

Parenting

the most important job in the world

TIPS ON BEING A PARENT, BUILDING SELF ESTEEM AND MANAGING GRIEF

GRANDPARENTS,
STEPFAMILIES AND
TEENAGE PARENTS

GOING IT ALONE:
A 'how to' for single parents

DEALING WITH
FAMILY SQUABBLES

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DAD



Families First in NSW

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

The Department of Community Services (DoCS)

DoCS provides services from a network of 84 Community Services Centres across NSW. You'll find their phone numbers in your local telephone directory under 'Community Services, Department of'.

Parent Line 13 20 55
Advice and information for
parents with kids up to 18 years statewide (voice and TTY)

Tresillian 02 9787 5255 or
(freecall outside Sydney) 1800 637 357
24 hour information and
counselling for parents or carers
of children under 5 years

Karitane 02 9794 1852 or
(freecall outside Sydney) 1800 677 961
24 hour telephone parenting
information and counselling

Family Support Services Association 02 9743 6565
Support services for families
experiencing stress

Relationships Australia (NSW) 02 9418 8800 or
(freecall outside Sydney) 1300 364 277

Centacare Relationship Counselling 02 9283 4899

Lifeline 13 11 14 statewide

Salvo Care Line 02 9331 6000 statewide

Salvo Youth Line 02 9360 3000 statewide

Dial-a-Mum 02 9477 6777 statewide

Telephone counselling for
anyone of any age

Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800

Kidsafe 02 9845 0890

Poisons Information 13 11 26

Children's Hospital Randwick 02 9382 1111

Children's Hospital Westmead 02 9845 0000

Early Childhood Centres (NSW Health)

To find your local Early Childhood Centre,
look under 'E' in the Telstra White Pages

After Hours Emergency Child Protection and Family Crisis Service

24 hours (freecall) 1800 066 777

Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463
1800 671 442 TTY

Centrelink

- Family and parenting payments 13 13 05
- Multilingual information 13 12 02

Find out about parenting courses by contacting your local
Early Childhood Health Centre or Children's Hospital.



Visit our **Parenting Website** at
www.community.nsw.gov.au

to get copies of all our parenting magazines:

Parenting: the most important job in the world

Caring for babies & toddlers (0 to 5 years)

Caring for children (6 to 12 years)

The teenage years (13 to 18 years)

FAMILY HELP KIT

The NSW Health Department has developed the Family Help Kit to assist families to better understand and recognise mental health problems in children, adolescents and young people. It also provides information and contact details on how and where to get help. Topics contained within the kit, include: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Problems, Challenging Behaviours, Grief and Loss, Fears and Anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress, Depression, Psychosis, Suicide Prevention, Body Image and Eating Disorders.

Copies of the Family Help Kit are available from the
Better Health Centre
LMB 5003
Gladesville NSW 2111
Telephone 02 9816 0452
Fax 02 9816 0492

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and all the other children,
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Becoming a parent does not come with an instruction manual for all the things you will face. It is one of the most important and difficult things you can do as well as one of the most rewarding. There is little training in how to raise a child. It is an enormous responsibility which is usually taken for granted. Most parents learn as they go, influenced by the way they were brought up or by what they have read or watched others do. Parenting styles may be different but we all share a common goal. We want our children to turn into healthy, happy, well adjusted, successful, honest, caring, responsible adults who will be respectful of others' feelings and property, be able to get along with others and be able to cope with difficulties. It is a lot to ask. Your children and your community rely on you to do this well.

being a parent

...is one of the most important and difficult things you can do as well as one of the most rewarding!

Your feelings

One of the most important things in parenting is your own attitude to it. Do you feel scared about it or are you thoroughly enjoying it?

As a parent you will experience a range of emotions which are all normal and yet which can make you feel like you are on a roller coaster ride. You will feel love, joy and pride but also more frightening emotions which can be very strong, such as anger, panic and hatred. Often parents feel that they are not appreciated by their children or valued by others. Such emotions can leave you feeling guilty as well as thinking you are not a good parent. It is important to remember you're not expected to be perfect and that all parents feel that they have made mistakes at some stage. Most parents at some time feel tired and upset and question what it is all about.



Things that might make it easier

Find out what you don't know

- ❶ Be aware of how children grow and develop.
- ❷ Be wise enough to know that you can do things differently.
- ❸ Be strong enough to say you don't know how to.
- ❹ Be big enough to ask for information or advice.

