

Women and separation

Managing new horizons



Relationships[™]
AUSTRALIA

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We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work, and we pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging.

Contents

About this book	3
Separation and women's experiences	4
Who initiated the separation?	12
Looking after yourself	17
Your financial situation	20
Children and separation	21
Relating to your co-parent	25
Violence and abuse	28
Working out a settlement	33
The future	46
Research about women and separation	47
Where to get more support	48
Recommended resources	54
References	56
Notes	58

“It's the simple things that still take me by surprise. Like when I see his car parked somewhere, it all comes flooding back again.”

FL, aged 48

3 years after separation

“Follow the path to healing even though you don't believe you will heal.”

BG, aged 37
3 years after separation

About this book



This book is for you if you're:

- a woman who is going through a separation or divorce
- supporting a woman who is going through a separation or divorce.

We've written this book to:

- help you make sense of your feelings
- give you some tips to help manage your feelings and navigate this challenging time in positive ways
- raise your awareness of services that may help.

Throughout this booklet, 'woman' refers to anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of the sex assigned to them at birth.

While this book is largely based on research relating to women in heterosexual relationships, we hope that much of the information will also be useful and relevant to women in lesbian and queer relationships.

The book was developed by Relationships Australia Victoria, an organisation which has extensive experience working with women. At Relationships Australia Victoria, we:

- listen to women on the phone, via video call and in person
- facilitate women's groups
- conduct research and evaluation related to the separation.

This book is not written to advocate for separation or divorce, or to diminish the level of distress that many people experience. Separation can be an extremely difficult time for all concerned.

Separation presents many challenges for women. We thank the many women whose experiences, advice and expressive words contributed to the content of this book.

How to use this book

This book is designed to be read and re-read, in part or all at once. You can record important thoughts in the notes section at the back and keep it handy for moments when you need a prompt.

You *will* get through separation and life will get better.

Separation and women's experiences



Separation and divorce are among the toughest experiences you will ever have. Women report a range of intense experiences during this time.

These include feeling:

- concerned about changes to your financial circumstances
- sad about the break-up of the family unit
- nervous about how you'll juggle work and home commitments, if you're returning to the workforce
- worried that this will impact your future work options, if you made career sacrifices to act as primary caregiver to your children
- angry at your former partner
- unhappy about your new circumstances
- uneasy about new relationships and how they might impact your children
- worried about dealing with the legal system
- worried about ongoing conflict with your former partner
- relief that you can talk about relationship issues with supportive people
- afraid of the impact of ongoing family violence
- worried about having to navigate post-separation negotiations
- worried about your children
- anxious that unhealthy relationship patterns will continue after the separation
- worried about losing social connections
- relief that the relationship has ended.

These responses are all perfectly normal. It's likely you have other feelings you could add to the list. The good news is that there is support for you related to separation and issues associated with separation.

6 Separation provides the opportunity for personal growth, but you don't have to go it alone.'

FL, aged 48
3 years after separation

Separation and grief

You may already know what it feels like to grieve the death of a close friend or relative. It has been suggested that separation or divorce is like this, but some women report that separation is even harder to manage.

Separation is complex and can involve feelings around the loss of:

- your former partner
- the family home, structure and routines you're used to
- friends and your social life
- meaning and identity
- a dream or future hope
- day-to-day involvement or contact with your children
- the opportunity to have children
- financial security
- plans or future expectations you had during the relationship
- support and approval from your family and community.

These losses are particularly difficult if:

- you didn't want the separation
- the separation was sudden or unexpected
- you're still hoping for reconciliation
- you feel betrayed by your former partner
- you have reduced or limited time with your children
- you don't have a support network, or are excluded or rejected by your friends or other people in the community.

Separation may also mean that:

- practical issues become more difficult (e.g. full-time responsibility for your children)
- changes in the nature of some of your adult relationships.

Separation can be very stressful and overwhelming—it's important to re-assure yourself that you will get through this.

Grieving

The path through separation is unlikely to be a neat, straight line. You may find yourself experiencing the highs and lows that come with grief and loss, including anger, numbness or despair. You will also experience the positives of creating a new life for yourself and your children.

The emotional and mental impacts of separation may make it harder to look after yourself properly. You might revisit memories and feelings you thought you'd left behind.

How should you be feeling?

There are no rules about how you should be feeling. We all progress through the separation process at different rates. The trick is not to give yourself a hard time or use unhealthy ways of coping.

See 'Looking after yourself' on page 17.



Don't let anyone tell you how you should feel. Embrace the strategies you have found that are helpful to you. You may choose to:

- seek supportive counselling
- journal your experience
- sit with and embrace your feelings, if you feel this is right for you at this time
- focus on maintaining routines (work, hobbies, clubs)
- let off steam by exercising
- express feelings through humour
- focus on the matters that are within your control
- join a group with others going through the same experience.

6 **At first I felt paralysed. I managed to get up every morning and get through the day, but now I am starting to feel alive again.'**

RM, aged 55, 2 years after separation

Separation, stress, anxiety and depression

Some feelings you may experience



It's normal to feel upset or sad following separation.

At this time of great vulnerability, it's also possible to become stressed, anxious or depressed.

You might experience a range of behaviours, thoughts, feelings and physical symptoms, including:

- no longer leaving the house, going out or socialising as usual
- not getting things done at work or home
- withdrawing from close family members and friends
- an inability to concentrate
- thoughts such as, 'I'm a failure' or 'Life's not worth living'
- feeling overwhelmed, guilty or irritable
- feeling frustrated, unhappy or indecisive
- tiredness, headaches and muscle pain
- sleep problems
- loss or change of appetite
- feeling sick and run down
- significant weight loss or gain.

Everyone experiences some of these symptoms from time to time. However, when they occur together and are severe or lasting, it's important to seek help. You don't have to go through them alone.

On the following pages you can learn about the differences between stress, anxiety and depression, and find out where to get support.

Stress

Stress is a natural response that everyone experiences when under pressure. It's not always bad, but when the stress is too much, lasts for too long or affects your daily life, it can impact your mental health and wellbeing. If you know what stress feels like, you can take action early and protect your wellbeing.

To learn about some common signs and symptoms of stress, visit beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/what-is-stress

Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, worry, or dread that can result from stress or occur without an obvious trigger. Anxiety can persist even after the situation causing stress has passed, and it can become a chronic condition. It can show up as persistent worry about everyday situations, panic attacks, or intense fears about social situations, places or objects.

For more information about anxiety, visit beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/anxiety/signs-and-symptoms

Depression

Everyone feels sad, unhappy or 'blue' once in a while, but clinical depression is different. Depression is more than just a low mood—it's a serious condition. People with depression feel sad, down or miserable most of the time for more than 2 weeks. They find it hard to function every day and don't enjoy activities they used to enjoy.

Keep in mind

- Help is available.
- With the right treatment, most people recover from depression.
- Don't dismiss the signs and symptoms of mental health problems in yourself because you are too busy caring for others.
- Seek help early—the sooner the better. See 'Where to get more support' on pages 48–53.



