend time with each of you.*** Even if you can only plan ahead for the next two weeks or two months, this will help your child feel more secure. When working out time-sharing issues, remember that it is important to look at what fits for your child and for his or her age and stage of development. Other important things to consider are your child's:

- Temperament and personality
- How she or he adapts and copes with change
- Gender
- Relationships with the extended families
- Friendships
- Sense of belonging and comfort with respect to their home, school and neighborhood
- Activities

The plan has to fit for you and the other parent too, given your work schedules and the distance between homes. One cannot stress enough how important it is

for parents to try and keep the conflict low between them. Even a time-sharing plan that is based on a child's developmental needs will not be able to guarantee stability and good adjustment for the child, if the conflict between parents is high and the child is exposed to that conflict.

## **PARENTING PLAN CHECKLIST**

Here is a list of things you may wish to include in your parenting plan. Some things might apply to your parenting situation now. Other issues may need to be decided later as your child's needs or your situation changes.

### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

A good way to begin a parenting plan is to state the importance of both parents in your child's life. This helps to set the tone for your new relationship as parents. This is also a good place to state your shared values, goals and how you wish to work together.

***For example: "We, the parents of CHILD, enter into this parenting plan to affirm our on-going commitment to our child. We want our child to have the best possible relationship with each of us. We both love our child and want what is best for him (her). We recognize that our child wishes to love and respect both of us and that his (her) well-being can be better served by working together as parents."***

### **DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITIES**

- This is the part of the plan that many people call "custody". *Remember you may not have to use the word "custody" or "access" at all.*
- How will major decisions, such as living arrangements, education, religious training, activities, medical and dental care be handled?
- How will day-to-day decisions be handled?

### **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS**

- About the day-to-day needs of the children    ♦ For the purpose of making decisions
  - When?
  - Where?
  - How? *Will you communicate directly or through a neutral third party (not a child)?*
- Special considerations for an infant or toddler - providing each other with information about the child while in your care.

- Usual routines, such as naptimes, bedtimes, bath times, meal and snack times
- What a child has eaten and likes to eat
- Behavior (mood)
- Health concerns (e.g. ear infections, fever, allergies, etc.) When did the fever or infection start? How has the parent looked after this? Does the child need or been given any medication? If so, what? When?

## TIME - SHARING ARRANGEMENTS

- Weekday plan for the child between parents' homes. Days? Times?
- Weekend plans for the child. Days? Times?
- Transportation
  - Who does what?
  - Costs - who pays if distance is involved?
  - If plans need to change, how will we let each other know? How much notice do we need to give? How much flexibility can we expect?
- When a parent is late
  - How will we notify each other?
  - By when?
- Contact with parent by child
  - How? Phone, letters, pictures, drawings, e-mail, videos, audiotapes? (Especially if there is a distance).
- Contact with child by parent
  - How? Phone, letters, pictures, e-mail, and videos, audiotapes?
  - When?

## VACATION PLANS WITH THE CHILDREN

- Summer school break
- Winter break
- Mid-term break
- Giving each other notice of vacation plans
- Decided by when?
- Contact with the other parent for child during these times

- How? When?
- Phone number where you and your child can be reached, in case of an emergency.

## SPECIAL DAYS & OCCASIONS

- Birthdays - child's, parents', extended family members', etc.
- Mother's Day
- Father's Day
- Long Weekends
  - Easter
  - Victoria Day
  - July 1<sup>st</sup>
  - August Civic Holiday
  - Labor Day
  - Thanksgiving
- Religious Holidays
  - Christmas, Hanukkah
  - Easter, Passover
  - Others
- Special family events
  - Weddings
  - Reunions
  - Anniversaries
  - Other Celebrations
  - Funerals

## SICKNESS

- When a child or parent is sick:
  - Who cares for the child?
  - How will this be decided?
  - How does this effect the time-sharing?
  - What arrangements if any, are made to re-schedule the time-sharing?

## EMERGENCIES

- Involving the child
  - Notifying the other parent - when?

- Involving the parent
  - Unexpected changes to the parenting plan in the event of a parent's or family illness, work or travel schedule
    - Child care - Who does it?
    - How is this decided?
- Phone number where you can be reached when out of town, in case of an emergency

## DAILY CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

- Daytime care or before and after school care - other parent, day care, extended family, private babysitter?
  - Who decides?
  - Who pays?
  - Who can pick up the child from day care (school) and when - consent given?
  - Who will be listed as a contact in case of emergency (at day care or school)?

## ALTERNATE CHILD CARE

- Other parent as first choice?
- Use of babysitters, extended family - When?
- Who is responsible for arranging alternate care? Who pays?

## CLOTHING / HAIRCUTS / TOYS / PETS

- Who decides what is needed? When?
  - Who pays?
- What clothes can be shared between households?
- Laundry
- Toys
  - Do we keep our own supplies?
  - How will parents handle the purchase of large items such as bicycles, video games and computers?
  - Do pets go back and forth?

## HEALTH

- Doctor, dentist, eye doctor, orthodontist, speech therapy, occupational therapy, counselling, etc.
  - How will decisions be made about what is needed?
  - Who chooses the doctor, therapist, etc.?
  - Who makes these appointments?
  - Who takes the child?

- How will information be shared about these things with each other?
- If costs are involved for a health service, who pays?
- As parents, if you have different ideas about how to handle your child's medical needs, how will you resolve this issue? Whose advice might both of you agree to follow? Pediatrician's? Allergist's?
  
