

FACT SHEET 3

Children need parents to help them with the tough times

1. Your children will cope better if they have a strong, positive relationship with you

- Your children need lots of warm time with you to relax and laugh. For activity ideas visit the 'out of school' pages at www.teamup.co.nz.
- Remember, you build relationships with your children by putting them first. Don't always ignore them or fit them into your own plans.

2. Good communication is the key to your relationship with your children

- Reassure your children often, especially that you love them.
- Tell your children what's happening, and answer their questions, but don't use this as an excuse for passing on conflict.
- Gently help your children to find the words to say what they want to say, but never put them under any pressure or 'interrogate' them.
- Show you are listening to your children and respect what they say.
- Watch what you say, especially when replying to difficult questions.
- Put yourself in your children's shoes.
- Protect your children from adult issues.
- Have lots of conversations all the time, including about everyday and funny things, not just the big, difficult issues.

3. Your children need both parents, so help them to keep up their relationship with their other parent as well

- Remember, your children might not want to tell you they want to see the other parent because of the loyalty they feel towards you.
- Your children need to stay connected to everyone they love on both 'sides' of the family/whānau (grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins).
- Maintaining all these relationships is important for your children's emotional development and for their self-esteem and mana.
- Help your children through the short-term difficulties that contact with the other parent often causes. (Get advice if you're worried though.)



4. Your children will need more support from you if their other parent doesn't keep in touch

- You can't force the other parent to have contact, but you can invite them to counselling (This is free through the Family Court).
- Your children's feelings will be affected by not seeing their other parent.
- You are more likely to need help for yourself as well (see point 6).

5. Your children need as much stability and security as possible

- Separation can cause lots of changes and disruptions in your children's relationships, especially if they move house and schools.
- You can help by doing what you can to keep your children's routines and activities going, and by spreading out changes over time.
- Tell your children what the practical plans are for them, and reassure them that they will be looked after.
- Delay introducing new partners and step-families as long as you can.

6. Your children sometimes need you to talk to other adults to get help

- If you are worried about your children, then talk to a health professional, counsellor or school counsellor.¹
- You may need other adults' help to be strong for your children, especially when there is violence, extreme bitterness, or addiction.
- Remember not to place your burdens on your children. Talk to reliable adults instead.
- Read the booklet *Putting Your Children First – Parents' Guide to Caring for Children after Separation*, pages 14-17, for helpful ideas for coping.

¹ See *Putting Your Children First – Parents' Guide to Caring for Children after Separation*, page 2, for more ideas.