What to do if you think you may be depressed

If you have ongoing negative thoughts or find it difficult to cope with your circumstances, it's important to seek help as soon as possible.

Some women may find it difficult to seek help or support for their own needs and may prioritise the needs of children and others first. However, it's important to know that depression is common and treatable, and to seek help early.

A general practitioner (GP) is a good person to discuss your concerns with. A GP or another healthcare professional can help you decide whether treatment is needed and what treatments are suitable for you.

Different types of depression require different approaches to prevent and treat. Treatments range from psychological treatments such as mindfulness-based stress reduction, through to medically based treatments for more severe depression.

Beyond Blue has an anonymous Anxiety and Depression Test, known as the K10, which can help you understand whether your feelings are the kind of worries that will go away on their own, or whether it's time to get more support to help you feel better.

It's an evidence-based test that asks 10 questions about how you've been feeling over the past 4 weeks. Australian doctors and mental health professionals use this test. Your doctor might ask you to take the K10 and talk about it with you. You can also take the K10 online at beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/tools-and-quizzes/k10

If you use the K10 test and are worried about your results, we recommend contacting a medical professional who can help you navigate options for support.

If you don't have a regular GP or clinic, you can:

- use the service finder at healthdirect.gov.au to find a healthcare professional
- contact Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 for 24/7 telephone and online counselling, and other online supports
- call Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277 to book a counselling appointment
- put a self-care plan and professional supports in place to help you relax and find the time to care for your mental and physical health.

Choices you can make after separation

Knowing that you have choices can help you to take some control over your life.

Although thinking about your options and making choices can be tough when you're feeling overwhelmed, options do exist. In time, you will start to see the choices that are available.

Some of the important choices other women have made during and after separation may help you, including the decision to:

- accept that your relationship is over and plan for the future
- survive and even thrive—one day at a time
- learn new skills or polish up your old skills
- seek support (see page 48)
- be there for your children (see page 24)
- focus on improving communication with your co-parent about your children where possible and safe
- aim for constructive conflict resolution
- learn, recover and rebuild your life
- look after yourself (see page 17).

Many women who make these choices find a sense of empowerment.

Counselling—talking to someone

Counselling can help you to clarify your thoughts and develop new strategies. Most women who seek counselling say that they found it helpful and wish they'd done it sooner. See 'Where to get more support' on pages 48–53.



“Once I realised I was depressed, getting the right treatment helped me adjust to the loss of my relationship.”

TL, aged 38
one year after separation

Your changing role

In some relationships, partners divide decision-making responsibilities between them, such as financial decision-making or money management.

Sometimes, one person in the relationship may not have been involved in certain decisions at all. If this was the case for you, don't despair.

Managing these decisions alone can seem overwhelming, but it can also help you feel empowered.

Information and support services are listed on pages 48–53.

“ I am the one who left and
I hurt as much for him
as I did for myself.”

JH, aged 49

7 months after separation

“ Face each day as it happens,
deal with each fear as it comes up.”

AG, aged 35

one year after separation



Who initiated the separation?

Both the person who initiated the separation, and the person who didn't, can have intense feelings, but they often have them at different times, either before or after the separation.

If you initiated the separation

If you were the initiator of your separation, you may have already gone through the emotional 'rollercoaster' of distress (see page 13) and be ready to move on. It may seem that your former partner is unable to move on though.

You may feel:

- you're more in control of the situation
- guilty about the break-up
- worried about how the separation will affect your children and your former partner
- anxious about the financial implications of separation
- afraid of your former partner, if there was conflict or violence in your relationship.

If you didn't initiate the separation

If you weren't the initiator of your separation, you may be struggling while your former partner seems to be coping much better.

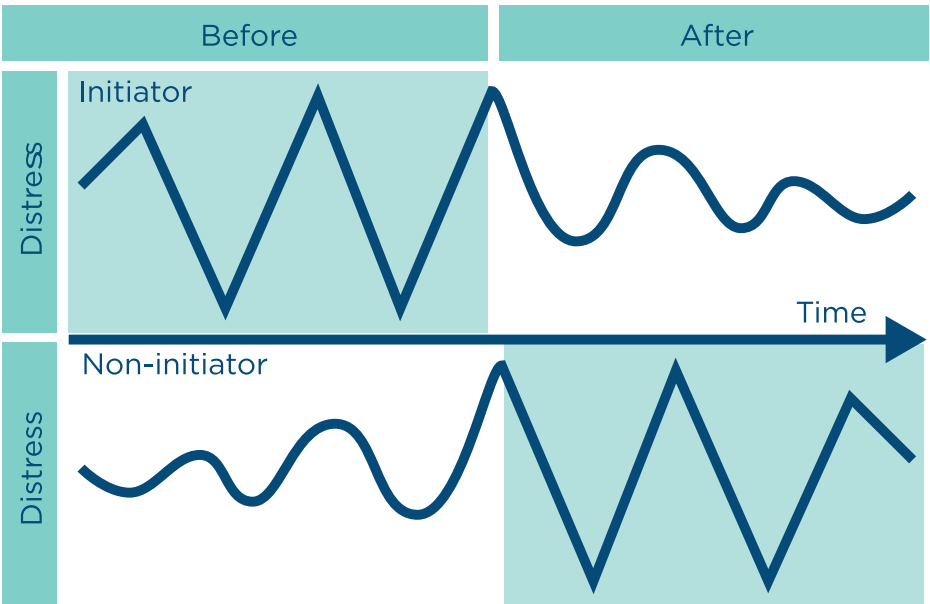
You may feel:

- powerless or betrayed
- unprepared for separation and the changes to your future
- lost, shocked or confused
- distressed that you didn't have a voice in the decision to separate
- a range of extreme emotions such as anger or frustration
- desperate to be given another chance.

If your former partner has been considering separation for some time, it's likely that they have already gone through many of the emotions you're currently feeling.

Differences between the initiator and the non-initiator

In the diagram below, you can see the initiator has the most distress before separation, while the non-initiator has the most distress after separation. For both people, it can feel like being on an emotional rollercoaster.

