



## Breaking up is hard to do

**Relationship breakups are often traumatic for everyone involved, never more so than for the children and young people caught up in the conflict of parents who separate.**

Kids Helpline provided more than 1,900 counselling sessions during 2012, where the child or young person wanted to discuss a family separation, custody issue or blended family living arrangement.

Many talked about witnessing high levels of conflict between their parents, were feeling confused about what might happen in the future, or blamed themselves for the conflict.

After a young person's parents have separated or divorced, they might be living with one parent or rotate between the two. In this case, young people have spoken about the challenge of travelling between two houses or going to two schools. They are also upset that they cannot see as much of one parent as they used to.

Separated parents who are still engaged in conflict with each other, sometimes try and get information about the other parent from their child or criticise the other parent in front of the child. This too can cause young people to feel distressed.

Some children and young people find it particularly difficult to adjust to their parent being in a new relationship or moving in with their new partner. There may be open conflict

or the young person may not feel comfortable around a step-parent or new partner because the young person may feel like this person is trying to replace their other parent.

### **How can parents help children and young people in this situation?**

- Reassure them that the separation was not their fault
- Emphasise that both parents still love and care for them
- Ensure that parental conflict is handled maturely and in private
- If a non-resident parent, keep in regular contact with the child
- If the child lives between two homes, give them their own space in each home so they can feel comfortable wherever they are
- Tell them about Kids Helpline if they need to talk to someone neutral.

See page 3 for more tips on shared parenting.

Kids Helpline is available 24/7 to offer children and young people help and support about any situation. Call **1800 55 1800** or visit [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au).