Value yourself

You are doing an important job. Be proud of the efforts you have put in through the day, no matter how small the tasks. When talking to friends about parenting don't moan and groan. Talk of it as a special career.

Look after yourself

See yourself as a person first and as a parent second. Be careful not to expect too much of yourself and of others. Take notice of your own special talents. Praise yourself for simple things. Don't dwell on your mistakes. Mistakes are for learning from, not for making you feel bad.

Accept your feelings

Understand that mixed feelings are normal. At times of stress or changes in your family you can be swamped with a range of emotions. At these times it is important to reach out and speak to your partner, to your friends, to family members or to someone not caught up in the emotion.

Reward yourself

Do at least one thing a day that makes you feel good. Get someone to fill in so that you can have 'time out' to do whatever you feel like doing even if it's 30 minutes - have a bubble bath, read a book, kick a football.

Talk to yourself

The way in which you talk to yourself matters. If you say "My child is trying to get at me" or "Why should I put up with this?" you will react very differently than if you say to yourself "What's happening to my children to make them behave like this?"

Trust yourself

Everyone has their own ideas about parenting and sometimes it's easy to become confused or to feel inadequate. Listen to other people's ideas - this is how we all learn. But do what feels right for you. Trust your own judgement.

Work out your own values

Clear values and beliefs are very important in forming the basis of a good foundation in raising children. Try to reach some common agreement with your partner if you have a difference of opinion. A shared and clear understanding of parenting practices makes for an easier road. If you differ try not to put each other down.

Get support

Make sure you've got a listening ear. If you feel alone and can't find support within your family, look everywhere until you find someone to talk to about your concerns. Parenting is too hard to do in isolation. Don't be afraid to ask for help ... it is not a sign of failure ... it is the smart thing to do. You will probably find that others feel the same as you.

Sorting and fixing

Being a parent is hard enough when everything is going well around you, but so much more difficult when things are going

wrong in other areas of your life. If you have violence in your home, money difficulties, ill health, arguments with neighbours or hassles at work, you must try to sort out the problem. Avoiding doing something about it will only make things feel worse for you. This may mean that, for the first time in your life, you seek advice from a professional if you have been unsuccessful in sorting it out within your family.

Take care of your relationship

One of the best things you can do for your children is to look after your own needs for support and love. Your closest relationship will probably be with a husband or wife or partner, but it may be with a special friend. Make regular time for your adult relationship where you can be alone together, do things you enjoy together, talk over the day's happenings, share ideas, share feelings and just relax. These times are really important to clear up any misunderstandings and one of the very best gifts that you can give to your children.

Managing anger

There are times in all parents' lives when they feel very angry. Most of the time parents manage to handle it successfully, but sometimes the anger can be in danger of getting out of control. Anger is always mixed with another feeling such as guilt, frustration, sadness, feeling unwanted or feeling used.

Try to do something about whatever is causing the underlying feeling if you can. Get to know your own body signs when anger is building up and act before it blows up. Work out when you are most likely to lose your cool and plan to do something different at those times, for example when you first get home from work.

Get some space ... go outside, go for a walk or a run. If you have very young children and no-one to mind them take them with you.

The critical thing is to admit you are angry and deal with it in a way that won't harm your family.

REMINDERS

- ❶ Parenting is forever, so make the foundation solid.
- ❷ Find out the right ingredients to raise a happy child.
- ❸ It is a marathon not a short distance run, so pace yourself.
- ❹ You are the most influential person in your child's life.
- ❺ Mistakes only matter if you keep repeating them.
- ❻ Don't waste time and energy feeling guilty - change what you are doing.
- ❼ Seek help from others, but keep on believing in yourself.



families

Families have changed a great deal in recent years and there are now many different forms of family and different styles of parenting. One thing is certain, whatever the 'family' means to you it is the most important part of children's lives. The family in which your child grows up in will have a big influence on how well your child will cope with situations, relationships and living.

Just as a loving, caring family can create a child with good self esteem, so an unhappy, fearful family can lead to low self esteem and a range of problems for a child.

Recognising and then telling your child that you've noticed them solving problems or achieving something they really want, helps them experience being capable and competent.

Sometimes unhelpful ways of doing things, habits and patterns form in our families without us realising that this has happened. We often just know that life seems harder and not enjoyable any more as a parent. You may find it useful to think about how your family works.

What makes a healthy family?