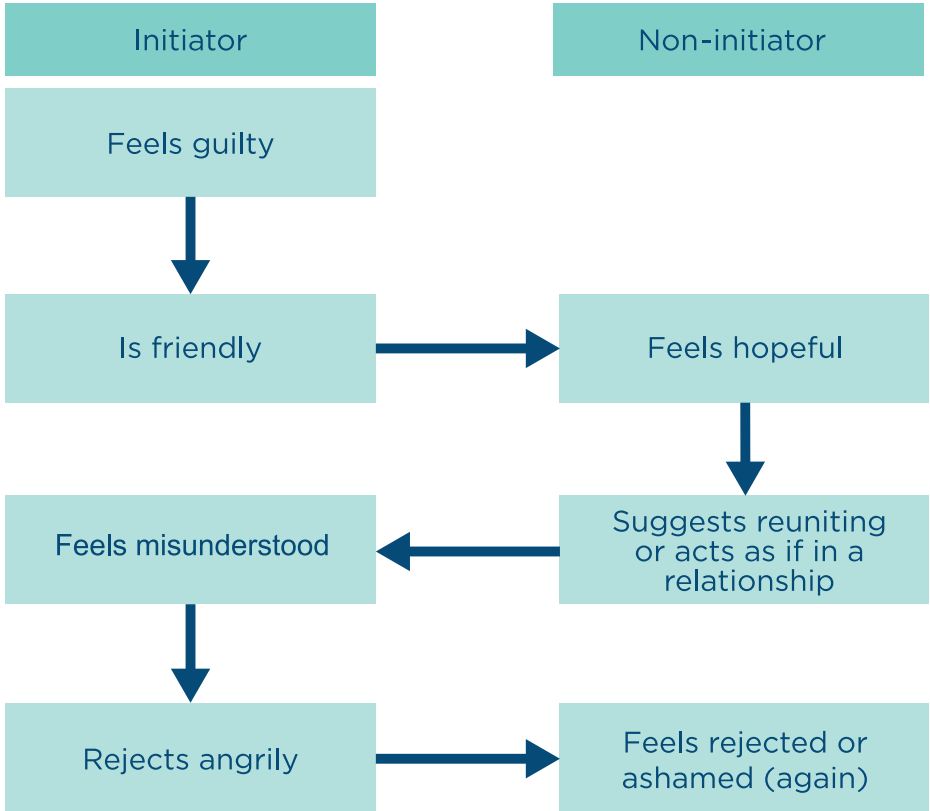


“I thought the ride would never end.”
JK, aged 47
2 years after separation

Mixed messages

Some women find it hard to understand why their former partner does not accept that the relationship is over, even though they have made this clear. Other women find it hard to let go and accept that a relationship has ended. They hope their former partner will change their mind, and may misread signals from their former partner and express an inappropriate level of intimacy.

Once one person begins to misread the signals, it can set off a cycle of misunderstandings which ends in arguments and distress. You may be able to recognise you and your former partner in the chain of events in this diagram.



How to avoid mixed messages

Women who have found themselves feeling guilty about ending the relationship recommend that you make it very clear that the relationship is over by establishing boundaries.

They suggest that you:

- limit contact with your former partner if practical (e.g. to one call per week, fortnight or month)
- limit socialising or going out together
- limit doing things for your former partner
- don't have sex with your former partner
- avoid intimate discussions with your former partner
- avoid comforting your former partner
- give a clear and unambiguous answer if asked about the possibility of reconciliation.

If you're the one hoping for reconciliation, remind yourself that there is no evidence that your former partner wants to get back together unless they specifically say so.

Separated people do sometimes rebuild a friendship together. This may take a long time, however, if it happens at all. It usually follows a long period without contact.

The emotional bonds created by the original relationship take a long time to disentangle. It can be more realistic to aim for a businesslike relationship, so that you can discuss issues and make decisions in a respectful way.

Some women may feel that their safety is compromised by setting boundaries or providing clear and unambiguous answers. **If you feel unsafe, call emergency services on 000.**

For information about family violence support, see page 28.



Blame and guilt

If you ended the relationship, you may feel it was all your fault and experience guilt or cycles of shame and anger. Remember, it's rare for one person to be totally responsible for the ending of a relationship. It usually takes 2 to make or break a relationship.

If your former partner ended the relationship, it's very easy to find yourself blaming them.

Blaming helps to distract from the pain you may be experiencing. It gives a sense of justice in what feels like an unjust situation, but it also stops people moving on.

Some separating couples get so caught up in blame and anger that it affects their children.

If you find yourself constantly blaming your former partner:

- if you need to remain in contact with them, consider constructive ways to communicate that align with your own values and how you would like to engage in the future
- talk to a trusted friend or professional for support with how you're feeling—they may be able to offer insights on how to approach your interactions with your former partner
- try to make choices that you believe will have positive outcomes
- be cautious of having extreme or 'black and white' views
- work on self-care strategies, including exercise where this is safe.



Looking after yourself



Ideas and actions that have helped other women



- Understand that you need time to deal with separation.
- Be honest with yourself and take responsibility for your life.
- Be clear about where you have choices and where you don't.
- Ask for help to deal with guilt, self-pity, hopelessness or feelings of revenge.
- Don't blame yourself or others.
- Commit to looking after yourself—keep doing the things you enjoy.
- Don't use your children to get advice or to work through the emotions and challenges you're dealing with.
- Talk to people about how things are for you.
- Seek help for things that you don't know much about.
- Be open to trying different ways of approaching things to find out what works for you.

Maintain your health and wellbeing



- Accept help, support and encouragement from family and friends.
- Reduce isolation by becoming involved in social activities.
- Eat healthily and include a wide variety of nutritious foods.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Get enough sleep.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Allow yourself time to relax and reduce your stress.
- Keep a check on your physical health and exercise regularly.
- Watch for signs of stress, anxiety, or depression (see page 8).

Wellbeing tools

Relationships Australia Victoria has a self-reflection and wellbeing information sheet with reflective prompts to help you check in with yourself. Download it at rav.org.au/self-reflection-wellbeing-tips



Beyond Blue offers a tool to help you build daily habits that support your mental health. It is available as an app and online tool:

- PACE is a daily wellbeing app to bring mental health support to you earlier, make it easier for you to take care of your mental wellbeing, and ensure you have support. The app helps you quickly and easily build daily habits that support your mental health. Visit beyondblue.org.au/pace-daily-wellbeing
- The online Wellbeing Action Tool can help you plan the wellbeing actions that work for you. Visit beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/wellbeing-action-tool

Ask for help

Many women find it difficult to ask for help. They may feel that they don't have enough time or mental energy to look after themselves and meet their other family or work commitments. Some may think that counselling is only for people who have a diagnosed mental health condition. However, it's always better to seek help early.

Where to find support

- Friends and family
- Babysitting services
- Work colleagues, supervisors and employee assistance programs
- Your local doctor or health centre / GP / psychologist
- Your local community centre or counselling service
- Parenting or separation groups
- The Family Relationship Advice Line, which can direct you to your nearest Family Relationship Centre. Call 1800 050 321.

- Beyond Blue provides 24/7 support for anxiety, depression and suicide prevention. Call 1300 224 636.
- The National Debt Helpline. Call 1800 007 007.
- 1800RESPECT for family violence support. Call 1800 737 732.

For more services, including online and telephone support services that are available 24/7, see page 48.

If you've been affected by family violence (see page 28), many women find it helpful to attend a support group with other women who have had similar experiences. Relationships Australia Victoria offers supportive group programs for women in Victoria affected by family violence.

Visit rav.org.au/womens-courses

Stay in touch with friends

Maintaining social networks may be harder now that you've separated, but they're still important for support and future relationships.

Make the effort, even if you feel you don't have the time or energy.

Withdrawing socially may leave you feeling more isolated and alone. It is important to keep in touch with your existing friends, and think about making some new connections with others in similar situations.

“ I knew that some of my old friends were only trying to help, but saying “You are better off without him” or “There are plenty of fish in the sea”, didn't make me feel any better.”

