

Respect your child's other parent

It's important to keep good lines of communication open with your child's other parent and treat them respectfully. However tempting it may be, never criticise them in front of your child. When you do this you force your child to choose between the two of you, and you risk making them feel disloyal, guilty or angry.

Look after yourself

When you don't see your children every day you will feel a range of emotions (and so will they). You may even experience relief, sorrow, joy and guilt all on the same day – all this is normal. It might help to talk to people you trust or write down how you feel. If you feel overwhelming sadness that persists, you may find it helpful to seek professional help or contact us at Care for the Family and we will signpost you to counsellors who can provide a confidential, non-judgemental space for you to work through those emotions.



Helping you to be an even better mum or dad



For more information and tips on family life, visit cff.org.uk

You might like to:

- Read *The Really Really Busy Parents Book On Parenting* by Rob Parsons and Katharine Hill cff.org.uk/shop
- Visit the *Single Parenting* section of our website cff.org.uk/singleparenting
- Visit our *Single Parent Support Facebook* page www.facebook.com/cffsingleparentsupport

Care for the Family seeks to promote strong family relationships and help those who face family difficulties.

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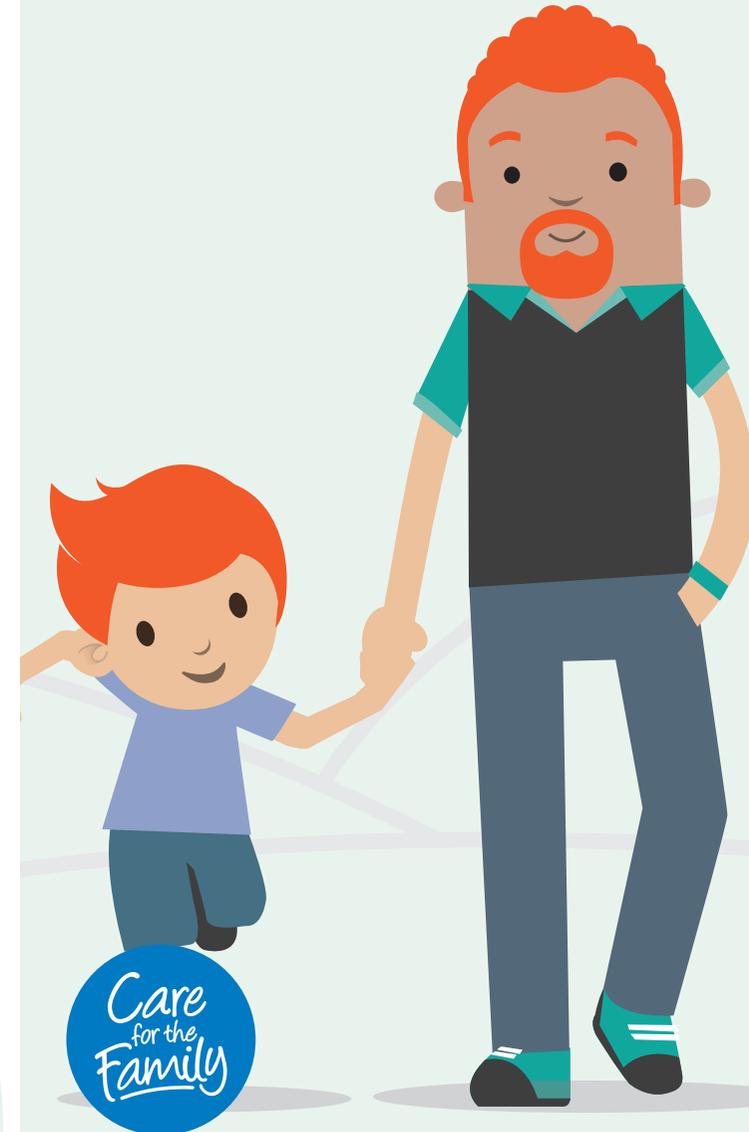
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Top Tips For Parents

Parenting Apart



Being a parent is one of the most important jobs you will ever do, but if you are separated or divorced from your child's other parent and no longer live in the family home, you may feel that you're unable to fulfil your role to the best of your ability. This doesn't have to be the case, and even if your parenting situation is very difficult, here are some tips that can help you and your children stay connected.

Keep in touch

Staying in regular contact with your child will help to strengthen your relationship and build their trust. As the adult in the relationship it's your responsibility to make this happen. Attend school concerts, parents' evenings, plays and sports events whenever you can to support your child. If this isn't possible, note the dates in your diary when these activities are happening and be proactive about asking your child how things went. Make sure you take the time to listen and show interest in what they are saying. If you can't speak to them face to face, a phone call or Skype is a great option.

Plan ahead

It helps to plan visits with or from your children in advance so that everyone in the family knows what's happening and there are no misunderstandings. Agreeing and keeping to the times



is very important for their stability and security – children learn to trust at an early age, and you can help maintain that trust by keeping your promises. While younger children don't have a true grasp of time, they'll know if you aren't there when you said you would be. Let your children know immediately if you are unable to attend an event or visit when you are scheduled to. And let them know how long it will be until you see them again.

Routines

Children feel happy when they know what to expect. Having a structured routine gives them a sense of security – and it also makes life easier for you! Try as much as possible to keep to their existing routines when they are with you, for example, meal times, bed times, homework and screen time. This will help to make the transition from one house to the other as smooth as possible.

Create happy connections

If you live miles away from your child it can be difficult to keep in touch, but communicating from a distance is so much easier today than it used to be. For video chatting use Skype or FaceTime – for younger children, this is a great way for you to read them a bedtime story. For older children who have smartphones or tablets, you can use email or online mobile photo sharing sites like Instagram to send messages and photos or play games together.

Belonging

Traditions give children a sense of belonging and are a great way to create strong, lasting memories. Creating traditions doesn't need to be expensive. It can be as simple as sitting down with your child and having milk and cookies every time they arrive at your house, having a pizza and film night, or going out for a cooked breakfast on

Saturday mornings. If possible, give your child their own permanent room and decorate it with them, so they know they have a special place in your home that says they belong there.

Quality versus quantity

It may not be possible to have as much contact with your children as you would wish, but focus on the quality of that contact rather than the quantity. When you are with them give them your full attention. Do things together that you all enjoy. Chat about their hobbies and the activities they'd like to do, and think of ways to engage with them around these interests.

Boundaries and discipline

Boundaries are important; they teach children about self-control, acceptable behaviour and respect for others. Having consistent boundaries also helps children feel safe and secure. It may mean that you both need to compromise, but whenever possible, agree boundaries with your child's other parent. If this is difficult, create boundaries that are right for your child while they are with you. Be loving and consistent with discipline – make sure you mean what you say and follow it through. And don't forget how important it is to praise and encourage your children when they have done well.