Studies show that healthy families:

Make time for talking and listening

- Families where a wide range of feelings are expressed seem to be healthier: feelings such as joy, excitement, anger and fear.
- Often parents forget that talking with children can be difficult and that they think in different ways from grown ups. Try to remember how it was for you. Probably the people you liked were those who listened to what you had to say.
- Listening means not only hearing the words but working out what your child is feeling behind the words.
- Listen without jumping in with answers or lecturing or criticising. Remember what it feels like when you want to talk and have someone just listen.
- Check that you're hearing your child correctly by repeating what you have heard but in different words. Show you are interested with brief fill-ins like "Mmm, go on" or "Really!"
- 'Put down' messages, threatening and blaming are likely to make your child feel bad or hopeless.

Show encouragement and appreciation

- ♥ Children and adults flourish with good doses of encouragement and appreciation. Let your children know what you like about them.
- ♥ Teenagers who remember being praised, kissed or hugged during the previous week are likely to do better at school than those who don't have this.
- ♥ Take time to ask what each family member has done each day.

Accept the differences in each person

- 😊 Encourage and value the differences in each family member, knowing that everyone is special in their own way. Let them feel proud to be themselves.
- 😊 No-one should be left out or scapegoated.
- 😊 Allow each person to be excited about personal interests, and show respect, even if this is not something you enjoy.

Share the chores and the power

- 🔧 Use adult power wisely and help children take on responsibilities so that as they get older you allow them to have more say over their own lives.
- 🔧 The younger the child the more you should be in control, but begin early, giving them chances to do things for themselves with careful watching.

- 🔧 Keep control through humour and encouragement, not with punishment or threats. In less healthy families there is a never ending fight for control which is unhelpful to children.

When children have a real say in what happens and where everyone feels their views are listened to, a very special relationship with trust and intimacy helps build a healthy family.

Keep in touch with friends and relatives

The more a family is isolated the more chance there is to have serious problems. Knowing that there are people outside to turn to when things get tough or in a crisis will make a difference to your child's happiness and chances of having friends at school. Apart from family and neighbours, share day to day problems with the parents of your child's friends (but not in front of children).

Make family time

- 🕒 Plan so there is time to discuss things that affect the whole family.
- 🕒 Find some way to spend time together as a family group. Allow fun times together.
- 🕒 A mealtime without TV is an opportunity to share information and find out what is happening to other family members.
- 🕒 Holidays which are planned to cater for the whole family and special ways for celebrating special occasions are an important part of a healthy family.

Spiritual values and beliefs

Many families have spiritual beliefs which give a sense of meaning and direction to every day events. They also add strength and hope in times of difficulty.

