

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Parenting after separation

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Western Australian's are currently experiencing an unprecedented time of change and stress. For parents who are separated and still parenting their children this may be an especially challenging time.

With the restrictions implemented that can limit where people can stay and visit at this time, things may be further complicated.

Here are some tips if you are separated to help you with parenting during this time:

- **Focus on the children**

A good place to start thinking about what is best for your children is to think about what you hope and want for them. This helps us to focus on what is important and to have a plan of how to move forward.

For example:

- I want to provide my children with a sense of stability and security, especially at home.
- I want to prepare them to live and thrive in a fast paced world
- I want to provide my children with a positive role model with the ability for resolving conflict and dealing with tough times.

- **Manage the conflict with your ex-partner**

Research has shown that it is sustained, ongoing conflict between separated parents that is particularly damaging for children. Children are resilient, and can cope, if their parents have a sincere wish to move beyond conflict, towards co-operation, and are working on changing damaging patterns and behaviours. Children can cope with conflict between parents so long as:

- The conflict is not frequent or violent
- The children understand that they are not to blame
- The children are not caught in the middle

- **Be aware of your children's emotions**

Regardless of age, children will be affected emotionally by the separation and will need understanding and support. They need to know that the separation is not their fault and their job is not to reunite their parents.

Generally, most children adjust to the separation well once things have settled down. Children need to feel free to be loved and nurtured within both family homes. Seek professional help for your children if you believe they are not coping well with the separation.

- **Dealing with the other parent**

The way you deal with the other parent can have a major effect on your children. If it is done well, your children will benefit and settle into healthy routines with both of you.

Make you sure **AVOID**:

- arguing or inviting conflict in the children's hearing
- speaking negatively about the other parent
- using your children to pass on messages to the other parent
- encouraging your children to take sides with you

- **Be the best parent you can be**

The more involved you are in your children's lives, the more they will benefit. The challenge for you is how to do this more effectively.

Here are some ideas of how to stay connected with your children:

- Share activities like bike rides, skating, jigsaws, board games, cooking etc.
- Ask them what they would like to do with you and implement this
- Keep in contact with their school
- Create your own rituals for birthdays, Christmas and holidays
- Have a special bedtime ritual; read a story, a little chat, sing a song/ lullaby

- **Remember that children need a secure emotional base**

When your children are living with you they need to feel safe and secure in your home. Setting up daily routines can help this process so your children know what to expect each day. Set realistic rules and boundaries in your home so that your children know what behaviours are accepted by you.

A secure emotional base also includes:

- Encouragement to learn new things
- Help to solve their problems
- Protection from trauma
- A trusted parent when they need to be dependent

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on ***Parenting After Separation*** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.