JL, aged 57

5 years after separation



Your financial situation

Financial hardship is often one of the most significant challenges of separation. You may manage to juggle your finances most of the time but worry constantly about unpredictable expenses.

Financial counselling can help you

Government financial counselling services and some private welfare organisations provide information, advice and practical support for people experiencing financial difficulties.

They are useful if you are:

- unable to pay for rent or electricity
- having difficulty budgeting
- needing advice on pension entitlements
- having problems with debts
- worried about child support payments (see page 43).

You can contact the National Debt Helpline for free financial counselling and online advice about debt and managing your money. Visit ndh.org.au or call 1800 007 007. See page 51 for more services that can help.

Beyond Blue's Money and Mental Health Toolkit also gives some tips and techniques to manage your money and help improve your mental wellbeing. Visit beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/financial-wellbeing

Returning to the workforce

If you haven't worked for some time prior to separation, you may find it daunting to get back into the workforce. Talking to a careers counsellor or a job network provider is a good way to start. To find tips and resources, visit servicesaustralia.gov.au/looking-for-work

“After we separated, my financial situation changed dramatically. I needed help to sort it all out.”

WH, aged 45

18 months after separation

Children and separation



Children react to separation in different ways.

The way your children react will depend on:

- family relationships before separation
- your children's ages and personalities
- how both parents manage the situation.

Children and conflict



A major factor in how children respond and adjust to the separation is the level of conflict that exists between the parents. If children have been exposed to family violence, they may need professional support to overcome these experiences.

Most children will feel vulnerable and have fears about separation. Some fears are realistic and some may not be, but they feel real to a child. Most children will express strong feelings, and younger children can often experience fear of abandonment and separation anxiety. These are often triggered by events such as saying goodbye. These are normal reactions to a stressful time.

Children who are not exposed to parental conflict are generally resilient and can cope well with separation changes. Once the situation has stabilised, most children manage well. Occasionally, some children take a while to settle down. Seek professional help if needed, particularly if there are other difficulties in their lives, such as problems at school.

Helping your children adjust to separation

Explain what is happening in ways that they can understand. Reassure them that both parents love them and the break-up is not their fault. See 'Being there for your children' on page 24.

Focus on your children's best interests

Before making a final decision about your parenting arrangements, it's wise to get legal advice from a family dispute resolution practitioner or family lawyer about what a court would regard as being in the best interests of your children. For more information, see pages 33–45 or call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321.



Always a parent

Separation should not mean the end of a relationship with your children for you or your former partner. Their family will continue, but in a different form. Your children may have 2 homes. While rituals and routines will inevitably change, it's important to remain connected and involved with your children in a meaningful way.

Prior to separation, you may have had care of or spent time with your children every day. Separation may have impacted the amount of time your children spend with you.

Contact with both parents, where safe and appropriate, can be beneficial for a child's development and wellbeing, so encourage your children to remain involved with their other parent.

Managing change

While you can't prevent change, you can help children to cope with it. Children are adaptable, but require structure, stability and safety.

If you're moving house, it's important that children have their own space in your home for their things—a bedroom, a space in the home, or a cupboard or storage space for their important possessions.

For parents who secure new accommodation, involving children in decorating and arranging the new accommodation may make children feel at home in a new environment.



Read: Share the care: Parenting plan—Collaborative parenting apart. See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.

Living arrangements

Ensure that the new arrangements are safe.

You might want to consider the relationships that your children have with other significant people, such as grandparents and extended family members.

It is important that living arrangements reflect the needs and ages of the children, the capacity of both parents to care for them and how the family worked before separation.

Being there for your children

Being there for your children is very important. While it may be difficult at first, you and your children can discover new routines and ways of relating. You may want to consider doing a parenting course to help you.

Tips to support your children

- Tell the school about the changes and stay involved with your children's activities and their friends.
- Don't ask or encourage your children to look after you emotionally—children are not developmentally prepared to attend to adult emotional needs.
- Be alert for any signs of distress including physical illnesses or changes in behaviour.
- Encourage and support your children to go to counselling if they need to talk to someone outside the family.

Even adult children may experience strong emotions at this time. Kids Helpline provides free, confidential telephone and online counselling for children and young people aged 5 to 25. Call 1800 55 1800 or visit kidshelpline.com.au

Consider a parenting after separation course

It's not easy being a separated parent. Courses and books can help. Find a parenting after separation course through:

- Relationships Australia: 1300 364 277
- the Family Relationship Advice Line: 1800 050 321 (they can refer you to a Family Relationship Centre in your area).



Relating to your co-parent



Some people believe that when they separate, they will no longer have to deal with their former partner. However, if you have children this is usually not the reality—you remain linked as co-parents.

The challenge is to make the ongoing co-parenting relationship as manageable and as constructive as possible. This may require some work. Respectful communication towards the other parent, even when the other parent does not reciprocate, can help to improve parenting communication. Respectful communication may support your children to develop positive communication skills that may be beneficial to their future relationships.

However, if you feel unsafe at any time, it's important to seek help (see 'Where to get more support' on pages 48–53) and take steps to protect yourself and your children. Constructive co-parenting involves establishing a good working relationship with your co-parent, where possible, safe and appropriate.

Women who have successfully managed this offer these practical tips.

- Focus on the children, not the past relationship.
- Remember why you're talking. Keep the best interests of your children at the forefront.
- Try using a written agenda: Stick to it and avoid arguments.
- Hold meetings at a neutral location if possible.
- Use phone, email, or text if face-to-face discussions are a problem.
- Consider legal advice, family dispute resolution or counselling if you have difficulties.
- Consider whether, and how, co-parenting arrangements can adapt to children's commitments (such as sport or special interest hobbies) and special events that arise for your children.
- Consider special days in advance, such as holidays and birthdays.

Don't breach or allow any breach of a court order that prohibits contact with your former partner. Seek legal advice if you are concerned about complying with any condition of a court order.

What if there isn't a good working relationship?

In some situations where there is high conflict, a businesslike interaction may not be possible.

Some parents, for a range of reasons, are not supportive of the children's relationship with the other parent. In these situations, the unsupported parent can feel distressed, powerless and angry. They may feel their children are being denied the right to a relationship with them.

If you're in such a situation:

- don't talk negatively about your former partner to your children, or in the presence of your children
- don't ask your children to play 'messenger' between parents
- don't quiz your children about your co-parent and what they're doing
- don't use the children as a way of 'getting even' with your co-parent
- view your conflict 'through the eyes of the children'
- consider family dispute resolution (see page 34) with your co-parent and focus on practical issues
- examine your own behaviour and what you can do to help the situation, such as talking to a counsellor
- some parents benefit from arranging changeovers or meetings at neutral locations away from their homes and sometimes this can help women to set boundaries with the other parent after separation
- debrief with friends or family members
- consider legal advice and action
- remain realistic about what's possible
- call the Family Relationship Advice Line (1800 050 321) which can refer you to your nearest Family Relationship Centre.

Try not to argue in front of your children

This includes anywhere that they might hear you, even if they're asleep in bed. Often, parents think their children don't hear or know about their arguments, but children often hear more than you think.



