

Family Separation

A book by kids for kids





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Anglicare WA delivers services across countless First Nation lands in WA, from Balangarra Country in the North to Minang Noongar Country in the South.

We acknowledge Aboriginal Peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands that our services operate on. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the Custodians of the lands where our offices operate.

We would like to thank the Noongar, Miriuwung Gajerrong, Tjurabalan, Yawuru, Nyikina, Ngarluma, Kariyarra, Nyiyaparli, Martu, and Wangkatja Peoples for their wisdom and generosity, and pay our respects to Elders of these lands both past and present.



This book was made by kids to help other kids who have had separation happen in their families. You might have lots of different feelings and they are all normal!

If you are feeling lots of 'feels', it can help to know that you are not alone. And it can help to know that there are things you can do to help manage your big feelings. This little book will give you some ideas and you might like to share it with a trusted adult. There are also some numbers and websites at the back of the book to have a look at.

We might talk about parents and caregivers separating because sometimes it's not just parents who separate, it could be other people who care for kids. Separation might have just happened in your family, or it might have happened a while ago. It's important to remember that everyone is different and has different reactions at times. We hope our art and stories might be helpful.



"Even though things seem really bad, there is a rainbow if you look for it". Jess, 8

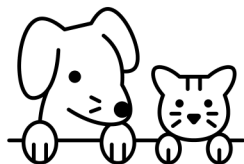
Changes happen all the time in our lives, even everyday.

When it's a big one like your parents separating or divorcing this can feel like a big storm moving through your family. There might have been some grumbling thunder or lightening that told you a storm might be brewing, or it might happen quickly. Just like in a storm, everyone tries to stay safe, be protected from the weather and wait for it to pass. This little book is to try to help you 'get through the storm', to cope with changes and come out the other side safely.

Separation can change things in your world. Sometimes when parents separate it's a complete surprise and other times it might not be at all. It might bring about big feelings about the world being unsafe and lots of questions like 'Where will I live?'. Lots of kids wonder what will happen to a parent who leaves the home.

Common worries kids have:

- What will happen to our pets?
- Do I have to change schools?
- I feel like I have to pick a side.
- What if my parent gets a new partner?
- Will I have to move out of our house?
- Will I see my Grandparents and the rest of my family much?
- How much will I get to see my Dad/Mum/Parent?
- What if I cry at school?
- Is it still ok to love both my parents?
- Was it my fault? (Top Tip, the answer is NO!)



You can learn how to manage these big feelings. You might feel like things at school are tough because you're thinking about what's going on at home. You might be worried about a parent or find it hard to do your schoolwork. Maybe you have lots of feelings bubbling inside that come out in different ways. Some kids get in trouble more at school because they have all these feelings swirling around like lava in a volcano and then it erupts! – Be kind to yourself because it takes time.



- **Feelings that might be swirling around:**

Worry, anxiety, sadness, confusion, resentment, guilt, anger, relief, feeling caught in the middle.



- **This might erupt in outbursts like:**

Anger, shouting, yelling or physical acts like hitting.



- **Or it might show up like:**

Not wanting to go out, crying, keeping things inside, headaches, stomach aches, feeling tired all the time.



"When my Mum and Dad told me they were getting a divorce I felt like a big rain cloud came over my house. I felt mad and sad at the same time. I got angry at school and kept getting in trouble. One of my teachers asked me what was wrong, and I told them. They listened to me. After that I knew that if I had a bad day at school, they would be there to talk to". Pippa, 8.

Grief and Loss and other things that might hurt.

Kids can feel a lot of loss when parents separate.

Lots of things can change, things kids have said:

"I had to change schools, then I had to make new friends. But also I had to leave my old friends and teachers and I felt really sad".



"When my dad moved out, at first, I wanted to go just for a little bit of time so I could get used to it and then go for a bit longer. I might want to stay the night but I don't know yet".

"I didn't think anyone would get it but then I found at that other kids at school had parents who got separated or divorced so I think they might".

Grief can feel like pain from the loss of something.

Maybe it's sadness that your family will no longer go places all together or celebrate special events all together. You might feel confused but most kids say that things settle down and keep changing. They usually get heaps better but it can take time.

You might feel like you have to take on a new 'role' in the family.

When things change you might want everything to go back to how it was or you might try to keep the peace in the family. You might also want to 'fix' things. Some children try to be 'the best kid ever' and not get into trouble to keep parents happy. This puts a lot of pressure on children and can be exhausting!