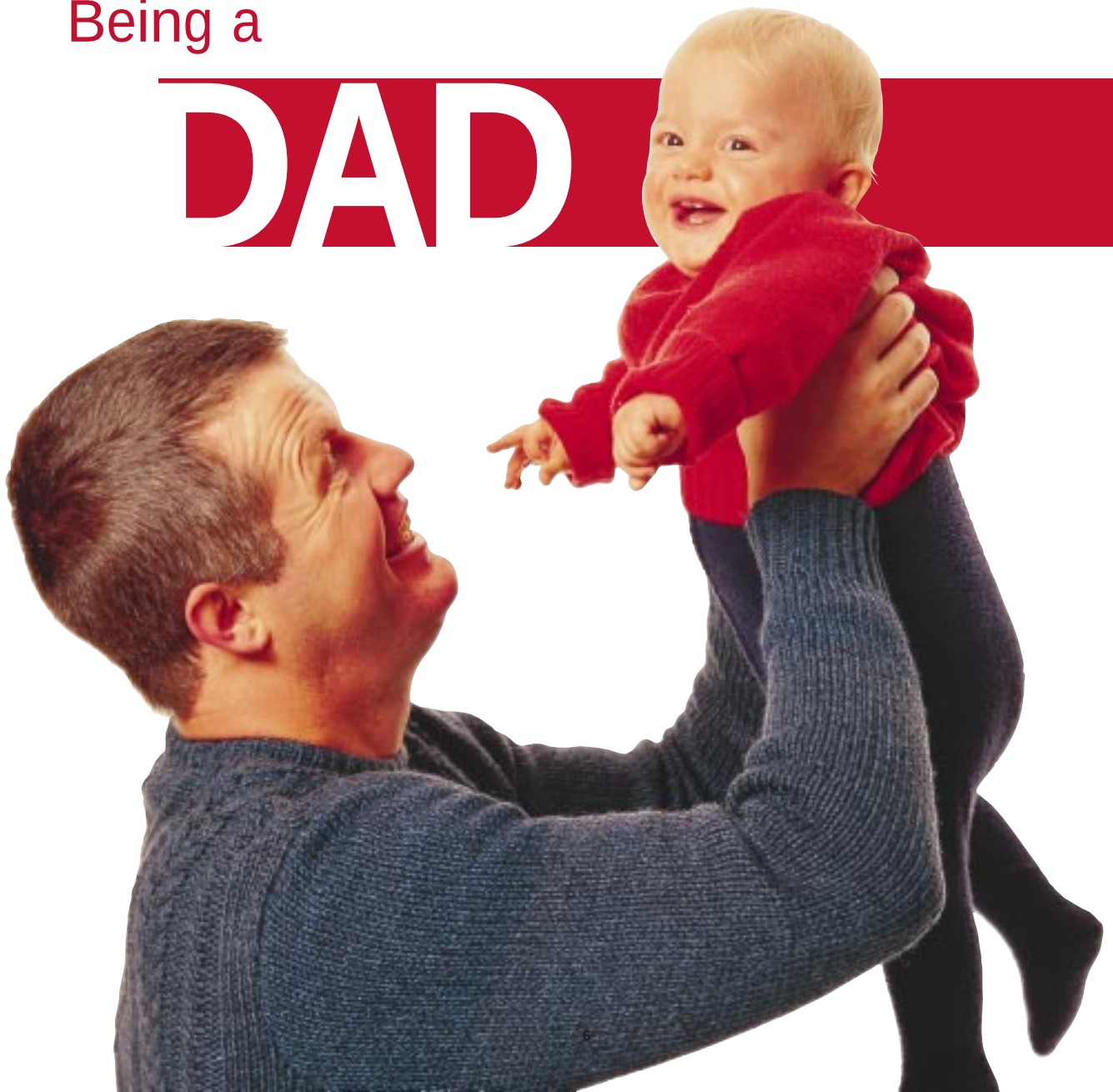
REMINDERS

- 😊 Allow feelings to be shown and listen well.
- 😊 Be quick with praise and slow with criticism.
- 😊 Value the differences in each family member.
- 😊 Sharing power promotes trust and caring.
- 😊 Develop friendships for support.
- 😊 Make time to be together.
- 😊 Hold on to your beliefs.

There are lots of different kinds of dads. Whether you are in a two parent family, in a stepfamily, have full-time care as a single parent or have your children with you for some of the time, being a dad is your most important job. In the past fathers were often the ones who were responsible for discipline and setting rules and mothers did most of the caring. While parenting can be done by either parent, children still have different experiences with their fathers than with their mothers. Fathering is not the same as parenting.

Being a

DAD



The most important gift that you can give to your children is your love.

What does it mean to be a dad?

There is no one right way to be a father. What is important is to work out what is going to work for you. Sometimes fathers feel uncertain of what is expected of them. Many fathers know what they don't want to do from memories of their own childhoods, but they aren't sure what they should do. There is no recipe for being a dad. How you work it out will depend on:

- ♥ what you expect to do as a dad
- ♥ what your children's mother expects
- ♥ what your partner expects if she is not your children's mother
- ♥ whether you are living with your children all of the time or some of the time or whether they live with their mother and visit you
- ♥ the way you and your partner balance work and family responsibilities
- ♥ the good things that you want to keep from what your own father did
- ♥ the things that you see other fathers do
- ♥ what your own children want and need

The most important gift that you can give to your children is your love. This means getting to know them and sharing who you are as a person.

It means spending time with them and making the most of the time you spend with them.

