

Splitting up or staying together?

Making the right decision – with Family Lives and Relate



Problems in a relationship don't have to mean it will end. Talking to a Relate counsellor can help you share your feelings and decide whether the relationship can be saved. And if a split is inevitable or has already happened, Family Lives can help you think about what's best for the whole family.

Relate counsellor Denise Knowles says:

"It's not uncommon for couples who are experiencing difficulties in their relationship to consider splitting up as their only choice. Some may feel they've exhausted all the options, while for others it may be the first thing they consider. However, splitting up might not be the only choice. Before taking this step, it's important to talk honestly and openly about feelings, needs, disappointments and fears."

She advises – ask yourself:

What is it that I'm really not happy about?

What have I or my partner been doing to contribute to this situation?

Many couples doing this can discover when their relationship began to deteriorate and the small niggles that were ignored at first and developed into big problems.

Common trigger points that put a strain on relationships are:

- **Money**
- **Unemployment**
- **New baby**
- **Changing roles**
- **Children leaving home**
- **Sex**

Relate offer phone and online counselling:
find out more on 0300 100 1234
or www.relate.org.uk.

How Family Lives can help

At Family Lives, we regularly speak to parents struggling to deal with each other while making arrangements for family life post-separation. Call and talk free and in complete confidence to a Family Lives worker on 0808 800 2222.

Parents ask us questions like:

"We're separating and know our children need to see both of us but we don't know where to start."

"My husband has been cheating on me and we're separating. Should I encourage him to have a relationship with our baby daughter or ask him to stay away?"

It can be difficult to continue a relationship with your partner after a break-up. You may be feeling angry, hurt, unfairly treated or humiliated, but you owe it to your children for both of you to be fully involved in their lives whether or not you stay together. It's a big responsibility: getting it right will mean your children will grow up to be happier, more well-balanced people.

Family Lives tips:

- **Listen** to your children's concerns. Don't say they're wrong or they don't understand. They're entitled to their feelings and should be able to express them
- **Don't criticise** the other parent, however justified you feel. Your child knows they are part of that person too, so they'll take your criticism to heart
- **Remember** your children need both of you
- **Reassure** your child that the break-up was

not their fault

- **Be patient** and loving. It may be difficult for your child to talk about their feelings, so don't force them. Give lots of cuddles and reassurance. Understand that any 'acting up' may be coming from these feelings
- **Be honest** about what is happening. Hiding the fact that you are separating may shake your child's trust in you
- **Encourage** frequent contact with their other parent in some form: visits, by phone, email or letter
- **Keep** to contact arrangements once they have been agreed to avoid unnecessary extra hurt.

Mediation:

It's important to sort out details of contact arrangements, residency and money early on. This is where conflict often starts. How you talk and act with your child's other parent is all-important. If you are finding this difficult, Family Lives can help you tackle this with increased confidence.

For further help, try local mediation services (see back page for details). Other members of the family may want to help but this can sometimes make things more complicated. A trained mediator helps you manage this in a more straightforward way.

Handling children's distress

Parent:

"I'm separated and my 12-year-old son is threatening to leave home if I have a relationship. He will not leave my side when anyone is here, throws things and bangs doors."

Parent:

"My ex says the children cry and act up before and after visits. Maybe it would be best if I just left them alone?"

Children show their distress about family break-up in all sorts of ways. Help your child by:

- Asking how they feel and what their worries are
- Involving other family members and friends to help listen to and support them
- Explaining why if something can't be sorted out the way they'd like
- Understanding if children want to talk to someone outside of the family, or a helpline
- Acknowledging they can't always tell you how they feel
- Suggesting places where they can get support (see back page).

Family connections

Grandparent:

"My son and his partner split up and since then she hasn't let us see our grandchildren for nearly 14 months. We're desperate."

Stepdad:

"I miss my stepchildren after my divorce. I don't think they want to keep in touch but I wish they'd phone."

At Family Lives we often hear from grandparents and other relatives distressed at losing contact with children after a break-up. Keeping in touch with relatives and getting them involved in helping to care for the children preserves part of their old family life and reassures them that others are still there for them.

Preserving routines that the children enjoy is all-important. Whether it's going to granny's for tea after school, regular visits to cousins or weekend swimming trips with one parent or other, it helps children feel their old life isn't over. If that isn't possible, keep regular family contact alive through phone calls, emails or letters.

Family problems? We can help.



Free¹, confidential **helpline**

on **0808 800 2222** for advice, information and support on any aspect of parenting and family life



Or Skype us via our website –

www.familylives.org.uk

We offer advice and information as well as extended support for complex and difficult issues.



Face-to-face support groups and workshops. Find out what is available in your area at –

www.familylives.org.uk/localsupport



Online advice and information on

all aspects of parenting and family life

Give and receive support and advice from other parents and adult family members experiencing similar problems –
forum.familylives.org.uk/forum

Advice and information for professionals working with families at –
www.familylives.org.uk/professionals

¹From landlines and most mobile networks.

Or alternatively –

Relate – Offers counselling for parents, families, and young people via face to face counselling, live chat and email support.
0300 100 1234, www.relate.org.uk

Childline – Free, 24-hour helpline for children in distress. **0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk**

It'snotyourfault – A website for children and young people about divorce and separation.
www.itsnotyourfault.org

National Association of Child Contact Centres – Provide a safe, neutral place for children of separated parents and their families. Network of local centres.
0845 450 0280, www.naccc.org.uk

National Family Mediation – Provides details of local mediation services in the UK.
01392 271 610, www.nfm.org.uk



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Registered Company Number: 3817762. Registered Charity Number: 1077722.