- **Health Card / Medical number shared**
  
- ☐ **Medication**
  - Who is responsible for obtaining?
  - Who pays?
  - How will information be shared re: when and how the medication needs to be taken?
  
- ☐ **Medical Insurance**
  - Who has a dental plan, vision care or extended coverage?
  - How will the necessary forms (paperwork) get to the doctor's, dentist's office, other parent?
  
- ☐ **Consents**
  - Who can or who needs to give consents to certain medical and dental procedures?
  
- ☐ **Special Considerations**
  - Any special diet, allergies, preferences of a child, i.e. diabetes, asthma, vegetarian? How will that be handled in each parent's home?
  
- **For an Infant**
  - Weaning
    - When?
    - How?
    - Who decides and how is this communicated to the other parent?
  - Potty training issues
    - When?
    - How?
    - Who decides and how is this communicated to the other parent?

## ☐ EDUCATION

- ☐ What do parents want and value for their child's education?
  - Who decides?
- ☐ If changes need to be made about where a child goes to school, how does that get decided?

- Information sharing - How does this get done?
  - Report cards
  - Monthly school calendars
  - Parent-teacher meetings
  - Sharing of school pictures
  - Who gives permission and pays for field trips?
  
- If a child has special learning needs, how will parents handle the flow of information between themselves and the school?
- If your child has special needs, whose advice and recommendations will you follow as parents – i.e. resource teacher's, psychologist, pediatrician or psychiatrist? If you have different ideas about how to handle your child's special learning needs, how will you resolve this issue?
- If your child gets sick or has an accident at school, who will pick up the child or stay at home with him or her?
- If one parent is more involved with the school, how will the other parent keep in touch with the school?
- Do you need to discuss how future educational costs such as university will be handled?

## **□ SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

- Parent-Teacher Meetings
  - Who attends - Do parents attend together or separately?
  - Who makes these appointments?
  
- Special Events - assemblies, school picnics, concerts, participation in field trips, other volunteer activities at the school
  - Who attends?
  - Where will we sit?
  - Who volunteers?
  
- In-Service Days - Early Dismissal Days
  - Who cares for the child on these days?
  - Who decides?
  
- Clothing and School Supplies
  - Who goes shopping? Who pays?

## **□ RELIGIOUS TRAINING AND CULTURAL UPBRINGING**

- Choice of faith
  - Who decides?
  - Level of child's involvement?
  - How will parents be involved?

- Learning another language
  - Who decides?
  - How will parents be involved?

## OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES / LESSONS

- What activities and when?
  - Who decides?
  - Sharing information
  - How will this affect the child's time with each of his or her parents?
  - Who registers?
  - Costs - Who pays?
- Transportation - Who?
- Parent attendance
- Who shops for the necessary sports equipment / musical instruments, etc?
- Friendships**
  - Spending time with friends - how is this managed?
  - Invitations to birthday parties, sleepovers, etc.
  - Who transports?
  - Who buys the gifts?

## PARENTING VALUES AND RULES

- Safety and Supervision Issues
  - When is it OK for child to play in the neighborhood park on his or her own with friends?
  - Ride the bus on their own?
  - Go to the shopping mall with friends?
  - Use the car?
  - Ride a motorcycle, snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle?
- Discipline
  - Kinds of consequences for what behavior
  - What will be handled the same or differently in each home?
- Curfew times
- Bedtimes (naptimes)
- Time for homework
- Amount of TV and what to watch
- Amount of video games and computer time
- Sleeping arrangements - when OK to sleep with a parent, not OK
- Bathing routines, OK or not OK to bathe with others?
- When OK for child to date - wear make-up - dye hair
- Movie and music choices



- Clothing choices
- Smoking
- Allowance
- Ear and body piercing, tattoos
- Use of alcohol - What will be permitted or not permitted in the home(s)?

## **COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD**

- Who will let the child know of changes to the time-sharing plan e.g. when a parent cannot attend as expected?
- How do you plan to deal with a child's wish for a change in time-sharing?
- How to handle a child's complaint about the other parent?
- When does it make sense to have family meetings to talk about issues (parents and children together)?

## **INVOLVEMENT OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY**

- Who is special and important to the child?
  - How will those relationships develop and be maintained?

## **DATING AND ROLE OF NEW PARTNERS**

- How will parents keep each other informed regarding this new development?
- When do parents plan to introduce new partners to children and the other parent?
- Role of the new partner
  - Child care responsibilities
  - Discipline, setting of rules
  - Communication with the other parent

## **CHILD SUPPORT**

- What are a child's expenses and how are these taken care of?
- Amount - How does the Child Support Guidelines apply to your parenting arrangement? Will there be regular payments? Will costs be shared?
- What costs does child support cover? What other costs do you need to be aware of and how will these be handled?
- Are there any special expenses, such as child care or health-related costs, extraordinary expenses for education, expenses for post

secondary education or extraordinary expenses for extracurricular activities?

- How are special expenses to be shared?
- If changes need to be made to child support or the payment of special expenses, how will this be handled?

## PARENT-TO-PARENT EXPECTATIONS

- Offering three meals a day to your child
- Making sure a child has own sleeping space and a place for belongings in each parent's home
- Ensuring the child is reasonably clean when he or she goes to the other parent's home - clothing, face, hands, new diaper, etc.
- Making sure any "adult" magazines and videotapes are put out of reach of the children.
  