No matter how hostile the situation, find strength in maintaining your dignity and acting fairly.



- If a discussion becomes abusive, stop any negotiation.
- Try a BIFF Response[®] (Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm), which many people find helpful. See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.
- Stay away from your former partner if either of you is affected by alcohol or other drugs.
- Obtain legal advice if you have concerns about following a court order.

Violence and abuse



Separation can be an argumentative and volatile process.

The conflict you're experiencing now may be part of a familiar pattern you had in the past with your former partner. It may have contributed to the breakdown of your relationship. However, it's important to know that violence against adults or children is never okay.

If you or someone you know is in danger right now, call the police on 000 (triple zero).



What is family violence?

Family violence involves a pattern of abusive behaviour within a family or intimate relationship that seeks to control, dominate, or cause fear and intimidation.

It can include physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, social, financial and spiritual abuse, as well as stalking and coercive control.

Family violence is not limited to physical harm; it encompasses any behaviour that instils fear, diminishes autonomy or isolates a person from support.

Family violence is a crime, and the responsibility lies solely with the perpetrator.



If you're experiencing any form of family violence, it's important to know that you are not to blame and that help and support are available.



Read: *Safe from violence—A guide for women who are separating or leaving a relationship*. See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.

Types of family violence

- **Physical abuse** involves any intentional act causing injury or trauma to another person.
- **Verbal abuse** includes using words to cause emotional harm.
- **Sexual abuse** involves any forced or unwanted sexual activity.
- **Emotional abuse** is the systematic undermining of an individual's sense of self-worth and mental health. Gaslighting, a tactic where the perpetrator manipulates the survivor into questioning their own reality, is a common part of emotional abuse.
- **Social abuse** aims to isolate the victim-survivor from family, friends and community, and limit their perspectives about the pattern of abuse they are experiencing.
- **Financial abuse** involves controlling a person's access to financial resources, making them financially dependent on the perpetrator.
- **Spiritual abuse** involves misusing religious or spiritual beliefs to control, manipulate or harm the victim-survivor. Spiritual abuse also includes behaviours designed to prevent or exclude a person from practicing their faith and participating in faith based activities.
- **Digital or technological abuse** involves using technology to track, monitor, control, harass or intimidate the victim-survivor.
- **Cultural abuse** exploits or undermines a person's cultural identity.
- **Stalking** is a pattern of repeated, unwanted contact that causes fear or concern for safety.
- **Coercive control** involves perpetrators using patterns of controlling and abusive behaviours in a way that creates fear and denies the liberty and autonomy of the victim-survivor. It can be difficult to identify because it can be covert, occurs over a period of time and may be perpetrated through a range of violent and abusive behaviours such as those described above.

Family violence and children

Children's exposure to family violence may be direct or indirect.

This may include them seeing or hearing family violence directly or being exposed to the aftermath. They may have to be conscious of their behaviour and presence to try to appease the person using violence. Children may be used manipulatively, as a tool between family members, or children may be neglected.

Are you being abused?

Violence and abuse are never acceptable.

- One in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15.¹
- One in 4 Australian women have experienced emotional abuse from a current or former partner since the age of 15.¹
- Women are over 3 times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner.²
- 69% of mothers who experienced violence from a partner said that their children saw or heard the violence.²
- The time of separation is a high-risk period for women and children who are affected by family violence.^{3,4}
- The time of separation can also be a time when family violence first occurs.⁴

Keeping you and your children safe

If you're experiencing violence in your relationship, your safety and the safety of your children must come first.

Take steps to look after yourself if you feel unsafe:

- Call the police on 000 if you or your children are in danger.
- Seek support for you and your children (see page 50).
- Minimise contact with your former partner or family member.
- Use alternative ways of communicating with them, such as email or text message.
- Bring a friend or family member when you meet your former partner.
- Keep a record of abusive incidents, such as stalking.
- Avoid retaliating—this increases the risk of harm to you and your children.
- Consider legal intervention, such as disclosing your experience of abuse to the police or seeking a court order to prevent the other parent from contacting or coming near you and your children.

Call the police on 000 if you or your children are in danger.

For more information and support for family violence, contact 1800RESPECT. Visit 1800respect.org.au or call 1800 737 732.



Are you using abuse or violence in your relationships?

Being abusive or violent has consequences.

- Your children's development and wellbeing will be impacted by your abusive and violent behaviours—sometimes these impacts are felt by children throughout their lifetimes.
- Violence and abusive behaviours towards the other parent can have long lasting effects on them and their parenting experience.
- Your children could become afraid of you.
- The time your children spend with you could be restricted.
- Assault charges and legal intervention orders can be taken out against you.
- If you commit acts of violence, you may be taken into police custody, sometimes for an extended time.

If you're using abuse and violence, you need to take responsibility by:

- immediately stopping all behaviours that are abusive, violent or controlling
- thinking about your past and present actions (i.e. stop blaming, justifying or denying that there is a problem)
- seeking support to change your behaviour through a program or service
- seeking counselling support through Relationships Australia, Beyond Blue, or your local doctor or health centre (see 'Where to get more support' on pages 48–53).

Working out a settlement



Settlements can relate to parenting arrangements, child support payments and/or dividing property and finances.

Parenting arrangements should be decided based on what is in a 'child's best interests' (see page 42).

Property division is based on several factors including direct and indirect financial and non-financial contributions, and future needs.

Separating de facto couples, including those in same-sex relationships, legally have similar property entitlements to separating married couples.⁵

Agreeing

If separating parties are able to negotiate safely and freely, they may benefit from negotiating their own agreements about:

- parenting arrangements—how much time children will spend with each parent and how much input each parent has into decisions made about their children
- child support payments—who will pay how much to assist with child-related costs
- property settlement—how your cash, assets, and liabilities, including superannuation, will be divided.

You may need to use a family dispute resolution service or lawyers to help with property agreements or parenting plans. See pages 34–38 for more information.

Property division will usually need to be formalised with the help of a lawyer. It is sometimes necessary to take legal steps or have a court to formalise parenting and child support agreements.

Some couples are unable or unwilling to reach an agreement in this way. Arrangements may need to be decided by a judge, which can add to the confusion, stress and powerlessness you already feel. It can also mean additional costs and time needed to finalise your separation.

Family dispute resolution

Family dispute resolution (FDR), also known as mediation, can help you and your former partner to make decisions about your children and parenting responsibilities, and property and financial matters, without going to court.

Under Australian family law, separating parents are required to attempt FDR before applying to the court for a parenting order (see page 41). There are some exceptions to this, such as urgent cases, and cases that involve family violence or child abuse.

FDR practitioners don't take sides. They don't represent either party or provide financial or legal advice. Their role is to help you and your former partner to reach an agreement.

FDR can assist you to:

- make your own decisions
- reduce the financial and emotional costs of legal proceedings
- improve your working relationship as co-parents
- improve your communication with your former partner
- resolve future disputes.

Some services offer lawyer-assisted FDR, where a lawyer can advise and support you to negotiate. FDR is offered by Relationships Australia, Family Relationship Centres, private FDR practitioners and some lawyers. To find a registered FDR practitioner, visit fdrr.ag.gov.au or contact the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321.