Some things that all dads can do

- 🌀 Show your sons the ways that you would like them to be when they are men. To learn this boys need to spend time with men. They will learn much more from what you do than from what you say.
- 🌀 Take your children to work with you sometimes if you can. Let them get to know how you spend your days when they are not with you.
- 🌀 Enjoy your children's company.
- 🌀 Spend time with your daughters. You are the first man that your daughters really know. It will help them to feel good about being female if they see that you enjoy your time with them. You are helping them to learn how to expect men to treat them when they grow up.
- 🌀 Share your own interests and hobbies with them.
- 🌀 Help your children with their sport or hobbies.
- 🌀 Show your love in different ways if you find it hard to say you love them. It doesn't need a lot of talking to:
 - take your children fishing
 - help them with their homework
 - go for a walk in the park
 - cheer at a school football or netball match.
- 🌀 Teach your children about rules and laws. Teach by what you do, as well as what you tell them. Stick to what is right even if it annoys them.
- 🌀 Encourage your children to stick at a problem even if it's hard.
- 🌀 Expect your children to do their best and be proud of them when they do, but be proud of them even when they fail.
- 🌀 Play with your children. Fathers often enjoy rough and tumble play. Children can learn a lot from this sort of play with their fathers. They learn that you can be strong and yet not too rough to hurt others. They learn that you can get excited and yet you can stop before things get out of hand.
- 🌀 Share your child's life. Go to school and pre school parent nights, to the doctor, to the park and to watch their sport.
- 🌀 Comfort them. Children, even tiny babies, often get a special feeling of security from being comforted by their dads when they are frightened or upset.
- 🌀 Talk about your feelings so that your children learn that it is alright for men to talk about feelings. Talk about when you feel sad or happy.
- 🌀 Being out of work and money worries can make problems for parents. But being out of work may mean that you have time to give to your children. Make it special so they will remember it all their lives.
- 🌀 Don't push your children into doing things you wanted to do and missed out on. They need to live their own lives.
- 🌀 Encourage your children to explore the world and find out.

What matters most for children is how you are a dad. Even if you are not a full-time dad your children need to know that you care about them and you will look after them.

Dads in two parent families

Being a dad in a two parent family means making sure that your relationship with your partner is right. One of the things that will help your children most is for their parents to get on well together. Children usually love both parents. They are hurt by parents fighting or putting each other down. It does not teach them how to make good relationships with others as they get older.

- ✚ Make regular time to be together as a couple without the children.
- ✚ When you have your first baby your relationship with your partner will bring big changes. She may feel tired and sometimes overwhelmed by coping with body changes and with her new responsibility. You may feel left out or even jealous. Discuss your feelings right from the start. Set a pattern of working things out together for the sake of your new family.
- ✚ Talk to your partner about how it is for you as well. For example many men feel a great responsibility to look after the family especially if there is a new baby and the wife's income has suddenly stopped. This can be a worry. Talk it over with your partner. Listen to her feelings as well.
- ✚ Talk about what you each expect of yourself and your partner in looking after the children.
- ✚ Work out how you will share things like:
 - getting up at night
 - bathing and feeding
 - arranging a babysitter when you go out
 - taking the children to school and activities
 - choosing presents
 - managing discipline
 - arranging some free time for each of you
 - taking time off work when the children are sick (find out what your work offers in parenting leave for fathers).
- ✚ Try to sort out any relationship problems away from the children.
- ✚ If you don't agree with the way their mother does something discuss it in private. If you still can't agree remember children can learn to cope with parents being different. What they can't cope with is parents putting each other down.
- ✚ Treat your children's mother (and all women) with respect so that your daughters will grow up knowing that it is good to be a woman and your sons will know how to treat their future partners.

What children say they want from fathers:

- ✚ sit and talk
- ✚ do things together
- ✚ don't work so much

Single dads

There are lots of different ways of being a single dad. You might be a dad with sole responsibility for the children, a dad who sees your children some of the time or a dad who hardly sees your children at all. You might be a single dad through divorce or through death.

What single dads can do

If you are separated from your children's mother then being a father may be hard, but there are some very important things that you can do for your children. **You are still their parent.**

- ✚ Single fathers can give children a feeling of being safe and secure by the way they look after them.
- ✚ Try not to let hurts or anger about your children's mother spoil your relationship with your children. Parents fighting is one of the most damaging things that can happen for children. If you can't work something positive out with your ex-partner, get some help for the sake of the children.
- ✚ Keep in touch with your children even if it is painful to have to keep saying goodbye after you see them. Your children need your love and care even though goodbyes are hard.
- ✚ Sometimes it might seem as if it would be easier for the children if you did not see them. If you are a caring father it will be good for them to see you even if the comings and goings are difficult.
- ✚ Children will be hurt if you stay away because you are disappointed or angry about your money arrangements. Whatever has been arranged by adults is not your children's fault. They still need your care.
- ✚ Be positive (or don't say anything) when you talk to the children about their mother. If you don't do this they will be torn between the two of you and things will be much harder for them.
- ✚ If there are bitter court disputes and you are very upset, try not to weigh the children down with your feelings. None of it was their making. They need you to care about what they need. They are not old enough to worry about what you need. If you can't let the feelings go, talk about it to friends and get adult support so you can be right with your children.
- ✚ When the children are with you let them share your life. Let them see that men can cook their food (it doesn't have to be fancy) and take care of them. They will learn a lot about being a father this way.
- ✚ Make the effort to learn to do things with your children.
- ✚ It's great to be able to give expensive presents and always go on exciting outings but children will get more out of just being with you.
- ✚ Be reliable about pick-ups and drop-offs and sending back clothes. Use 'give and take' when it comes to making arrangements.
- ✚ Try not to send messages with the children or keep asking them questions about their mother.