**Some roles children
may take on:**



WARRIOR

"If I do my best and fix things for everyone then maybe Mum and Dad might like each other and stay together". Xavier, 7

CLOWN

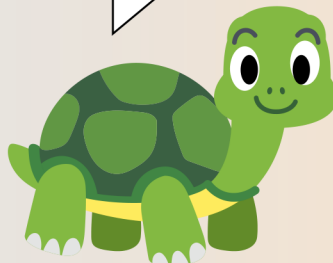
"I can make everyone laugh and then no-one will be mad anymore."

Lisa, 8



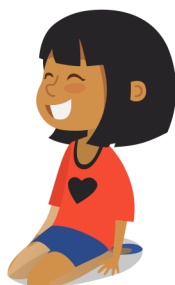
TURTLE

"If I keep quiet, I won't cause any problems and then my parents won't fight." Luca, 9



Sometimes there are little things that might be a 'silver lining' when things are hard.

"I get two lots of presents now for my birthday and Christmas". Amy, 7



Often it just takes one brave person to talk in a group about how they are feeling and suddenly other kids open up. This can happen because we learn that we are not alone and we share experiences similar to other people. It can be hard to do but if you feel the time is right and you trust the person, try talking a little bit and see what happens. When you are talking it can help to learn the words to emotions and feelings so that you can express how you feel.



It's important to have people to talk to.

It might feel like there is nothing that is good right now.
You might feel sad or angry at the world.

"I've got some people I can talk to if I feel sad, scared or unsafe. I know that if one of them is too busy, I can talk to another one, I'll ask until I find someone". Josh, 9

Draw your own Safety Network on this hand. Think of safe adults you can trust and go to if you're feeling sad, scared, worried or just chat to.



***‘What kids need
from parents and
caregivers...’***



- “Keep us out of adult conversations about family court and lawyers”
- “Keep routines the same so we know what is happening and when”
- “Check in with us about how we are feeling. We might not want to talk every time, but we need to know that someone is available”
- “Listen to us and make time for us”
- “Don’t be on the mobile phone all the time” and “Don’t ask me to send messages” (to the other parent)

“It’s a bit like a rocky path when I go between my parents’ houses. Like sometimes things go ok and it’s calm but other times they argue, and I don’t like it. Sometimes I think I have to pick a side. I wish I didn’t hear them”. Luke, 9





What is the Family Court?

When parents find it too hard to come to an agreement about where kids will live some parents need to go to a place called Family Court so that a judge can listen to what they have to say and help make a decision. It can take a long time to come to a decision and sometimes one parent or the kids don't think it's fair. It's important to remember that no-one is to blame. You might get to talk to a children's lawyer who can share your ideas in the court. New arrangements can happen and this can take some getting used to. You might want to know all the things going on or you might hear things your parents say. It's important to remember that this is stuff for the adults to talk about, your job is to 'be a kid'. You don't have to solve problems and you don't have to take sides.

TIPS

Remember that Family Court is a place where decisions are just made about where the kids live.

"When I know Mum and Dad are going to court, it made me feel nervous. I saw a movie where people went to jail after they went to court, and it made me feel worried".

Sometimes after a separation kids might not get to see a parent for a while.

When this gets sorted out by the adults or Family Court, then they might get to spend some more time with them. *"First I did visits with my Mum but now I get extra time with her, and she helps me with heaps of stuff and if I've got a worry I can talk to her".* Georgina, 11