Many women also gain a great deal of help from taking part in a parenting after separation course (see page 24), which cover topics such as self-care, co-parenting and meeting children's needs.

Appropriateness of FDR

It's not always appropriate for separating couples to be together in the same room. You have other options, such as 'shuttle' FDR. In these processes you do not have to be in the room with, or speak directly to, your former partner.



Do your legal homework

Because of the legal issues involved, particularly in property and financial matters, it's wise to get legal advice.

Getting legal advice doesn't mean that you have to go to court.

Your lawyer should provide legal advice and pathways for you to consider that may include settlement proposals, legal negotiations or court proceedings.

Many lawyers experienced in family law will give you an initial free or reduced-rate consultation and negotiate on your behalf about parenting arrangements, property and finance if you instruct them to.

You can also contact your state or territory legal aid office to check whether you're eligible for free services, and check your eligibility for assistance from community legal centres. See page 52.

Where to get legal advice

- Contact your state law society or law institute for family law specialists.
- For advice and referrals, call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321.
- For information on family law and attending court, visit the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia website at www.fcfcoa.gov.au
- To find the Legal Aid office in your state or territory, visit nationallegalaid.org/contact



Preparing for legal advice

Lawyer fees can be expensive, so it's important to do your research into the process and which areas different lawyers specialise in.

As a first step, you might also consider trying family dispute resolution (see page 34), which is generally a more affordable option. You, more than anyone else, stand to benefit from understanding the family law process. Look for a lawyer (see page 52) who is experienced in family law and who you feel comfortable with.

Many lawyers will give you a free or reduced rate initial consultation. Think about the sort of information your lawyer might need, such as details about your situation, children and/or finances, and prepare some written questions before you first meet.

When meeting with your lawyer:

- take notes so you can read over them later
- seek help or advice to understand the family law process
- explain your budget to your lawyer, and ask for clear information about costs and payment options
- use your lawyer as a consultant—you decide how you wish to proceed
- get a clear understanding of the likely outcomes
- if something is unclear, ask questions.



Don't be afraid to change lawyers if you feel you don't have a good working relationship with your legal representative.



Read: A fair share: Negotiating your property settlement.
See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.

Negotiation methods

Negotiation can be hard work, but if you don't attempt it, you may find yourself with:

- parenting arrangements that don't work for your children or are impossible for you to comply with
- child support payments that don't reflect your co-parent's income accurately
- expensive legal processes
- increased resentment and the feeling that you've been exploited.

Ask your lawyer or another support person to help you to negotiate if you don't feel confident or objective about your situation.

Sometimes, it's impossible to discuss things directly with your former partner. Family dispute resolution can assist you to make decisions about your relationship and develop a workable plan for the future. This can include sorting out assets and financial matters, as well as future parenting responsibilities through the preparation of a parenting plan.

Making future-focused decisions

- Don't commit to an agreement immediately after separating just to get it over and done with.
- Take the time to consider what your future needs will be as a separated individual or parent.
- Be clear and realistic about what you want.
- Get legal advice before signing any documents.



Formalising property arrangements



Read: A fair share: Negotiating your property settlement.
See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.

Using a lawyer

It's wise to seek legal advice before negotiating any agreement with your former partner about property. That way, you know your rights.

If you can then reach agreement about the division of property, you can instruct your lawyer to prepare formal 'consent orders' for the court. These are formalised and become 'court orders' which are binding. Your lawyer can usually do this without you needing to attend court personally.

For married people, proceedings for the division of property must start within 12 months of a divorce order becoming absolute. For people in de facto relationships, proceedings for the division of property must start within 2 years of the breakdown of the relationship. If you do not make an application for financial orders within the timeframe applicable to your circumstances, you will need to seek permission of the court to apply for financial orders.

Preparing your own consent orders

If you don't want to use a lawyer, you can file consent orders on your own behalf.

Applications must be in the required form, explaining how the assets and debts will be divided between you and your former partner. After you have both signed the proposed orders, they are processed by the court and are legally binding. You may need to provide further written information if the court is not satisfied with either the information or the asset division.

Consent orders for property are necessary, otherwise your former partner may ask to change your property settlement in the future.

If you're unable to reach an agreement over property, your lawyer will negotiate on your behalf with your former partner's lawyer. This may involve going to court, which can be costly and take some time (see page 44).

Documenting parenting arrangements

There are a number of ways parents reach agreement about how to raise their children after separation.

Parents may choose to:

1. keep making decisions ('agreements') about their children together without writing them down
2. write their own notes about what they've agreed to
3. create a parenting plan (see page 40), with support from a service known as family dispute resolution (FDR). Plans are signed by both parents and can be updated if/when needed, but can't be legally enforced.
4. get a parenting order (see page 41) from a court, with the support of lawyers. Parenting orders can be made with both parents' agreement (by consent) or decided by a judge. They can be legally enforced.

Support is available

A third party, such as a FDR service (see page 34) or lawyer (see page 35), can also be useful for parents who need help to reach agreement about parenting arrangements and/or parenting plans (see pages 40–41).



Parenting plans

Australian family law encourages parents to set out arrangements in a signed parenting plan. This can be a good option for parents who want to document their parenting decisions without going to court.

The plan may cover:

- who the child lives with
- the amount of time the child spends with each parent
- how parents share the parenting and decision-making responsibility
- financial maintenance of the child
- other important considerations (e.g. holidays, communication, grandparents' involvement)
- how long the plan will last.

Plans can be changed easily according to changing needs and circumstances, but both parents must agree to the changes.

Parenting plans are not legally enforceable. However, if you need to go to court at a later date, the court may consider the most recent parenting plan and how much both parents have followed it.



Read: Share the care: Parenting plan—Collaborative parenting apart. See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.

Parenting orders (by consent)

Some parents decide to make their agreement or plan into a legally enforceable 'parenting order by consent'.

This involves asking the court to formalise what both parents have agreed on. Parents can ask the court to consider their current parenting arrangements, as well as future arrangements that both parents agree will be in your child's best interests as they grow and develop.

The parenting order may include flexible parts which can change as your children grow or family circumstances change. It may also have specific sections that make sure that both parents understand what you need to do to follow the court order.

A family lawyer can help you understand and manage the process of requesting a parenting order.

If an existing parenting order no longer meets your child's needs or is no longer in their best interests, you can attend FDR or ask a lawyer for advice about your individual situation.

Parenting orders (decided by a judge)

If both parents can't agree on parenting arrangements, or you're concerned about your child's wellbeing or safety in your co-parent's care, you can ask the court to decide what is in your child's best interests.

It's a good idea to get advice from a lawyer if you're thinking about starting this process. You can also read more about going to court on page 44.

Protecting your children

If your children are at immediate risk of harm from the other parent or any other person who is currently caring for them, contact your state-based welfare organisation immediately. You can find their contact details online: dss.gov.au/child-protection/reporting-child-safety-concerns



Focusing on children's best interests

You should consider what is in the best interests of your children as the paramount consideration and act in the best interests of your child by applying the considerations found in s60CC(2) and (3) of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth).

