

# family break-ups

a guide to how to cope  
when parents split up

# Worried your parents are splitting up?

## Parents already living apart?

Then this leaflet is for you.

### First off . . .

Just because they're arguing doesn't mean they're splitting up.

### Secondly, even if they are breaking up . . .

It's not your fault.

Nothing you've done has caused this to happen – no, really, we mean it!

### And lastly . . .

You're not alone.

Lots of people have parents who have separated.

At the back, there are details of places where you can get help and more information if you feel you need it.



You might find these other leaflets handy too:

r u worried? – coping with worry

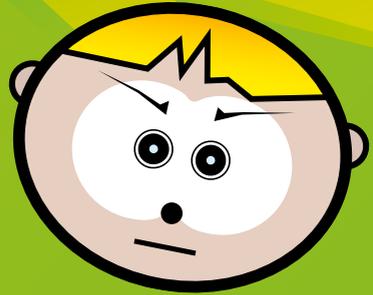
r u sad? – coping with sadness

Ask a teacher about them or look in your school library.

## Why are they splitting up?

There can be many reasons. They might:

- want to be with someone else
- not agree about important stuff
- want different things
- not be able to get along any more.



Like anything else, relationships can break. Usually, it's because one person (or both) is unhappy and believes they need to be apart for things to get better.

### It's not your fault.

Nothing you've done or haven't done has caused this to happen.

## Why are they acting so weird?

Ending a relationship is very stressful.

Your parents might:

- not talk to each other
- argue and shout lots
- get cross with you more
- get upset easily.



### Arguments

Arguing lots doesn't always mean they're splitting up. If you're worried, talk about it with mum or dad, another family member, a friend or a teacher.

## What will happen to me?

Your parents will probably arrange for you to stay with one of them most of the time. You might hear them argue about this – **it doesn't mean they don't love you.**

They might also arrange times for you to be with the parent you don't live with.

### Speak up

It's hard to choose but let them know if you'd rather stay with one of them.



### Piggy-in-the-middle

Kids often feel 'stuck in the middle'.

- Don't let them use you as a go-between – it's not fair on you.
- Don't try to do the talking for them – they need to work it out between themselves.
- Do let them know how you feel – it'll help them make their decisions.

They might say bad things to you about the other parent. Not fair! Tell them not to if you find it upsetting.

# Feelings



Family break-ups cause powerful feelings. You might feel:

- angry
- upset
- numb
- confused
- sad
- guilty
- worried.

## Relief

If there's been lots of unhappiness, you might feel relieved.

## I feel nothing

You might feel nothing at first. This is normal too but don't get a fright if everything comes in a rush later.

## Make a wish ...?

Children often wish that their parents would get back together.

**Wishing won't make this happen.**

If it does, it'll be their decision.

Dealing with major changes affects our bodies and minds.

## Don't be surprised if you:

- can't sleep properly
- can't concentrate at school
- get hungry more
- go off your food
- get bad-tempered
- have aches and pains
- want to cry lots.

These are symptoms of **stress**.

When we're stressed we need to look after ourselves.

## Looking after yourself

Listening to arguments, worrying about what'll happen – it's easy to forget **yourself** in all the confusion.

### Chill

Do stuff you enjoy and that relaxes you. Exercise is a great way of beating worries – take a walk, go swimming or have a kickabout down the park.

### Take a break

The atmosphere at home is probably a bit rotten. Can you stay at a friend's house or with another family member for a couple of nights? You still need to clear this with your folks.

### Express yourself

It's important to work through your feelings. Why not:

- talk with a friend or trusted adult
- keep a diary
- write a song or rap
- make a picture.

### Get help

Let school know what's happening at home – they can help if you're getting behind.

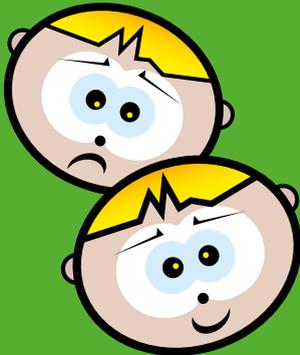
Call Childline any time for help, support or just to talk to someone:  
0800 1111



## What if they meet someone new?

Your mum and dad might meet someone new – maybe they already have.