Amy's Story

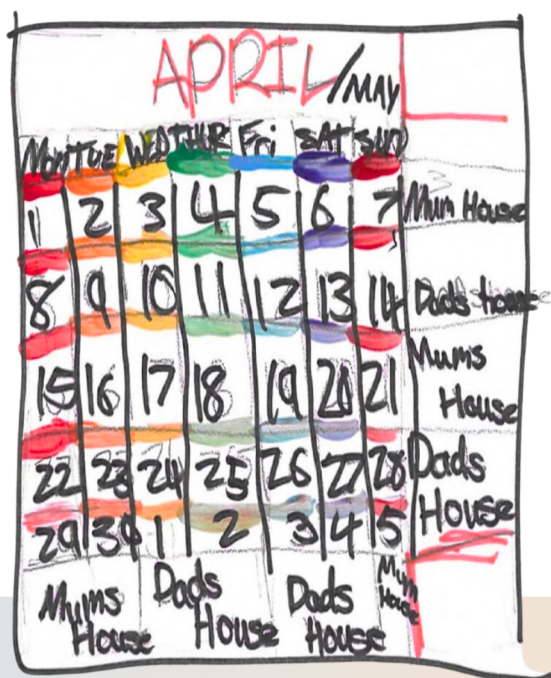
"I was 12 when my parents separated. I remember finding out because Mum just left and went to her friend's place for a few days. I knew they argued but I just thought they would be together forever and then everything went so fast. Dad got a place to live in and us kids would go there every second weekend. I usually just stayed in my room, and I didn't want to talk to anyone. My brother annoyed me and our dog was at mum's place. When they got a divorce, they sold the house and mum rented a new place too. I went to a new high school which turned out ok because I made friends with some nice kids, so I hung out with them a lot after school. I guess every week got a bit better, but it was weird getting used to it. I remember trying to listen to my parents' conversations. I think I wanted to always know what was going on". Amy, 12



*"I guess every week
got a bit better, but
it was weird getting
used to it."*

Living in Two Homes

When your parents or caregivers live in different places, you might go between the houses and have visits or even stay over. Lots of kids say they forget things so it's good to get organised. Maybe try a chart or have a bag ready to put things in when you know you are going for a visit. A calendar can also help and you can use things like stickers to help remember which days you are going and what to bring. Things like library books or sports clothes or bathers.



"One of the annoying things is I forget my stuff when I'm at one of my parents' houses. Sometimes it's my library book and sometimes it's my sport uniform. I made a calendar so I can remember my things". Ravi, 7

TIPS


"If I feel sad or angry I do things like listen to music and that helps me feel calm and relaxed." Maya, 11



"We had to share our dog between my parents houses because I got too sad when I went to Dad's and I had to leave him at Mum's house. Now he goes with me and it's so good because he sleeps on my bed and I feel safe". Scott, 6

"When we go to one parent's house, my brother and I can use the iPad to talk to the other parent on Kids' Messenger. Some kids have watches, and some kids talk on the phone". Summer, 12





**Fill the clouds with
things that help you to
feel calm or relaxed**



Your parent might start dating or get a new partner

This can be tough especially if you are hoping your parents might get back together. It can bring up lots of feelings like jealousy, rejection, anger, sadness, or happiness or excitement. You might wonder what they will be like, will they be bossy, are they a safe person, do they have kids, will they take up lots of your parents time, what will your other parent say, will it cause problems? Maybe they will be really nice. Some kids find that they can even talk more openly to their parents' new partner. New partners may mean there are more people around who bring different personalities and new interests and perspectives. If you have any questions or worries, try to have a chat to your parent.



"We have a picture of all of us in a frame at both parents houses and I like it because I remember when we all used to do things together like camping. Sometimes though it makes me feel sad if I look at it, but it's kind of a happy sad feeling". James, 11



"I feel sad when my Mum drops me off at Dads but then we do something like go to the park or have a popcorn night and I'm ok. I can call her if I want. Then I miss Dad when I'm at mum's, I'm not used to it yet". Sam, 9

Ways to talk with your parent. Just like kids, parents can get super busy and sometimes it might seem like they just don't have time. You might want to make an 'appointment' and book out some time to sit and talk.

"I asked my Dad if we could talk and we made a time for it. He made milo and got biscuits and we sat and I got to talk to him about stuff that was worrying me. The best bit was he didn't have his phone and it was so good". Ryan, 11

It can get better. With all the changes that might happen in your family, try to remember that it can get better, that all your feelings are ok to talk about and that there are family and friends who love you and want to help you.

"I try and think it's like walking towards the sunshine, it might be a long way away, but I know things will get better". Farah, 10



Helpful numbers & websites

Kids Helpline

kidshelpline.com.au

1800 55 1800

Headspace

headspace.org.au

Commissioner for Children And Young People

ccyp.wa.gov.au



1300 11 44 46

info@anglicarewa.org.au

anglicarewa.org.au

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Support and services for Western Australians

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- Disability Services • Family & Domestic Violence
- Financial Wellbeing • Housing & Homelessness
- Mental Health • Parenting Support • Suicide Postvention
- Sexual Abuse Support Services • Youth Services