- 👉 Keep in touch - often. Phone and write and remember birthdays and special occasions. Contact them when there are important school events such as exams, or going for a job.
- 👉 It is okay to have different rules and ways of doing things at your house. Children can learn to understand that there are different ways of doing things in different situations.
- 👉 As children get older give permission for them to choose to stay with their mother or at a friend's place instead of staying with you. They need to know that it is okay with you so they don't feel guilty.
- 👉 Try not to show that you are upset if your children's mother gets another partner. She is moving on from the old relationship and so can you. You will still always be the children's father.
- 👉 All children have worries sometimes. Make it comfortable for children to talk to you and encourage them to share their worries as well as their successes.
- 👉 Parents have the right to separate from their partner but they still have the responsibility to be a parent. Children have the right to be cared for by both parents, even if you are not together.
- 👉 Stick in there for your children.

Dads in stepfamilies

Being a stepfather can be difficult especially if the children are older when you join the family. Children who have had time alone with their mother often feel sad or cross about having someone else take some of her time. You may also have your own children who still want your time.

- 👤 Give the children time. A stepfather cannot take their father's place.
- 👤 Be a friend but don't crowd them.
- 👤 Plan household rules together and include the children. These may be very different rules from what the children are used to.
- 👤 Be wary about disciplining even if their mother asks you to. It is usually better if parents discipline their own children, especially at first.
- 👤 Talk with your partner about problems and work out together how you will deal with them.
- 👤 Let the children still have some time on their own with their mother.
- 👤 Do some things with the children yourself. Choose things they enjoy.
- 👤 Make sure that you have some special time with your own children, too. It can be tricky making a place in your life for everyone, but it is worth it.
- 👤 Support your stepchildren in seeing their father if that is what they want.
- 👤 Children in stepfamilies often come and go between houses, so you need to be flexible to allow for this.



REMINDERS

- 👤 With two caring parents there is not one right way and one wrong way, but two different ways.
- 👤 How you act when you are with your children is teaching your children how to act when they grow up.
- 👤 Share your ideas about parenting with your children's mother if possible. Listen to hers.
- 👤 Fathers can teach their sons to grow up to be loving and caring and able to get on well with others by the way they do these things.
- 👤 Girls and boys both need time with their fathers.
- 👤 Show your children that men can be gentle in a tough world.
- 👤 Fathers have an important role in teaching their children that it is alright for men to cry or to ask for help.
- 👤 When fathers are involved in daily care of their babies it builds special bonds that are important to children.
- 👤 As they get older children need to know that you like them even if they choose different ways of doing things from you.
- 👤 Even if you don't see your children a lot you can still build happy memories in the time you have with them.

BOOKS FOR PARENTS

'Dad's place: a new guide for fathers after divorce'
by Jill Burrett; published by Angus and Robertson, 1996.

family squabbles



Parents often worry about brothers and sisters quarrelling. A certain amount of quarrelling is normal for children in families. It is one of the ways that they learn how to get on with other people. Quarrelling can be positive. Sometimes, however, you will need to step in when tempers become frayed and you can see that things are getting out of control.

What causes quarrelling?

Learning to get on with others

Arguments between brothers and sisters are one of the ways that children learn to respect other people's belongings and feelings. It is one of the ways children learn to solve problems. Learning to argue fairly and without hurting each other will help them get on with others.

Parents' attention

- ♥ Children in families also fight about parents' love. To children love means time and attention. If you seem to have more time for one child than you do for another, they are likely to be jealous.
- ♥ Often an older child who feels hurt and angry will try to get at a new baby or younger child in some way. If the parents then rescue the younger child (as they have to) and at the same time punish the older child, it makes the older child feel more unloved and misunderstood.
- ♥ This can become a habit, where one child always seems to be the one who starts the fights. The parents feel that they should rescue the child who is being picked on. This makes the one who 'started it' feel worse, and so this child will start another fight when the chance comes.

Remember the child who seems to start the quarrel is not always the one who does so. Often children will do something to annoy other children knowing they will retaliate and then get into trouble.

What parents can do

Here are some steps you can take to help prevent quarrels.

