

my family's changing

FACTS AT YOUR FINGER-TIPS

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GETTING ALONG

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

DEALING WITH YOUR PARENTS SPLITTING UP

Words from the wise

How other kids have coped

IS MY FAMILY NORMAL?

What is a NORMAL family anyway . . .

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How good are YOU at talking things through

sharing your space

Living with new people

I'm ANGRY!

Dealing with feelings

WHY FAMILIES CHANGE:

Lots of children's families change when their parents split up.

There are lots of reasons why relationships don't always work out and parents decide to split up, but it is usually because one or both of them is unhappy and they believe that they need to be apart for things to get better.

Here are some of the most common reasons:

- Growing or drifting apart.
- Wanting different things.
- Not being able to spend much time together.
- Wanting to be with someone else.
- Having lots of disagreements.

The reasons are different for every family.

From the list, or using your own ideas, or maybe even asking your parents, can you think of the reasons why your parents might think it's best to be apart?

Write them in the space below

ALWAYS REMEMBER:

It's not your fault that this is happening

Your Mum and Dad will always be your parents even if they are not together anymore.

IS MY FAMILY NORMAL?

"I sometimes get jealous of my friends because I think they've got a normal life still, with just a Mum and Dad." Ellie, age 14

But what is normal?

Families come in all sorts of shapes and sizes . . .

"I live with my Mum in the week and with my Nan on Friday and Saturday nights."
Tanika, age 8

"Me and my brother live with my Dad and his girlfriend and her three children."
Lenny, age 10

"I live with a family who look after me, and sometimes I see my Mum."
Kelly, age 12

"I visit my Dad every other weekend."
Ellie, age 14

"My Mum and Dad split up when I was a baby but I spend the same amount of time at both their houses."
Jade, age 11

"My Mum died when I was little so it's just me and my Dad."
Sophia, age 10

. . . so, there's really no such thing as a normal family.

Change is not always easy, especially if lots of people are involved. It might take some time for everyone to get used to new or different ways.

Facts at your fingertips

Facts at your fingertips

- **About one out of every four children has parents who get divorced.**
- **About 650 children see their parents separate or get divorced every day.**
- **1.5 million children visit a parent at the weekends or during the holidays.**
- **Over 2.5 million children are now growing up as part of a stepfamily.**
- **About 300,000 children have parents who have been married to other people before.**

What happens when parents divorce?

A marriage can only be ended by an order from the County Court. A County Court is a court for your local area, and is very different from the courts that deal with crime.

The judge may be asked to make decisions about residence (who you live with) or contact (the arrangements for having contact with the parent who doesn't live with you anymore).

Usually, it is not necessary for anyone to actually go to the court for a divorce as things can usually be dealt with by post.

To do this, they may ask a Children and Family Reporter from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service to talk to you and your parents and then give advice to the court on the best arrangements.

Your parents may talk to mediators (people who are trained in helping parents to come to agreements) or get advice from lawyers (specialists on the law) about how best to agree future plans – things like money, where people are going to live and most importantly, arrangements for you.

When the judge has all the information to make a decision, a Court Hearing may be arranged to discuss the arrangements. A Court Hearing is a meeting between the judge and your parents to hear what everyone has to say. Children are not usually called to the court because it's the job of the Children and Family Reporter to make sure that the children's views are passed on to the judge.

Sometimes parents find it too difficult to agree on future arrangements and so a judge can make decisions for them. These are known as Court Orders.

It can be really hard and upsetting when your parents split up. However, most children find that in time, things do get better and they can eventually feel okay about what's happened.

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

We all need someone to talk to. Don't keep things bottled up inside, especially if you are going through big family changes. You may be able to talk to your Mum or Dad. If not, here are some other people you may feel able to speak to. Make sure it is someone you trust.

a grandparent

a sister or brother

a cousin

an aunt or uncle

a friend

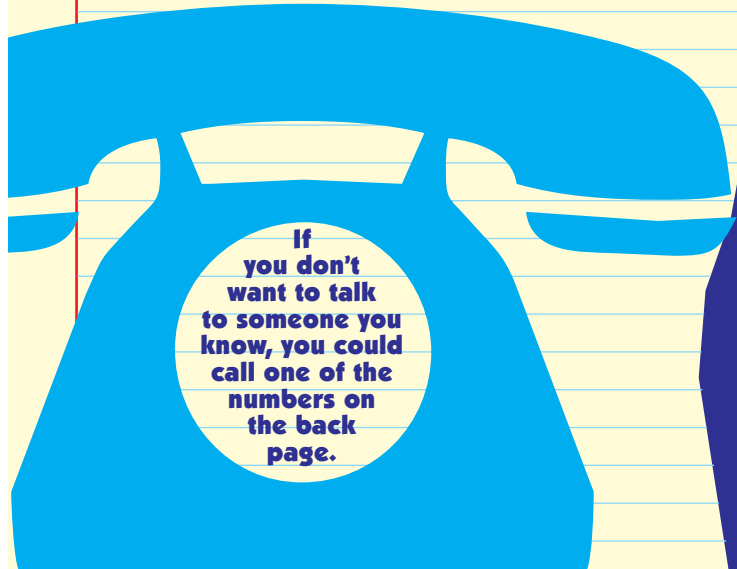
someone you know who has been through a similar thing

a teacher at school

a friend's Mum

a youth worker or play worker

a counsellor (someone whose job it is to listen to how you feel)



If you don't want to talk to someone you know, you could call one of the numbers on the back page.