- Non-negotiable safety issues - How do you both intend to commit yourselves to these?
  - Use of car seats
  - Life-jackets
  - Use of helmets for bicycles, snowmobiling, etc.
  - Not drinking and driving when transporting children

## OUT OF PROVINCE / COUNTRY TRAVEL

- Informing each other of plans or possibilities - giving notice
- Written consent given for child to travel
- Child's passport
- Medical insurance
- Contact by the other parent with child (When? How?)
- Number given where the travelling parent can be reached in case of an emergency

## MOVE OF A PARENT

- When to inform each other of this possibility or plan?
- How will distance effect parent-child relationships and time-sharing?
- Transportation issues and who pays?
  - How will all this get decided?

## CHANGE OF A CHILD'S NAME

- Is there a need?

- How will this get decided?

#### **DISABILITY OR DEATH OF A PARENT**

- What financial and childcare arrangements have been made in these events?
- Ongoing contact with the extended family of the deceased parent
- Issues of Legal Guardianship if both parents are deceased or incapacitated in some way*

#### **REVIEWING THE PARENTING PLAN / MAKING CHANGES TO THE PARENTING PLAN**

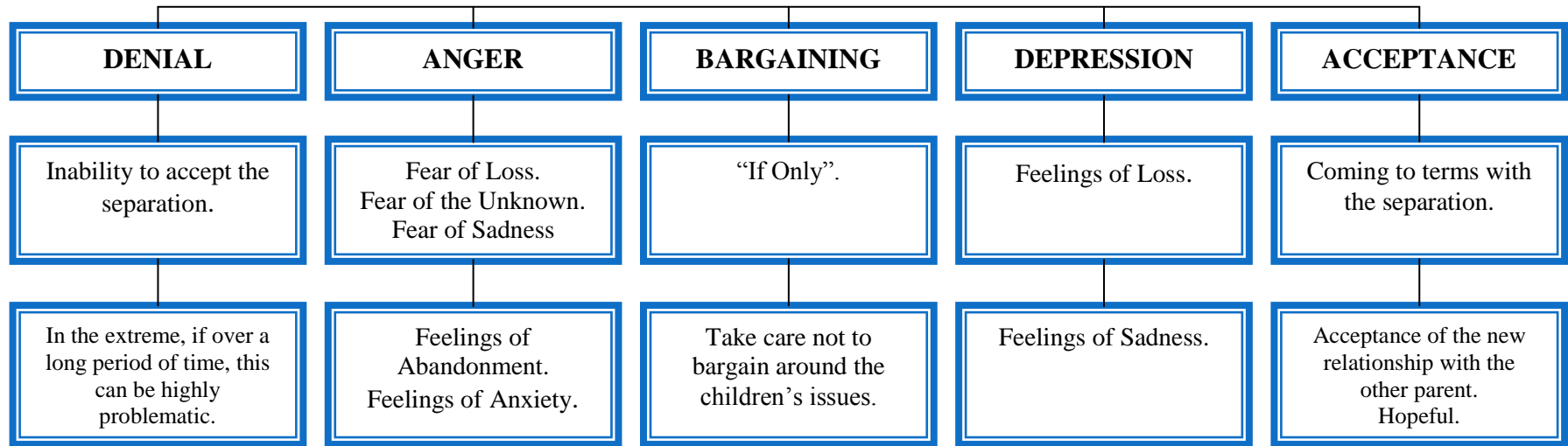
- When and how?

#### **HOW WILL PARENTS RESOLVE FUTURE DIFFERENCES**

- Use of Counselor / Family Therapist
- Mediation
- Lawyers

**Handout #4**

# EMOTIONAL SEPARATION



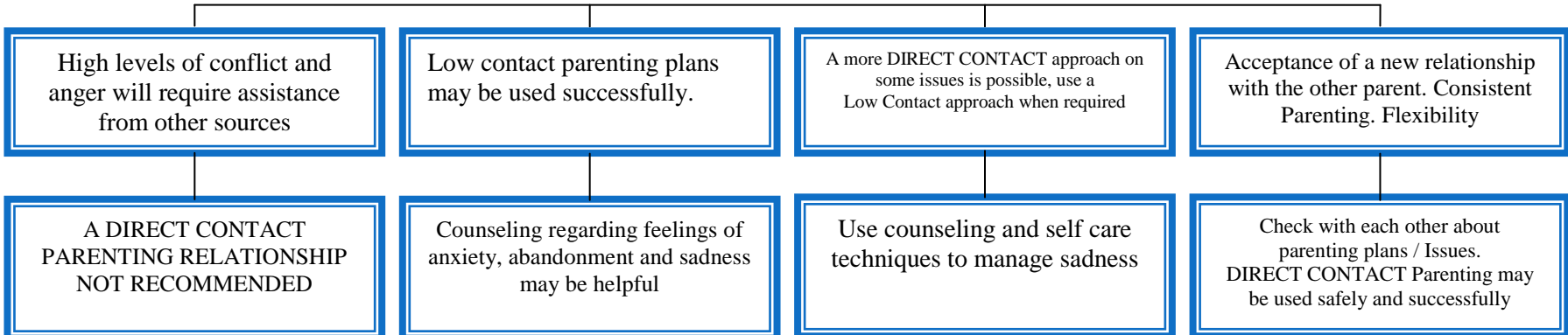
**TIME**

**HIGHER**

**LOWER CONFLICT**

**LOW to NO DIRECT CONTACT Parenting Relationship**

**DIRECT CONTACT Parenting Relationship**



## Handout #5

### THE SEPARATION EXPERIENCE

#### TYPES

#### PHYSICAL ELEMENT - ADULTS

As an adult, you will be experiencing the physical separation in terms of your former partner, and possibly your home and community. Acknowledging these changes as stressful, and at times even frightening; "Am I going to be able to manage on my own? Do I have the strength to do all this?", can be the first step in managing this task. A strong support system is helpful during this period. If you do not have many friends or family near you at this time, you can receive support through counselling or groups established to support and assist people in their adjustment to separation. (See Resources section for information)