- ☆ Protect the needs of each child, for example prevent older children's activities from being interfered with by younger children and vice versa.
- ☆ Spend special time with each child on a regular basis.
- ☆ Allow each child to own some special things of their own that they don't have to share.
- ☆ For younger children, see that there are more than one of the same toys, such as matchbox cars, so that they can play together without having to share. Two second hand tricycles are often better fun than one new one that has to be shared.
- ☆ If you have three children make sure that the same one is not left out every time. Invite other children over.
- ☆ Children need their own bit of space which will not be interfered with by others, even if it is only a drawer.
- ☆ Try not to compare children with each other - this always leads to bad feelings.
- ☆ Be generous with hugs and affection to all your children.
- ☆ Make ground rules. Get your children to help you make some rules about what behaviour is not allowed in your home, for example name calling or hitting. Then if you have to step in, you do so because someone has broken a rule, not to take sides.
- ☆ When you can see that children are feeling upset, help them to find ways to express their feelings by talking about them. Play that helps with feelings includes water play, painting and playdough. For older children and adolescents it may be something like going for a run or playing their music. Talk with them about what helps.

Children need you to teach them how to solve problems, to listen to each other and then to look for solutions that are fair.

When you have to step in

Remember that it is sometimes better not to step in but to let your children learn to sort things out for themselves. They don't always need an umpire! Step in when behaviour is harming one of the children or things are getting out of control.

- Be aware of your own feelings. If you are feeling angry with one child or more loving towards one particular child, make allowance for this so that you are fair.
- If children come to you for help to sort out a problem, try not to take sides. Remember you probably did not see it start. If tempers are not out of control listen to each child so that each feels heard. Tell them that you understand that it is a difficult problem. Then tell them that you think that they can sort it out for themselves, and you would like to hear what they decide to do to make things better. You might have to remind them of the family rules.
- If they still need help to sort out the problem try to help them work it out together. Help them to listen to each other's feelings and try to work out ways to solve the problem. For example, if they are fighting over a TV

program you might say: "Joe wants to watch this program and Maria wants to watch the other one. What are some things you can think of to do that would be fair?" You might have to help with suggestions at first. When they have agreed on a solution, give it a try and then check to make sure it is working. If not, have another try at working it out. This is good training for when they are older and need to be able to solve their own problems.

If you need to trouble-shoot

- ⚡ Sometimes tempers get high and you will need to help.
- ⚡ With young children who are about to hurt each other, quickly separate them. Keep children who are angry with you for a while, or find them something different to do until they have calmed down.
- ⚡ With older children you may have to separate them until tempers cool. Remember that separating children does not solve the problem. When the children are feeling more calm, help them to work out a way to do things differently.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Being jealous of parents' love for the other children in the family can be a major cause of stress for children. As a parent you will not always feel the same towards all your children. It is natural for parents to feel like this some of the time, sometimes all of the time. Parents often feel guilty about this but love is a feeling that you can't force. What matters to children is how you treat them. Love can never be shown in exactly the same way for every child but each child needs to feel sure of being loved.

REMINDERS

- ♡ Don't try to treat your children exactly the same as each other. Let each child know that he or she is unique and special.
- ♡ If children ask whom you love best, tell them that each of them is special to you in their own way and that no-one could replace them.
- ♡ Don't compare children with brothers or sisters.
- ♡ Don't label children, for example as difficult, the cause of the trouble etc.
- ♡ Teach children to say how they feel with words not actions.
- ♡ Don't look for someone to blame. Look for ways to do it differently next time.
- ♡ Children need to know that you understand how they are feeling.
- ♡ Help children to find other outlets for their feelings through play.
- ♡ Remember it takes two to quarrel.

GRAND parenting



Keep the family networks **alive**

Grandparents are very important people in children's lives. There have been many changes in the last fifty years or so which make grandparenting a whole new ballgame.

If you look at a picture of grandparents from the 1950s, or even later, it is likely to show a grey haired old woman with her knitting or a bald headed old man with a stick. Grandparents today can be as young as in their forties and live an active life for many years. In fact as people live longer, grandparenting can last as many as 30 or 40 years or more. Children are lucky when they have close ties with a grandparent as well as with their parents.

Changes for today's grandparents

Here are some of the major changes that may be part of grandparenting today:

-  Grandparents may be working full-time.
-  Families move around much more and long distance grandparenting is more likely.
-  Children's behaviour, the ways they dress and the language they use have changed.