I'M A

Have a go at the wordsearch below. Write down any of the words that describe how you feel. Look at them again in a month or a year to see if (and how) your feelings have changed.

It's okay to have mixed feelings (like being happy and sad at the same time), especially when you are going through big family changes.

L	P	C	O	N	F	U	S	E	D	S	N	C
O	M	R	Q	C	S	X	C	D	I	T	A	P
V	E	M	B	A	R	R	A	S	S	E	D	D
E	S	Y	T	E	B	Y	R	C	A	O	L	Y
D	N	T	V	L	P	S	E	F	P	F	A	U
P	E	A	G	P	G	U	D	M	P	K	E	L
S	R	H	A	D	J	E	A	L	O	U	S	D
B	V	H	W	U	N	D	W	C	I	G	P	I
W	O	R	R	I	E	D	J	S	N	Y	X	F
D	U	S	F	T	R	I	A	J	T	C	T	F
U	S	B	I	G	Q	D	N	L	E	O	B	E
P	J	C	Q	S	E	R	I	A	D	H	P	R
S	X	R	G	R	S	U	P	A	L	O	N	E
E	Y	J	O	N	G	A	O	I	N	C	F	N
T	D	N	O	Z	K	A	L	R	I	G	H	T
A	G	A	D	S	A	J	F	O	V	S	R	A
I	F	R	I	G	H	T	E	N	E	D	F	Y

Words to search for:

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|---------|
| ANGRY | EXCITED | LOVED |
| ALONE | FINE | NERVOUS |
| ALRIGHT | FRIGHTENED | OKAY |
| BRAVE | GOOD | SAD |
| CONFUSED | GUILTY | SAFE |
| DIFFERENT | HAPPY | SCARED |
| DISAPPOINTED | IGNORED | UPSET |
| EMBARRASSED | JEALOUS | WORRIED |

ANGRY

If you are angry, sad or worried it is quite normal to want to be quiet and not want to talk. But sometimes bottled-up feelings can make you feel a bit sick, like you have butterflies in your stomach, or they can stop you sleeping because you are worried.

Here's how to let out some of those bottled-up feelings:

- Talk to someone
- Do something that makes you happy: see a film, re-read a favourite book, or listen to your favourite music.
- Paint a picture (really big). Use loads of paint and bright colours to show how you feel. You could try red for anger, blue for calm and happy, yellow for nervous, purple for sad, and green for jealous.
- Write in your (secret) diary.
- Write a letter to a friend.
- Write a letter to the person who is making you feel bad but rip it up before you send it.
- Sport – playing football, swimming, dancing or just running fast can all make you feel better.
- If you feel really mad, hit a big, soft cushion or yell into a pillow.

None of these things will solve all your problems or make things go back to just the way they were, but some of them may help.

SO WHAT IS A LONE PARENT FAMILY?

A lone parent family is when you live with only one of your parents, your Mum or your Dad. You may sometime see or stay with your other parent, you may have no contact, or your other parent may have died.

SO WHAT IS A STEPFAMILY?

A stepfamily is when one or both of your parents are in a relationship with someone who isn't your Mum or Dad (like your Mum or Dad's boyfriend or girlfriend, or your Mum or Dad's new husband or wife) who may have children, too. Some people feel happy to use the word "stepfamily", others don't like it. Whatever you choose, it's okay.

it's all in a name

Imagine your Mum or Dad has a new boyfriend or girlfriend. Perhaps your Mum or Dad is getting remarried or maybe your Mum or Dad's new husband or wife and kids are going to come and live with you. What do you call them? And how do you describe them to your friends?

"I call my Mum's boyfriend Uncle SyNester. I know he's not my real Uncle or anything but we like it."
Jamal, age 6

"It winds me up when my stepsister calls my Dad, Dad. He's my Dad, not hers."
Leon, age 9

"I call Winston by his name. Although he's like a father figure, he's not my Dad." Matt, age 15

"I wanted to have the same surname as my Mum, stepdad and stepbrother. It's great now it's changed because I'm higher up on the register." Ellie, age 14

GETTING ALONG

You don't like your Mum's boyfriend, or you and his children just don't get on. You know you're stuck with them even though you wish you weren't. What can you do?

HELP TIPS

Keep busy. Being with your friends and doing something you really like can help you get through tough times.

Always be yourself. Don't try to change the way you are to please other people. Take time to get to know them.

You may find you like some of the same things.

Think of at least one good thing about each person.

Try to think about things from the other person's point of view. If your stepsister is really whingey, or your stepbrother locks himself in his room all evening, perhaps they're unhappy about being part of a new family, too.

