

**A Family Breakup...**

*is stressful for everyone. You may feel exhausted and overwhelmed by new responsibilities and financial burdens. It may seem you have fewer opportunities to spend “quality time” with your children. Or perhaps you’re experiencing the loss of day-to-day contact with your children and wondering just how you’ll fit into their lives in the future. Your children are adjusting too, and may feel lonely, sad and insecure.*

*There are ways to make this difficult time easier for everyone.*



If you’re feeling stressed out, call to speak anonymously with a trained volunteer of Parents Anonymous who can provide support and refer you to resources in your community.

**Family Helpline**  
**1-800-THE KIDS**  
**1-800-843-5437**



Department of Children and Families  
 New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

Many of the ideas in this brochure were adapted from “Surviving the Pain of Divorce and Separation,” by Janice I. Cohn, D.S.W., A.C.S.W.

**Making it easier on you and your kids**



Tips on how to help your family members make it through the pain of separation and emerge feeling loved and secure.

These tips are based on the experiences of divorcing parents and include helpful advice from professionals.

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### Let everyone express their feelings

During and after the breakup, your children are likely to have strong emotions. Encourage them to share their feelings of safeness, fear and anger. Youngsters who show no emotion very often are hiding their pain, so try to get them to talk about their worries, wishes and sense of loss.

Of course, you will feel pain and anger, too. Don't try to "put on an act" to hide this from your children. Chances are they'll understand your grief. When you're upset, angry or sad, be sure to tell them that the breakup and how you feel are not their fault. Children need to know it takes time for everyone to heal after a marriage has ended.

### Don't ask kids to take sides

It's important that children continue to love and trust *both* parents. You can help make this happen by protecting your children from any bitterness and anger you and your partner may feel toward each other. Sometimes you may not be conscious that you're putting children in positions that force them to "choose sides," so think carefully about what you ask them to do.

### Tell children their feelings are OK

When children share what's on their minds, accept their emotions. Don't tell them that their feelings make no sense, that the feeling will soon go away or that they only *think* they feel a particular emotion. Responding honestly is better than trying to distract kids or cheer them up.

Helping kids express their emotions is the first step to putting their problems in perspective. Keep in mind that children sometimes deal with their immediate problems "at a distance" through art, playtime acting or by asking questions about storybook or television characters and their families.

### Try to keep family life normal

When you know your children are in emotional pain, it may be hard to keep firm but reasonable limits for their schedules and behavior. But it's important that you do. Knowing your expectations will help them feel secure, and well-behaved children and a regular schedule will help make your life easier too.

### Give extra love and attention

It's natural for children to feel insecure during a family breakup. Tell them you love them and will always take care of them. Let them

know that relatives, friends, teachers and, with hope, both parents will be there when they need them.

Find ways to allow your kids to feel good about themselves. Praise them for helping around the house and recognize their special talents and skills. Try to find time to spend alone with each child every day, even if it's only 10 or 15 minutes.

### Take care of yourself, too

Your feelings also are important. Don't ignore them. Take time out to talk to friends, family or a therapist about the pain, anger and disappointment you feel.

Remember that while strong feelings are normal, "bottling them up" can lead to depression, anxiety or physical symptoms like headaches or insomnia. When you feel you need a physical outlet for your anger, try vigorous exercise at the gym or simply throw on your sneakers and take a brisk walk or jog around the neighborhood. If you're the main caregiver for your children, plan some time away from them occasionally to follow your own interests, spend time with adults – or just have some time alone.

If you feel pressure mounting, don't be afraid to ask for help. Phone a relative or friend, seek resources for divorcing parents in your community, or call 1-800-THE KIDS. An understanding voice can make all the difference.