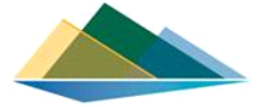


#divorceandseparation
#publichealth5-19service



DIVORCE & SEPARATION FACTSHEET

This factsheet will provide you with information and advice about what to do if you are experiencing the break-down of your parent's relationship and links to some helpful websites.

“Where can I meet young people who have been through this too... am I the only one?”

You are not alone... the latest figures show that just under half of all couples getting divorced have a child under 16. That's a total of 94,864 young people under 16 in England and Wales who have parents who are divorced (Office for National Statistics, 2013). This doesn't include the young people whose parents have lived together but are not married. So a short answer to your question is you are not alone and also you are not to blame. These are the two main things that worry young people when their parents decide to separate.

Why are my mum and dad splitting up?

There are lots of reasons why your mum and dad may be splitting up. Usually parents decide to separate because they no longer get on together. People change as they get older and maybe they no longer love each other in the way that they used to. But you have to remember that it is nothing that you have done that has made them decide to split up.

“My mum and dad are shouting at me more and arguing loads!”

Sometimes parents' behaviours change when they are unhappy or stressed and they make take their frustrations out on you. They have feelings too and they might be all mixed up at the moment. Although they may be angry and shout at you more, they still love you.

I don't know what to think or feel!

You may experience lots of emotions and these may change from one minute to the next. Some of the emotions you may be feeling might include:

- **Feel sad.** It is normal to feel sad. Everyone feels sad when they lose things or people or when things change. When parents separate you will feel like you have lost lots of things, the main one being that you have lost the family unit that you used to have. This will bring with it lots of changes because your family will not be the same as it was before. Remember, it's normal to feel sad so don't be too hard on yourself.

“I used to love going out together as a family... we used to play games together... that's not going to happen now!”

- Feel angry. You may feel very angry and wonder how your parents could do this to you. You might feel angry but not really know why you feel this way or who you actually feel angry at. This sometimes may cause you to shout at people close to you or behave in a way you wouldn't normally behave. Another thing that might make you angry is the feeling that no-one told you what was going on, or the feeling that you can't do anything about it. It's ok to feel angry. Lots of young people in this situation will feel like this and this is one way of coping with what is going on.

“Why has my dad gone off to live with another woman? He really must not love me anymore!”

- Feel relieved. Sometimes young people feel relieved that their parents have separated. Your parents may shout at each other all the time... and may even shout at you which can mean there is a horrible atmosphere within your home. It's not your fault that this has happened and it could turn out to be better for everyone.

“I think it is better that my mum and dad split up... all they do is argue... and shout at me!”

- Feel confused and scared. You might feel confused about why this is happening to your family and scared about the future and how this will affect you. You might feel that your parents are not telling you what is happening or maybe your mum is telling you one thing and your dad is telling you something else. It is normal to feel scared and confused and things will sort themselves out in the end...sometimes it might even work out better than it was before.

“Why is this happening to my family? What will happen to me now? Who will pick me up from school?”

- Feel guilty. A lot of young people feel guilty when their parents split up and wonder if it was something that they said or did that caused their mum and dad to argue. Your mum and dad would still have split up even if you had kept your bedroom tidier or looked after your pet rabbit better. You are not to blame – it is not your responsibility that your parents have decided to split up.

“I wondered if it was my fault... did I do something that made them unhappy?”

What will happen to me now?

They are still your mum and dad and even though they have split up they still want to do the best for you. There will be some changes as your mum and dad will no longer be living together so they need to come to some agreement about where you will live, whether you will stay at the same school and how often you will see each of them. All of these changes will cause you to feel some of the feelings that we talked about earlier. Remember, all of these feelings are normal, however, if you feel that any of these feelings are getting too much for you and you are starting to feel very sad, angry, confused or guilty and you don't feel you can manage these feelings then look to the next section which will give you some advice on where you can go for help.

What can I do or where can I go if I feel I need some help to manage my feelings?

- Ask your parents - they are still your mum and dad and they both care about you. Ask your parents what is happening and this might make you feel less confused and scared about what is going on.

- Talk to them – they may not realise how all the changes are making you feel as they have been so busy trying to sort everything out. You are also more likely to get what you want if you tell them what you would like to happen! If one parent is moaning to you about the other or asking you to pass messages between them, tell them that you love them both and could they find someone else to talk to about this, or use some other way to pass information over to the other. Also, ask your parents to write down arrangements for day-to-day activities like who is picking you up from school, taking you to after school club etc. This will make you feel more settled and in control of the situation.
- Keep a diary - sometimes writing down how you feel in a diary may make you feel better by just getting your thoughts out of your head and put down on paper.
- Talk to someone - talking to someone will make you feel better. They can help make the negative feelings go away and sharing how you feel means that you are not trying to manage this on your own. This could be a member of the family – grandma, grandad, sister, brother, auntie, uncle. It might also be someone who isn't in the family, like a teacher. If you talk to one of these people, they will be able to help you work through your feelings and if you both feel you need further help they will find this support for you if this is what you want them to do. If you tell a teacher, they are more likely to be understanding to any problems you are having with your work or behaviour within school.

“I have learnt how to cope. I still see my dad every week and there are less arguments now.”

VISIT THESE USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.kooth.com

Free online counselling and support

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/home-families/family-relationships/divorce-separation/

Webpage from Childline provides and advice and support

www.divorceaid.co.uk/child/children.htm

Webpage from Divorce Aid provides advice for children, also has a webpage aimed at teenagers

www.themix.org.uk/sex-and-relationships/family-life/dealing-with-divorce-3295.html

The Mix provide support and advice for children and young people aged 13-25