- It's not a competition – your mum/dad still love you, their love for you is a different kind of love.
- Feeling weird at first is normal, getting used to new people takes time.
- It doesn't mean they'll get married, it can take time for mums and dads to get over a divorce.
- Give them a chance.  
New people to know can mean new friends
- They're probably feeling weird about you too.



### What if I have to deal with a new family?

Your two families might live together. This can be hard at first but remember:

- everyone's in the same boat
- it gets easier.

For information and support if you're living in a step-family visit [www.thepark.org.uk](http://www.thepark.org.uk)

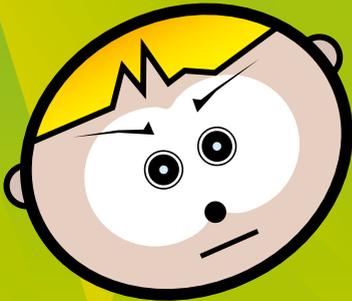
# Changes

## What about rules?

You'll have to stick to the rules of the parent or step-parent you're with, when you're with them. If they're so different you can't cope, let the adults know. Don't get shouty about it though – it won't help.

## Should I tell my friends?

Don't worry about this. You know people with divorced parents, right? You don't think less of them so why should anyone think less of you? Even if they do, that's their problem.



## What if I miss them?

You might not see as much of one or both your parents. It's natural to miss them and the things they did for you.

- **Keep in touch**  
Send letters, postcards, emails, texts or pick up the phone.
- **Keep them posted**  
Let them know what you're up to.
- **Think up new routines**  
It helps fill the gaps left by the things they used to do with you.

## Some words

### Separated

When parents have decided not to live together any more.

### Divorced

When a married couple have gone through a legal process to end their marriage. They'll have to decide on:

- residency – where you'll live
- where you'll go to school
- who you'll live with
- money matters
- contact – how and when you'll see the parent you don't live with.



### Mediators

Sometimes, a mediator will help parents sort through all the decisions they need to make when they separate or divorce.

### Moving on

- They still love you even if they don't want to be together.
- They're still both responsible for you.
- You're not alone – lots of people go through this.



Dealing with big changes is hard at first but learning to deal with change makes us stronger for the future.

## Help

### Emergencies

Call the police on 999.

Ask for a 'child protection police officer' if you're worried about abuse.

### Carers Trust

Support for people caring for a relative who is unwell or in need of care.

<https://carers.org>

### Childline

Freephone 0800 1111 – any time – call for advice, information and support on any worry or see [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) for other services.

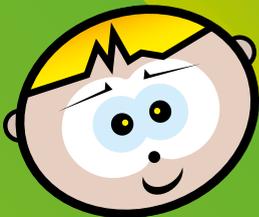
### Hope Again

Support and advice for anyone coping with the loss of a friend or relative.

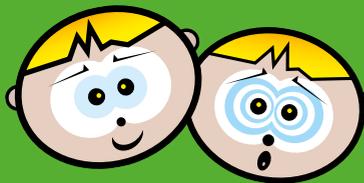
Get in touch for details of a group near you. Call 0808 808 1677 or email [hopeagain@cruse.org.uk](mailto:hopeagain@cruse.org.uk)

### Family Lives

Freephone 0800 028 22 33 – information, support and advice for parents.



## Help



[www.whocaresscotland.org](http://www.whocaresscotland.org)

Advice, information, advocacy and local support for young people living in care or who have been in care. Telephone: 0141 226 4441

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Childline website – fact sheets, links, email help, problem pages and more

[www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk)

Information and advice on bullying

<http://respectme.org.uk>

Information, advice and links on bullying

<http://hopeagain.org.uk>

Information and advice if someone close to you has died, message boards and email support

**Surf safe! Never** give out your real name, telephone number or address online.

Visit [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) for information on using the internet safely.

NHS Health Scotland cannot guarantee the quality of information on websites run by other organisations.

This resource may also be made available on request in the following formats:



 **0131 314 5300**

 **[nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net)**

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