They include the following.

- What arrangements would promote the safety (including safety from being subjected to, or exposed to, family violence, abuse, neglect, or other harm) of:
 - the child; and
 - each person who has care of the child (whether or not the person has parental responsibility for the child).
- Any views expressed by the child.
- The developmental, psychological, emotional and cultural needs of the child.
- The capacity of each person who has or is proposed to have parental responsibility for the child to provide for the child's developmental, psychological, emotional and cultural needs.
- The benefit to the child of being able to have a relationship with the child's parents, and other people who are significant to the child, where it is safe to do so.
- Anything else that is relevant to the particular circumstances of the child.
- In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:
 - the child's right to enjoy the child's Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture, but having the support, opportunity and encouragement necessary:
 - to connect with, and maintain their connection with, members of their family and with their community, culture, country and language; and
 - to explore the full extent of that culture, consistent with the child's age and developmental level and the child's views; and
 - to develop a positive appreciation of that culture.

Child support payments

Services Australia is an Australian Government agency that uses a formula approved under Australian law to work out how much child support should be paid or received.

Several factors are considered in calculating child support, including:

- the combined incomes of the parents
- the number of children you have and their ages
- how many nights per year they spend with each parent.

The amount of child support may also be determined by a court order, or the parents may make a child support agreement.

Services Australia can collect and transfer child support, or the parents can work out how and when payments are made between themselves.

Within Services Australia rules, parents have flexibility and a range of options.

Contacting Services Australia

For child support enquiries, call Services Australia on 131 272 or visit www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/separated-parents



Services Australia also has an online calculator to help you work out the level of child support available in your case. Visit <https://processing.csa.gov.au/estimator/about.aspx>

What happens if you can't reach agreement?

If you're unable to reach agreement on particular issues, you may need to make an application to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, or the Family Court of Western Australia.

The Court will continue to encourage you to come to agreement to avoid a trial. Sometimes an order is made to attend family dispute resolution if the court considers it will be helpful, or the parties themselves decide to try it. However, if you still cannot reach agreement, a trial may be needed where a judge will determine the parenting or property issues in dispute.

In a parenting matter, you must file a certificate stating that you have attempted family dispute resolution unless your circumstances fit within one of the exceptions. You may need to contact a Family Relationship Centre which has a range of services including family dispute resolution that can help you or, following this, consult a lawyer. Call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321 to find your closest Family Relationship Centre.

Court proceedings happen in only a few cases. It means asking someone who doesn't know you or your children to decide what's best for your children and what is fair in financial terms. Think carefully before deciding whether to start court proceedings. Sometimes, the court process can be more damaging than the issue. Once the court action is over, you will need to continue co-parenting. On the other hand, if the issue is the safety of your children, then court action may be the only way to ensure this.

Getting a sense of how the court system works

Going to trial can be costly and stressful, but sometimes it's the only option. Consider attending the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia as an observer to get a feel for how the court system operates. Visit fcfcoa.gov.au to learn more.



Dealing with institutions

Remember that all institutions are acting according to legislation and are not trying to make things difficult for you.

- Be courteous and respectful with the employees of institutions you deal with—this often results in helpful responses.
- Ask questions if you don't understand—understanding new information is especially difficult if you're under stress.
- Avoid blame or accusations towards your former partner or 'the system'.
- Be patient if you have to wait your turn.
- If you're unhappy with the service you've received, speak to a supervisor or use the service's customer complaints procedure.
- Gather all relevant information before you act or make decisions.
- Seek advice from the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321 or your lawyer.
- Talk about counselling with Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277.
- Talk about family dispute resolution with Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277, or with your lawyer.

Remember

The more that you and your former partner can agree on, the less you'll need to engage with family law processes. However, don't jeopardise your children's safety or your safety, or be pressured into making an agreement that you think is unsafe or unfair.



“When seeking assistance from government agencies, I always took my knitting and my lunch.”

LC, aged 45
6 years after separation



After separation, many women report positive and healthy changes in their lives and discover aspects of themselves that they never knew existed. They recognise that life changes, and many talk of finding inner strengths, new friends and new resources.

New relationships and moving on

Close relationships are important to everyone. Often after separation, there's a great need to reconnect and feel wanted and cared for again.

Some women shy away from starting another relationship, and find it hard to trust again.

Others may begin new relationships shortly after separation which may ease the pain initially. While this can often be a healing experience, it may not allow enough time and space to sort through some of the feelings from the last relationship.

Some women join interest groups and enjoy companionship but remain unattached. Some establish a committed relationship that includes children from other relationships.

There isn't one 'right' way. Choose wisely and find out what works for you.



Read: *Partners—A guide to successful relationships*.
See 'Recommended resources' on page 54.

Whatever happens for you, we suggest you take it slowly.

- Give yourself time to grieve the loss of the relationship.
- Take time to re-establish your own identity.
- Look after yourself.

Research about women and separation



Separation and divorce

- 31.2 years is the average age for women to marry.⁶
- 44.1 years is the average age for women to divorce.⁶
- 52.5% of women who divorce are under 45 years of age.⁶
- 51.9% of divorces are joint applications (both partners agree) while 24.9% are single applications from women.⁶
- 47.8% of divorces involve children aged under 18 years.⁷
- The average length of marriage at the time of divorce is 12.2 years.⁸

Women and their children after separation

- 15.8% of families in Australia are one-parent families, with 78% of these single parents being mothers.⁹
- 31% of single mothers work in full-time paid employment and 39% work in part-time/casual paid employment.¹⁰
- 31% of single mothers receive a government payment as their main source of income.¹⁰
- 32.3% of single mothers have a mortgage.¹⁰
- 6.4% of single mothers own their own home (without a mortgage).¹⁰
- 43% of single mothers rent.¹⁰

The impact of separation and divorce on women

- Women are more likely to experience financial hardship after divorce than men.¹¹
- After separation or divorce, women experience a 21% drop in household incomes compared to their pre-divorce incomes.¹¹

Where to get more support



National

These national organisations can refer you to services in your area.

Relationships Australia

Australia-wide relationship support services for individuals, families and communities.

Call 1300 364 277 or visit www.relationships.org.au

Beyond Blue

Learn more about anxiety, depression and suicide prevention, or talk through your concerns with Beyond Blue's 24/7 support service. Trained mental health professionals will listen, provide information and advice, and point you in the right direction so you can seek further support.

Call 1300 224 636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support

Family Relationship Advice Line

A free helpline to assist with family law problems for those unable to attend a Family Relationship Centre. Provides information about options and locations of family services for separating families, including Family Relationship Centres.

Call 1800 050 321.

Family Relationships Online

Provides information about and services to assist all families to manage relationship issues, including agreeing on appropriate arrangements for children after parents separate. Includes a national directory of support services, including Family Relationship Centres.

Visit familyrelationships.gov.au

Counselling and mental health

Kids Helpline

Free, confidential telephone and online counselling for children and young people aged 5 to 25.

Visit kidshelpline.com.au or call 1800 55 1800.

