

# 6 How to Help Your Children

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## 1. Keep a structured and regular routine, similar to what existed before.

- Stick to a daily routine with your children. Make changes slowly and talk about them. Encourage your children to play with friends and have a normal life. Try to keep your children's environment as stable as possible. It is not a good idea to make too many changes at one time.

*Example: Your children may be getting used to having only one parent at home every night. Moving into a new home or going to a new school may be too much for him or her at the same time.*

- Maintain rituals around birthdays or holidays. This helps provide a sense of security and helps your children plan and look forward to family events.
- Help children feel free to ask questions. Tell them about changes well ahead of time. Children want to know what is going on in their lives.
- Encourage your children to be involved in school activities, sports, and after-school programs.
- Talk to your children honestly about changes or moves that will affect them before they happen.

## 2. Don't fight and yell in front of your children.

It is important that you protect your children from seeing arguments or violence between you and your partner. If you are experiencing strong feelings about the separation, you may wish to find a support group or speak to an Elder who can help you work through your feelings, away from the children.

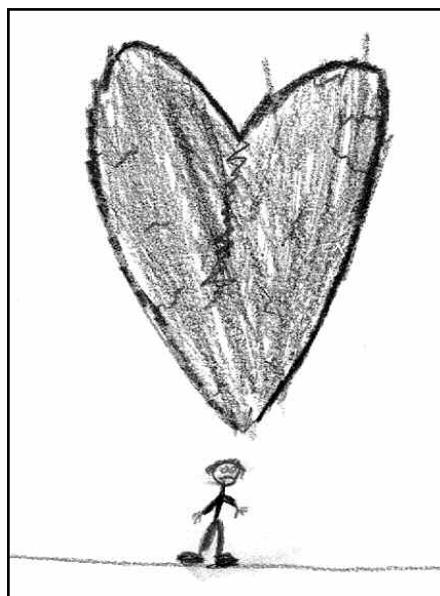
## 3. Encourage children to express their feelings.

During this time, children may feel sad, scared, and lonely. Helping them express their feelings allows children to know that it's okay to have all these feelings. Then tell them you will always be there to love them and take care of them. When you think about your child's feelings, you are letting them know that you realize how they are feeling.

#### 4. Allow time for children to grieve; mirror their feelings.

Like you, children are grieving the loss of the family as they have known it. Many of their feelings of anger and confusion are like the feelings you are experiencing yourself.

In their grief, children may express feelings of anger towards you. Try not to take them personally. Your children are trying to make sense of the separation. When your children are upset, you could try to use “mirroring.” Mirroring is simply stating back what your child has just said. For example, “I hate you Mommy. You made Daddy leave.” You can mirror this back: “Right now you feel like you hate me because you think I made Daddy leave.” Mirroring can help children to feel heard.



Terence, Nipisikopahk Middle School

#### 5. Tell them you love them and it was not their fault.

Your children need support now more than ever. Children need to hear, over and over, that you love them no matter what happens. Explain to them that while the love adults have for one another can change, the love a parent has for a child can never change.

Tell your children that the separation was not his or her fault. Tell him or her it is okay to feel sad about the changes. Avoid making your children take sides. Some children may feel guilty for having a good time with the other parent.

#### 6. Set limits on their behaviour.

Children need limits. They need a stable home life with clear rules and a parent they can depend on to be consistent about the limits. Sometimes they test these limits. However, in maintaining limits you are helping them feel secure. Children who have chores appropriate to their ages and abilities are better able to adjust to change.

## When to Get Help for Your Children

It is time to seek professional help when:

- **Children’s distress and problems are constant and ongoing.**
- **Children’s symptoms get worse over time.**
- **You feel unable to cope with your children.**

To get help, start by contacting some of the groups listed on the **Contact List**.