Another element in the physical separation is the initial division of household items. Deciding who should keep certain gifts you both received as a couple, or even decisions regarding pots and pans, can be "emotionally loaded". People often argue over these things, thinking that they are struggling over the item itself. Although sometimes the item itself is important, more often what the item represents, its emotional significance to you, is what drives the struggle. Knowing this can be helpful. You can spend some time thinking about what is really important for you (and/or the children) to have and what you can let go of. You can ask yourself whether you are struggling over the items, or whether this is where your hurt or angry feelings are showing. You do not want your children to see you arguing and you do not need to be spending your precious energy in this manner. You will need your energy for the physical and emotional tasks associated with separating. If you and the children's other parent cannot work these issues out alone, you can both consider contacting a financial mediator or advisor for assistance in working out an agreement which is fair to all concerned. (See Resources section).

At all times, especially during the early stages of separation when it appears that there are more tasks than time, remember to take time for yourself. Whether this takes the form of an evening out or an exercise program (when alternate caregivers for the children are available), or a half hour of your favourite music, a long bubble bath after the kids are in bed, remember you deserve and need to take care of yourself. The investment of some time for yourself can increase your energy level, which will assist with your daily tasks and your ability to cope.

## CHILDREN

For children, one parent leaving the family home and/or their own move from the family home can be confusing and stressful. Preparing your children for these changes minimizes the difficulties they experience. Discuss the separation with your children beforehand, let them know that "Mom and Dad" have made a decision to live apart, without giving them details of the reasons for your separation. Let them know that you love them and that they will continue to see both of you; that you will continue to take care of them. Children often worry that they will not see one parent. Having a timesharing plan that you can tell them about or show them (see section entitled Calendars) prior to your physical separation, helps them to feel more secure. Assistance in planning a parenting schedule is available through mediation, prior to and following the separation (See Resources re Mediation for more information).

Children need to know the separation was not their fault; that the decision to separate was an adult decision. Frequently reminding them of this and the fact that you love them is very important. Although you and the child's other parent are now separated, the child continues to need you both. Being available to your child and supporting healthy relationships between your child and their other parent, goes a long way in their positive adjustment to the separation. Perhaps most importantly, do not expose your children to parental conflict. Parental conflict simply stated means parents "fighting".

Research and experience show it is parental conflict that causes the most harm to children, not the separation itself. The information in this manual should assist you

in understanding parental conflict and how to avoid it. For further assistance, contact Family Support Services (Family Court) at the telephone number for your region listed on the resource list in this folder and ask for the Family Court Social Worker.

### **SOCIAL ELEMENT - ADULTS**

Each couple's separation experience is different. Some partners manage to stay friends, to continue "sharing" friendships made during their union and to stay in contact with former in-laws. Others experience major shifts in their social circles, wherein choices are made, either by themselves or by others, about who is now who's friend and whether they are still "related" to their former partner's family. In situations where these shifts do occur, adults may experience a range of emotions including a sense of loss, resentment, or sometimes relief. As an adult, the challenge may be to establish new friendships to ensure that you have a support system and to manage relationships with "former" friends and relatives in a way that is not damaging to either yourself, them or your children.

As is the case with your child's other parent, your child does not "divorce" their "other" grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. Your child will continue to care for and need these people and will appreciate your support in maintaining these relationships. You can benefit, knowing that there are other people who love your child and with whom you can share the responsibility of meeting their needs.

## CHILDREN

Although there are situations where the child losing frequent contact with friends or extended family is unavoidable (e.g. A move away from the city or town they have been living in) in most cases such losses are avoidable. If you are leaving the home/community you have been residing in and/or the child must change schools, you can help them adjust by assisting in their contact with their "old" friends. With younger children you can assist with telephone contacts and arranging day visits or sleep-overs (if in the same city). Older children who cannot drive themselves may need a ride or help figuring out the bus schedule.

Children will often drift away from friends in their old community once they are established in the new one, however, maintaining the ties, at least initially, is beneficial. If you, or you and your children are moving out of your city or town, occasional telephone contacts, or visits if affordable, and/or assistance in writing letters to old friends is still recommended. The same applies with respect to both parents' extended families. Having lots of pictures and/or videotapes help children feel connected to family. Encourage others to call, write and/or visit. Your child needs to know these people still care and are "there" for them.

As noted, supporting your children's relationships with all extended family (i.e. Both Mom's and Dad's ) can benefit you and your child. Blocking those relationships can and usually does backfire. If your child loses relationships because you did not "allow" them, eventually the child figures it out and may well resent you for it. It would be difficult to explain to a teen or adult child why you withheld the love and support of others. Again, your child will appreciate your assistance in maintaining these relationships and will respect you for setting aside your own feelings and opinions for their benefit.