Lifeline

24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Visit lifeline.org.au or call 13 11 14.

Suicide Call Back Service

A free nationwide service providing 24/7 phone and online counselling to people affected by suicide.

Visit suicidecallbackservice.org.au or call 1300 659 467.

Family and parenting support

Australian Government Department of Social Services

Information about programs and services administered by the Department, including programs for families and children.

Visit dss.gov.au/families-and-children/programs-services

Australian Government—Services Australia

Helps separated parents to provide the necessary support for their children's wellbeing. The website includes information about legal services, services in your local area and calculators for child support.

Visit servicesaustralia.gov.au/separated-parents

Carer Gateway (Carers Australia)

Family carer support and counselling in each state and territory.

Visit carergateway.gov.au or call 1800 422 737.

Family and Relationship Services Australia

The national peak body for family and relationship services provides a directory of member services and locations.

Visit frsa.org.au/member-directory

PANDA – Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia

Supports the mental health of parents and families during pregnancy and in their first year of parenthood.

Visit panda.org.au or call 1300 726 306.

Raising Children Network

Provides parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts. Visit raisingchildren.net.au

Family violence

1800RESPECT

1800RESPECT is the national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling service. It supports people experiencing, or at risk of, sexual or family violence, their family and friends, and front-line workers and professionals. It also provides information on family violence, legal, housing and finance and other support services in your state or territory.

If you need an interpreter, you can call 1800RESPECT and ask them to organise this, or contact the telephone Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask them to contact 1800RESPECT.

Visit 1800respect.org.au or call 1800 737 732.

Daisy

A mobile app developed by 1800RESPECT that connects women to family violence services in Australia. Visit 1800respect.org.au/daisy to download the app.

Child safety concerns–Australian state and territory contacts

State and territory contacts for reporting child safety concerns. Visit dss.gov.au/child-protection/reporting-child-safety-concerns

Financial counselling

MoneySmart

Free online resources and tools to help you manage your money. Visit moneysmart.gov.au

National Debt Helpline

Free financial counselling and online advice about debt and managing your money. Visit ndh.org.au or call 1800 007 007.

First Nations services

13YARN

Talk 24/7 with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander crisis supporter. This is a confidential, culturally safe space to yarn about your needs, worries or concerns, without judgement.

Visit 13yarn.org.au or call 13 92 76.

Djirra (Victoria)

Culturally safe and specialist legal and non-legal support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience family violence.

Visit djirra.org.au or free call 1800 105 303.

Health

Health Direct

A government-funded service, providing quality, approved health information and advice. Visit healthdirect.gov.au

Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health

A national organisation that provides easy access to the latest scientific health information, research and services for Australian women. Visit jeanhailes.org.au

Interpreters

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)

An interpreting service for people who do not speak English and for agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients.

Call 131 450 or visit tisnational.gov.au

National Relay Service

This service can help you if you're d/Deaf or find it hard to hear or speak to hearing people on the phone. Visit accesshub.gov.au

Legal

Australian Government Attorney-General's Department

Information about Australia's family law system and services such as family dispute resolution. Visit www.ag.gov.au

Community Legal Centres Australia

Links to organisations in each state and territory that may be able to assist you with a legal problem. Visit clcs.org.au/legal-help

Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia

Information and procedural advice, forms and brochures, and referral advice to community and support services. The website includes a free, live chat option.

Call 1300 352 000 or visit fcfcoa.gov.au

Family Court of Western Australia

Information about court services, applications, forms and resources.

Call (08) 9224 8222 or visit familycourt.wa.gov.au

Legal aid commissions

Contact your state or territory legal aid commission for information about legal assistance, and advice and referral to appropriate services for separating couples. Visit nationallegalaid.org.au

LGBTIQA+ services

QLife

Provides anonymous and free LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral for people in Australia wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships. Visit qlife.org.au

Multicultural services

Embrace Multicultural Mental Health

Provides resources and links to services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Visit embracementalhealth.org.au

Recommended resources



Many books, resources and courses can help you with parenting and separation. Some resources are available online, while others can be borrowed from a library or community centre or bought at a bookshop.

Booklets by Relationships Australia

- A fair share—Negotiating your property settlement
- Safe from violence—A guide for women who are separating or leaving a relationship
- Partners—A Guide to Successful Relationships
- Share the care—Parenting plan—Collaborative parenting apart
- What about the children?

Visit relationships.org.au/ra-information-booklets for details.

Books

BIFF for coparent communication: Your guide to difficult texts, emails and social media posts (2020) Eddy B, Burns A & Chafin K. Unhooked Books.

Calming upset people with EAR: How statements showing empathy, attention and respect can quickly defuse a conflict (2021) Eddy B. Unhooked Books.

Mom's house, dad's house: Making two homes for your child (2006) Ricci, I. Fireside Books.

Parenting after separation: Making the most of family changes (2002) Burrett J. Finch Publishing.

Rebuilding: When your relationship ends (2016) Fisher B & Alberti RE. Impact Publications.

Courses and programs

- Relationships Australia Victoria—Parenting After Separation Seminar program: Visit rav.org.au/pass
- Parenting Research Centre: Visit parentingrc.org.au/program
- Triple P – Positive Parenting Program®: Visit triplep-parenting.net.au/au/triple-p

Online resources

Beyond Blue: beyondblue.org.au/resources

Raising Children Network: raisingchildren.net.au

Podcasts

Guiding Growing Minds—Pop Culture Parenting:
guidinggrowingminds.com/popcultureparenting

Research

Family dispute resolution services: Cost-benefit analysis summary [Report] (2024). Relationships Australia Victoria: rav.org.au/fdr-cba

FDR: What the research says—Relationships Australia Victoria:
rav.org.au/about/research-evaluation/fdr/

- FDR for clients intending to go to court: More than just a tick-box exercise?
- Analysing the costs and benefits of FDR
- FDR outcomes for Relationships Australia clients
- Can post-separation co-parenting apps help families avoid conflict?
- How are communication technologies used and misused after separation?
- Legally-assisted FDR with community legal centres
- Hearing children’s voices: Supporting child-inclusive practices in FDR
- AccessResolve property dispute resolution for court-ordered clients: Satisfaction and outcomes

Smartphone apps for separated co-parents [Information sheet] (2024). Relationships Australia Victoria: rav.org.au/news/coparentingapps

Research on post-separation parenting—Australian Institute of Family Studies: aifs.gov.au/research/post-separation-parenting

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Notes



Use this section to note down important thoughts. For example: 'Keep the kids' future in mind'.







1300 364 277

www.relationships.org.au

Relationships Australia is a leading, not-for-profit provider that supports individuals, couples, families and communities to have safe and respectful relationships.

We provide counselling, family dispute resolution, trauma support, mental health services, and a diverse range of other family and community support, professional training and education programs. These are delivered through a network of over 100 service locations across all Australian states and territories. Our work is informed by our 75 years of experience and our knowledge of the crucial role of relationships in protecting and enhancing mental health and wellbeing.

As a community-based organisation with no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background or economic circumstances.