



Guide-How to tell the children

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“Underneath most kids bonnets there is an innate need to want to know how safe they are”

Most children of separated parents say that they were told too late and that they were aware of something being wrong, before their parents talked to them.

This can feel really unsettling for children of all ages. Children just want and need to feel emotionally secure which means [different things for different children at different ages](#).

As separating parents, you will need to consider:

- **What to tell them**- It is often better to tell them something rather than nothing, leaving them to guess.
- **How to say it**- Don't blame, acknowledge children's feelings, give them time to reflect on important questions they need answers to. See page 44-52 of book: How to tell your kids (see resource)- 4 types of questions:
 - Open
 - Reflective
 - Hypothetical
 - Closed/Directive
- **When to tell them**-This very much depends on the context.
- **Where to tell them**- In surroundings they are likely to feel most secure.
- **Plan for questions**- See page 42 of book: How to tell you kids (see resource)
 - Who is going to look after me
 - Where will I have to be and when
 - Will I have to leave my room
 - Where will we live
 - Did I do anything wrong
 - Do you still love me (because you have stopped loving Mum/Dad)
 - What will I tell my friends
 - Will I have to change schools
 - Can I still do my usual activities
 - Whose fault is it-who decided to break up

It will help to be aware of the impact on children of separation to understand what they might be needing and why they might be saying and behaving in the way they are, depending on ages and maturity. Be ready for these kinds of responses.

Think about whether you want to discuss this subject and these questions [in mediation with the other parent or individually with a coach before speaking to the other parent](#).



11 keys

1. Tell the children together if possible- united front. [Ideally with the other partner](#). What if one partner does not wish to?
2. No blame game- keep the [conversations very child centred](#) (not putting them in the middle)
3. Avoid repetitive conflict in front of the children and especially arguments about the children.
4. Talk about what will stay the same (reduce changes)
5. Be empathetic towards them- Ask them what they want to know
6. Give the children time to reflect on the news and formulate questions about things that are important to them
7. Anticipate logistic questions- where live/ holiday plans etc.
8. Have time with each child after/ next day with more age-appropriate content
9. Understand each child's personality and individual needs/ how each they might deal with it differently (emotionally, psychologically, practically)
10. Be aware of [Grief cycles](#) for each parent and children- emotional journey
11. Be aware of who they might be talking to

Resources: [How to talk to your kids about separation: A little guide for you to help your kids through a difficult time: Amazon.co.uk: Scott C. Docherty: 9781512212495: Books](#)

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