## **ECONOMIC ELEMENT - ADULTS**

In almost every family's situation, separation initially and often continually means trying to run two households on the same amount of money as you had been managing one household. i.e. higher costs/the same or less income.

There are also additional costs involved in moving, replacing or buying new household items, legal fees, and duplicating some of the children's possessions. Stricter budgeting is often necessary. Contacting a knowledgeable friend or a professional financial advisor (see Resources) can be helpful. However, the reality remains that your income will likely be lower, especially if you are the primary residence parent.

Research indicates that the children's primary residence parent often experiences a significant decrease in income, whereas the other parent's income may stay the same or increase. (This is more often the case where females are the primary residence parent). Research also shows that in addition to parental conflict, a significant decrease in economic status can negatively effect children and their adjustment to separation. These factors speak to the need, for the sake of the children, to be fair with respect to child support. Withholding available funds from your former spouse, or alternatively, requesting funds unnecessarily, may hurt the other adult - it will most certainly hurt your children. If either parent is left with insufficient funds to manage their household, the children will also suffer. Fair distribution of your joint incomes is the best way to ensure that your children will receive the most benefit in both homes from what is available for their care.

Children can be helped to understand that there is less money available, if that is the reality. There is nothing wrong with explaining that you cannot afford things, even those things that perhaps were affordable prior to the separation. Statements such as, "Mom and Dad can't afford that right now" can be managed by children. They cannot manage being told that it's "Mom's fault/Dad's fault".

Blame laden statements can cause anxiety for your children and can lead them to question why, if their other parent loves them, they won't help? Even if you are asking yourself the same question, it is important not to say this to your child. If this is the reality, in time your child will come to understand this for himself or herself, and may directly confront their other parent. In the meantime, involving them in financial concerns will only serve to worry them.

## CHILDREN

Children cannot do anything about finances. Although older children may secure part-time jobs, children cannot significantly increase the family income and will have no means by which to "make things better". By involving them in financial concerns (other than saying "We can't afford that right now"), children hear a message that they should "make things better". Knowing that they cannot, causes them further stress. Discussing money matters in too much detail, blaming their other parent, and/or asking them to speak to their other parent (e.g. to ask for more money) is too great a burden for children to bear.

For their part, children will be concerned about their "STUFF" e.g. "Will I get to keep my bicycle?", "What about my bike when I'm at mom's/dad's?". When you cannot afford to duplicate items, it is important to try and remember that it is THEIR STUFF. i.e. bikes, skates, portable CD players, clothes, photographs, even pets, etc. are best viewed as the children's possessions, which they should be allowed to take with them wherever they are staying. To make this "principle" work, both parents (or grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) must act responsibly, ensuring that the children have what they need and that their possessions go back and forth with them. Withholding things or not returning things, is a great way to aggravate another adult - it also upsets the children.

Parental conflict is often "played out" on children's possessions and in some situations has been taken to great extremes. For example, one parent angry with the other for not sharing the clothing expenses, sent the children out barefoot on a cold and rainy day with instructions to ask their other parent to buy them boots. What message did this give the children? That neither parent cared about their physical or emotional health? That Mom and Dad are so mad at each other, they

have forgotten to take care of us? Although this is a fairly extreme example (unfortunately not rare enough) most struggles over children's material possessions send a similar message. You can help your children feel secure by providing the best that can be afforded in both homes, by acknowledging limitations without blaming, and by respecting their right to their "STUFF".

### **LEGAL ELEMENT - ADULTS**

When going through a separation / divorce, many other "systems" impact upon each person. Consciously or unconsciously, you have to manage with society's, friends', and relatives' opinions and views of you and the fact of your separation, all of which may impact upon how you feel and see yourself. The legal system, lawyers and the Court will also have an impact on you and the children's other parent, both emotionally and financially. How "costly" the impact, depends significantly on how you and your child's other parent manage your separation and on how you decide to use the legal element.

Everyone benefits from sound legal advice. There are now many family law lawyers specializing in the issues of separation and divorce. They can assist with developing consent orders when you and the child's other parent can agree on matters. If necessary, with instruction from you, they can negotiate on your behalf and/or proceed to Court to represent your concerns. Again, the degree of their involvement directly depends upon how you and the child's other parent manage your issues. Your lawyers work for you. You pay them to advise you, however the final decision is up to the two of you, unless you proceed to Court, where the decision will be made by a judge.

The more issues the two of you decide between yourselves, the fewer issues need be negotiated by lawyers or decided by judges. In some situations one or both parents cannot discuss issues/negotiate matters for themselves for any number of reasons including a history of violence/intimidation by the other parent, serious alcohol/drug abuse, mental health issues, and/or where there are serious concerns regarding the safety of the children. In these types of situations intervention from an external resource is usually required such as the N.B. Department of Family and Community Services or the N.B. Domestic Legal Aid Program, N.B.

Department of Justice. In many situations however, parents can work together to make decisions regarding both their children and finances. In New Brunswick, government sponsored mediation is available to assist parents in making plans related to their children. Family Support Services (Family Court) (see Resources) can assist parents in formulating parenting plans regarding:

- how they will share responsibility for the children after separation.
- how the children will spend time with each parent on weekdays, weekends, holidays and;
- how they will continue to make major decisions about education, religion, dental and medical care and recreation.

Family Support Services(Family Court) Social Workers do provide financial mediation (see Resources). Mediation is not intended to replace independent legal advice. It can be considered as a first or at least "early step" in the process of attempting to make decisions regarding your children's future.