Remember, you don't have to love everyone, but in time you may end up liking them.

sharing your Space

You may have to get used to living with new people. What's it like?

"At first, it was a nightmare having to live with them when you didn't even know them" Charlotte, age 12

"Although I'm not at my Dad's all the time, I feel at home because I keep my own stuff there." Emma, age 14

"They have rules that you don't understand or are not used to." Sian, age 14

TIPS

Keep some of your favourite things around you to make you feel happier.

Don't feel you have to get rid of any things even if they make your Mum or Dad upset. Explain to them that they make YOU feel better.

If you can't have your own room, make sure you have a space to keep your own things.

GET TALKING

Do you throw a screaming fit if you don't get your own way? Or do you stop talking to everyone for a week? Try this quick quiz and find out if you are good at talking about feelings.

You are moving house and you have to go to a new school. Your Mum is worried about how you will cope and keeps asking. Do you:

- (a) Say you're fine (even if you're not). You don't want to worry her even more.
- (b) Tell her to stop going on about it and leave you alone.
- (c) Say you're glad she's asked you and tell her there are things you are a bit worried about.

Since your Mum and Dad split up, your Mum has become a lot stricter than she was. When Dad lived with you, you used to go to the cinema on Saturday evenings with your mates. Now you're not allowed out at all. Do you:

- a) Stay in and Sulk
- b) Yell "I hate living with you, I'm going to live with Dad!"
- c) Try and talk to your Mum

and ask her to help you understand why you were allowed out before and not now. Try and show her that although things have changed, you haven't. You can be trusted as you were before.

Every time you come back from a weekend at your Mum's, your dad tries to find out how she is getting on with her new boyfriend. Do you:

- a) Make up stories that things aren't going well even if they are
- b) Tell him to stop hassling you and storm off
- c) Explain to him why talking about it makes you feel uncomfortable

You go and stay with your Dad every weekend. You get on well

but often miss out on what your friends are doing. Do you:

- a) Continue going to your Dad's as usual. You don't want to hurt his feelings
- b) Don't turn up on the weekends that your friends are doing something more exciting
- c) Explain to your Dad that even though you still want to see him, you'd like to see your mates sometimes too.

Your stepsister is driving you crazy, taking your things or borrowing your clothes without telling you. Do you:

- (a) Put up with it: you don't want to cause a row.
- (b) Lock everything up and threaten to do something nasty to her.
- (c) Ask her to imagine how she'd feel if you did it to her.

Even though it's really difficult sometimes, you're good at being able to talk things through and say what you feel. You are also aware of other people's feelings and listen to what they have to say. Well done!

Mostly b's
You're not afraid to let people know what you are feeling. But just as much as you have a right to say what you think, others do too. Try to put yourself in other people's shoes from time to time and imagine what they are feeling.

Mostly a's
You often put other people's feelings before your own. Don't keep things bottled up inside. People won't know how you feel unless you tell them, and talking can make things better.

how did you score?

Words from the wise

... about feelings

... about new families

It's not your fault.
Andy, age 11

Make sure you don't blame yourself for the break-up.
Phillip, age 9

Remember, your feelings are important and normal.
Kelly, age 12

Talk to someone and let them know how you are feeling. Don't let it eat away at you on the inside.
Flora, age 14

Useful Books
Dinosaurs Divorce. L Brown + M Brown. Little Brown and Company

Parent Problems - Children's views on life when parents split up. B Neale + A Wade. Young Voice

Suitcase Kid. Jacqueline Wilson. Corgi Yearling

GETTING HELP

ChildLine: 0800 1111

(Freephone 24 hours a day)
www.childline.org.uk

Special help line for children. Call for free advice or just someone to talk to.

Children's Legal Centre
01206 873 820

(10.00 - 12.30pm, 2-4.30pm weekdays)
information on the law for children

Youth Access 020 8772 9900

(9.30 am-5.30 pm Monday to Friday)
Will tell you where you can go for help in your local area.

Parentline Plus www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Information for young people
freephone helpline for parents: 0808 800 2222

NSPCC Helpline 0800 800 500

(Freephone 24 hours a day)
Offers counselling, information and advice for anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse, including children themselves.

Who Cares? Linkline 0500 564 570

(Freephone 3.30- 6.00 pm Monday, Wednesday and Thursday)
Advice and support if you have been or are in care

Samaritans 08457 909090

(Freephone 24 hours a day)
Advice and support if you feel really unhappy and depressed

CRUSE Bereavement Care 020 8332 7227

Help, advice and support if a relative or a friend has died.

National Youth Advocacy Service 0151 649 8700

Freephone 9am-9pm Monday to Friday
2-8pm weekends
information, advice and representation (someone who can speak for you)

It can get better . . . there are less arguments now than when my parents were together.
Britta, age 13

You have more people to talk to and be with. There are more people to care about you.
Luke, age 7

Your parents don't love you any less.
Sian, age 14

Just try to give them a chance.
Anthony, age 8

THANK YOU to all the children who helped with developing this leaflet.

FOR FURTHER COPIES OF THIS LEAFLET PLEASE CONTACT:

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