As noted, there are certain situations that require a high degree of involvement from the legal element. Certain situations require advocacy (a lawyer negotiating on your behalf) and/or adjudication (a judge to make the decision). Others can be resolved by direct negotiation or mediation. For help in deciding whether you could use mediation, call Family Support Services(Family Court) or a private mediator to discuss your situation. A skilled mediator can assist in assessing whether mediation would fit for you.

## CHILDREN

Justice Huddard of the Supreme Court of British Columbia once had two parents before her and asked each of them the same question: "Do you love your children?". Both the mother and the father answered "Well of course I do!" Justice Huddard replied, "Well, I don't. I don't even know them. Are you sure you want me to make the decisions about them?" Except in rare cases, parents know their children better than anyone else. They know their likes and dislikes, their special needs, what makes them laugh, what makes them cry, their "peculiarities", their strengths and their limitations. Parents are usually in the best position to make decisions regarding their children. They usually know them best and love them

most. Whenever parents can work together to make decisions about their children, they should.

**Whether you are working together or whether you and your children's other parent require legal assistance to make decisions regarding your situation, it is important not to involve your children.** Children may express opinions regarding their situation and it is important that you listen to them. However, it is equally important that you maintain responsibility for the decisions made for and about them. Involving children in the decisions about how to share time with mom and dad creates conflict within them. Remember, they love both of you, deciding "between you" is virtually impossible. Children may need to share more time in one home than the other, however that decision should be made for them, based on your knowledge of their needs.

If your decisions are being made through legal channels, do not speak of legal issues either directly to your children or with others, while the children are present. Do not involve your children in the preparation of legal materials, e.g. reading or writing affidavits, and do not have them speak to your lawyer. If you have serious concerns about your child's well being, contact an Intake Worker at the N.B. Department of Family and Community Services (see Resources). If you are concerned that your child has been, or is being abused, or is at risk of being abused, report the matter immediately to the N.B. Department of Family and Community Services. Children need to know the basic facts of your separation. (e.g. that you are separating, that they will be taken care of and that you still love them). They do not need to know all the details. If the matter proceeds to Court, and the judge believes that he or she needs to know more about your situation, your children's situation and their feelings, the judge can order that an assessment be conducted by a mental health professional, knowledgeable in the areas of separation/divorce and working with children.

Children need to **feel safe and protected**. You can protect them from information they cannot understand, by not engaging them in systems not meant for their involvement, and/or by seeking appropriate help through child focused agencies or the Court.

## **EMOTIONAL ELEMENT - ADULTS**

Misunderstandings, longstanding problems that never seem to get worked out, behaviours viewed as hurtful or inconsiderate, all serve to encourage emotional "distancing" between adults. For one or both adults the emotional separation will have begun prior to the actual separation. However, at some point both partners were invested in the relationship and therefore whether the decision to separate is made jointly or by one partner, it is known that both will go through a grieving process. Depending on one or both partners' behaviours, it may be difficult to believe that both have, or still are mourning the loss of the relationship, yet it is a rare circumstance for anyone to walk away from a relationship "kicking up their heels". People do not enter significant relationships thinking about the day they will leave. Most have great hopes and wonderful dreams about a secure, happy and fulfilled life with their partner. Disappointment is felt by all. To varying degrees, all couples that separate experience a period of mourning the loss of the relationship, their hopes and dreams. Whether some of the grieving process occurs prior to the actual separation for one or both partners, or how long they grieve following separation, will vary from one individual to the next.

Research indicates a period of one (1) to three (3) years is the average amount of time required for separated individuals to adjust to the separation and reach a new balanced state in their lives. This grieving process, which is similar in nature to grieving the death of a loved one, has been identified as being composed of several feelings which arise and diminish over time, during the separation process.

### (1) **Denial**

Both adults and children, at some point, experience the sense that, "this can't be happening to me". Adults' denial is often more short-lived than children's, as the reality of tasks involved in separating settle in. However, both adults and children may have difficulty accepting the reality and telling others about it. If you are experiencing difficulty telling others, choose a trusted friend or family member to start with and ask for their assistance in telling others.

You can assist your children to explain things to others, reassuring them that there is nothing "wrong with them" because their parents separated. Remind them of others they know that are in the same situation and/or that there are many families where parents do not live together. Let your children know you appreciate the difficulties they are experiencing and that you will try to help them. Contacting the child's school to let them know, can be helpful. Some schools now have groups for children whose parents have separated/divorced. Ask if your child's school has such a resource.

(2)            **Anger**

Anger often results from fear of the loss being experienced and fear of the unknown. Adults' fear of loss includes fear of being rejected, of being alone, the loss of respect, companionship and love. "How could she/he leave me?"; "Why couldn't she/he try harder?"; "Is there something wrong with me?"; "Will I ever love again?"; "Why does she/he seem happy already? Am I that disposable?" All these questions and more will "spin" around in a person's head.

They are difficult, hurtful questions. Anger is often the surface emotion, covering the deeper feelings of hurt, fear and regret. The fear of the unknown, is simply and not so simply that ..... "What now? Where do I go from here? Where do I turn for help when it's too much for me to handle?" Remember you and your children's other parent may be able to work together, to plan and answer some of these questions. You may no longer be husband and wife, or common law partners, but you are still parents together. Helping each other, or at minimum not sabotaging each other's efforts, will help your children.

Anger is a common and expected emotion during separation and divorce and during the ending of a significant relationship. How you manage your anger is key to your own adjustment and that of your children. Using your anger against the other parent, hurting them either emotionally or physically, is not acceptable. Not only the other parent, but you, and your children, will be negatively affected. If you cannot manage your anger in a way that is not hurtful to others (and yourself),

seek help. Counsellors understand that anger is common. They can help you to manage your anger and work toward healing what hurts.

Children demonstrate anger for the same reason adults do - fear of loss and fear of the unknown. Their fears will be different e.g. "Do mom and dad still love me?", "Will I still see both of them? What about grandma and grandpa?"; "Who will take care of me?"; "Why are they still arguing?" Their feelings of confusion, fear, hurt and regret are under their angry outbursts as well.

Assuring children, following through with promises, protecting them from your angry feelings and/or conflict with their other parent, all assists in minimizing their anger. Nonetheless, they may demonstrate anger and it is likely to come out in ways you would not expect. Be aware and sensitive to your child's reactions. This is their way of "telling you" their feelings.

Children are not likely to ask you direct questions. It is not likely that either calmly or in a screaming voice they will ask "Why is this happening? Why did you do that? I'm angry!" More likely, they will start screaming or crying over something that seems insignificant. For example, your child's shoelace breaks and he or she screams "dumb shoelace, dumb, dumb, dumb, shoelace" over and over. Once they have stopped and you have recovered from the shock of their reaction, rather than focusing on the item (in this case the shoelace) focus on the feeling. Try saying something like "Geez, you seem really upset about something. Do you want to talk about it?" It may feel awkward saying this, however your child will appreciate it. They may begin to think that you are quite magical, as you show them you know they are upset. At times you may feel you need some magic to manage your child's emotions. Remembering that the behaviour is your child's way of asking for your help, can assist you. "Geez, you seem really upset/confused/worried about something? Want to talk about it?" can open the door for your child to express his or her feelings. Hearing them out and reassuring them is what you both need. As your child starts talking about how he or she is feeling, the angry expressions will stop, and you will feel more able to manage the feelings they are telling you about.



(3) **Bargaining**

Often at the beginning stages of separation, adults and children have "if only" thoughts. "If only I'd done this or that"; "If only we'd tried harder". This form of "bargaining" is a common way of trying to explain and justify the separation.

Adults must come to terms with the fact that they cannot change the past. The positive aspect of the bargaining stage, the "learning piece" for adults can be that you can manage the future differently. If you have ideas about how you could have done things differently, remember the ideas, and apply them in the future. These ideas may apply to relationships with other friends and family members, to future partner relationships or to the relationship with your former partner. You do not have to continue struggling with your former partner.

Learning new ways of communicating, new ways of dealing with each other, will benefit you and your children. Children need help understanding that they did not cause the separation. Often children's "bargaining" sounds like this - "If only I'd put my toys away, mom/dad wouldn't have left"; "If only I could have made them happier.....". You can assist your children by reassuring them that you both love them and that they did not make you and their other parent separate.

(4) **Depression**

Both adults and children experience feelings of loss and sadness. Crying easily, lack of energy, lack of concentration and need for more sleep, are common reactions to separation. Although it is often difficult to distinguish between what is a common reaction and what requires assistance through counselling or medical attention, you are likely in the best position to judge whether you can manage on your own or whether you need help. If at any point in your separation/divorce you feel like you "can't go on", that "its too much," discuss the matter with your doctor and/or counsellor who can help you assess what type, if any, additional support you require. Needing additional support does not mean there is something wrong

with you. It is better to ask for assistance when you can still see/feel the difficulties you are experiencing, than to have it brought to your attention by others. Some signals that you may be experiencing more than the type of sadness that is commonly associated with separation is:

- prolonged lack of concentration at work that effects performance;
- "uncontrollable" crying (e.g. in situations where you would not normally allow yourself to cry);
- an extended period of being unable to wake up, stay awake, or get uninterrupted sleep;
- continuous lack of energy;
- lack of interest in matters not related to the separation.

Check with your doctor and/or a counsellor for assistance in determining whether you are experiencing a clinical depression that requires attention.

Children may demonstrate their sadness either through tears, sleep disruption, lack of concentration at school, changes in eating habits and/or regressive behaviour (which means they may act younger than their age). All children experience sadness when their parents separate. As with adults, the degree of disrupted behaviour must be monitored e.g. watch for signals of extreme or prolonged behaviour changes.

Initially, you can assist your child by acknowledging his or her sadness and reassuring the child with comments such as "I know you are sad that mom and I / dad and I aren't living together any more. It's important for you to know that we both love you and will continue to take care of you". Other ways to help children overcome their sadness are:

- acknowledge and reassure your children;
- help them to feel safe and secure by not exposing them to arguments with their other parent;
- refrain from making negative comments about their other parent;
- ensure contact with both parents and extended family and friends.

If your child starts acting younger than his or her age (e.g.: your three year old suddenly needs a diaper again; your twelve year old suddenly cries when you ask that chores be done) try to "meet them" at the age they are demonstrating. In other words, parent them the way you did when they were at that younger age.

With the three year old, you would continue to encourage use of the bathroom without shaming them e.g. "Well, sweetie, try to remember that you need to use the bathroom, but maybe for now, we'll give you a diaper again. Would that help you?" With the 12 year old, rather than arguing about chores, you might try saying "It seems you might need some help making your bed/doing the dishes? Would you like me to help you finish your chores?" Managing regressive behaviour in this manner, lets your child know you understand that he or she is feeling badly, and that you are willing to help. With such help, children often "recover" their age quickly and you have saved yourself a lot of grief by not fighting them.

If your child's behaviour seems disrupted for an extended period and your attempts to assist her or him are not successful, call a child related agency (see Resources) to discuss your concerns.

(5)            **Acceptance**

Adults must eventually adjust to the loss of their partner relationship with their children's other parent. Complete adjustment can often take years and will require support of friends, family and/or counselling. Acceptance of the separation, includes accepting the loss, your role in the separation, your inability to "change" your former partner/to save the relationship and acceptance of your child's need for, and right to, an ongoing relationship with both parents.

For adults, a separation/divorce inevitably means the loss of the relationship as you knew it. You are no longer partners/wife and husband. At best, you are friends, or simply parents who need to work together for the sake of the children.

For children, a separation/divorce **should not** mean the loss of relationships. Children don't divorce their parents and they need you to accept that fact and help them maintain ties with all the people they love.

**Handout #6**

**EFFECTS OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN**

Child experiences high levels of fear, anxiety. May regress, have difficulty concentrating. Will also act out anger.

Child may act “watchful”, sensitive to parents’ moods. May attempt to please/may still act out.

Child may show signs of sadness, confusion, act withdrawn.

Begins to trust that they are safe. Increased ability to concentrate. Focuses more on own growth and development.

HIGH

LEVEL OF CONFLICT

LOW

## **Handout #7**

### **PARENTS SHOULD CONSIDER...** **(Tips for separated/divorced parents)**

---

- 1. Give your children verbal and emotional permission to have ongoing contact with the other parent.**
- 2. Deal directly with one another as parents. Do not use your children as messengers.**
- 3. Do not fight or argue while your children are present or within hearing distance.**
- 4. Do not denigrate or name call the other parent while your children are present.**
- 5. Do not quiz your children about their other parent's personal life.**
- 6. Do not quiz your children about the time they share with their other parent.**
- 7. Do not give your children « adult information » about the separation; e.g. what the lawyers are doing, court action, financial concerns, etc.**
- 8. Do not involve your children in the decision making with respect to financial issues. This is clearly a parental responsibility.**
- 9. Do not base the amount of visitation on the amount of child support being paid. One does not preclude the other.**
- 10. Minimize or eliminate the conflict between yourselves as parents. Research clearly indicates that children adjust much better to their parents' separation, when the parents are cooperating.**

Please note: The above are not in any specific order of importance.

## Handout #8

# DIVORCE: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

---

### Children Have the Right to:

Develop and maintain an independent relationship with each parent.

Be free of the conflict between the parents.

Be free from having to take over the parental responsibilities for making custody/visitation decisions.

Be free from having to take sides with, defend, or downgrade either parent.

Be guided, taught, supervised, disciplined, and nurtured by each parent, without interference from the other parent.

Be financially supported by both parents, regardless of how much time is spent with each parent.

Spend time with each parent, regardless of whether or not financial support is given.

A personal sleeping area and space for possessions in each parent's home.

Be physically safe and adequately supervised when in the care of each parent.

Have a stable, consistent and responsible child care arrangement when not supervised by the parents.

Develop and maintain meaningful relationships with other significant adults, as long as these relationships do not interfere with or replace the children's primary relationship with the parents.

Expect that both parents will follow through with the child care plan, honouring specific commitments for scheduled time with the children.

Both parents being informed about medical, dental, educational, and legal matters concerning the child, unless such disclosure would prove harmful to the children.

Expect that their parents will consider any special needs (developmental, mental, emotional or physical) they might have when arranging a child care plan.

Participate in age-appropriate activities so long as these activities do not significantly impair their relationship with either parent.

## Handout #9

### WEBSITES:

**Please note that although most of these websites have the word « divorce » in them, there is lots of information about the emotional, legal and other issues involved when parents are working together from two homes. Even if you were not legally married, you may find some of this information helpful.**

<http://www.familylawnb.ca>

<http://www.divorcecentral.com/>

(Good general information with lots of links to other sites, but with mostly American legal information.)

<http://www.divorceasfriends.com/>

<http://www.divorcesupport.com/>

<http://www.divorceinfo.com/>

<http://members.aol.com/kidsturn/>

(Site for parents and children)

<http://parent.net/resources/divorce.html>

(Links to some articles on separated parenting)

<http://www.divorcemagazine.com>

<http://www.supportkids.com>

Parenting Tool Kit – Justice Canada <http://section15.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/parent/plan.html>

What Happens Next? Information for Kids about Separation and Divorce (Justice Canada) - <http://justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/fl-lf/famil/book-livre/index.html>

Because Life Goes On...Helping Children and Youth Live with Separation and Divorce (Public Health Agency of Canada) - <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/toc-eng.php>

Custody and Parenting (Justice Canada) - [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/parent/index.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/parent/index.html)

Child Support online look up - <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/child-enfant/look-rech.asp>

Spousal Support online look up - [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fcy-fea/spo-epo/g-id/spag/index.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fcy-fea/spo-epo/g-id/spag/index.html)

What Happens Next Calendar - <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/fl-lf/famil/cal/2014/index.html>

[Inventory of Government based Family Justice Services \(Justice Canada\) - http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/fjs-sjf/brows-fure.asp?type=2](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/fjs-sjf/brows-fure.asp?type=2)