What grandparents can do for grandchildren

- ★ Spend time with grandchildren in a busy world - time to have fun, time to explore the world and time to just be together.
- ★ Give grandchildren love (without the added burdens of being a parent).
- ★ Grandfathers, in particular, may not have been able to really spend time with their own children in the way that they can with grandchildren.
- ★ Keep the family history alive. Help grandchildren to know where they fit in the world by telling stories about the family history. Tell them stories about their parents when they were young.
- ★ Keep the family networks alive. Keep in touch with all the family members.
- ★ Let the family know about old family traditions as the family grows and changes and new traditions are built. You can help to keep the best of the old, as you and the family work out new ways to manage Christmas celebrations, holidays and birthdays.
- ★ Give security and protection - especially at times when there are family problems. Grandparents can be there for the grandchildren to support and protect them.
- ★ Build grandchildren's self esteem by taking a personal interest in them.

Expectations of grandparents

Grandparents don't have a 'set' role, where they know what their responsibilities are in the same way that parents do. Talk over with your adult children what you expect to do as a grandparent and what they would like you to do. Be open and talk these things over.

-  How often you will visit them or they will visit you.
-  How often you will ring, and when not to ring.
-  What babysitting you will do. (Remember that what you do for the first grandchild may be expected for others). Child care that you really don't want to do may not be a help to anyone. Be prepared to say if it is too much for you, or you need time to yourself. Looking after yourself might mean saying "No" sometimes.
-  What you can afford to do and want to do about presents as the family grows bigger.
-  Listen carefully to your adult children's views on bringing up children and 'fall in line' if you possibly can. It is good to talk about any problems with them. If you think differently, bring up your ideas and listen to theirs. They may not do things the way you would, and you may have to accept this in the end.

The new grandchild

This is a very important time in the lives of your adult children and in your own life.

- Take your cues from them. Your daughter or son and partner may want some time alone to get to know their new baby before they involve other people, so don't just arrive on the doorstep.
- On the other hand they might invite you to be there for the birth. This depends on each family. It does not necessarily show how the parents feel towards the grandparents.
- One of the best things that you can do is to support the new parents in getting to know their baby. It is a time when your practical help with the dishes and the nappies might be more needed than to have you cuddle the baby. Your turn to do the cuddling will come.
- Let the young parents see that you think they are doing a good job when you see them doing things well.
- If the baby is unsettled the young parents may be grateful for help with minding so they can get some breaks. This will be a help for the baby as well, as she gets to know that there are other loving people to care for her.
- When the second baby comes along you can offer to mind the new baby. This will give the parents time to spend with their first child who needs to still feel special.

Grandparenting ideas

-  Your house may no longer be child proof. When grandchildren are young, if they visit you, check that your good things (china and pot plants) and your poisons (from medicines to dishwashing powder) are safely out of reach.
-  Have a box of toys that are special for visits. Add something new occasionally.

-  Children love stories. Keep a supply of books to read to them. Tell stories about the family history.
-  Read a few recent books on child rearing so you are up to date with modern ideas.
-  Keep up with grandchildren's interests. As they grow older take an interest in what they are doing. Listen to some modern music so you can talk about it.
-  Be a good listener. Grandparents often have time to give children a real opportunity to talk about their interests and feelings.
-  Let them know when you are interested in going to their activities, such as school sports, concerts etc.
-  Adolescents, in particular, often get a lot of value out of support from their grandparents. (Remember that hairstyles, activities and language are different from when you were a parent and criticism may spoil your relationship.)

Distance grandparenting

Many families now live a long way apart, with family members working in different states and countries, so you might not be near your grandchildren.

You can still keep the links open and support your grandchildren.

-  Offer to have the grandchildren to visit you on holiday - together or one at a time. Children get benefits from individual relationships with grandparents, not always in a group.
-  Visit them.
-  Keep regular telephone contact.
-  Write letters, send tapes or videos and include family stories in them.
-  Develop some new family traditions for managing birthdays etc.

Separation and step-grandparenting

If your son or daughter's relationship breaks up it can bring special problems for grandparenting.

-  You may feel let down or disappointed or sad and angry. Talk it over with someone, a counsellor if necessary. Your grandchildren are going to need your support at this time.
-  Don't talk to your grandchildren about your disappointment with their parent(s), but listen to their feelings.
-  If your son or daughter is very distressed you may be needed to try to explain to the grandchildren what is happening, and to help them to talk about their feelings. This needs a great deal of tact and sensitivity as both of the couple are your grandchildren's parents. Children usually love and want to be with both their parents.
-  Try to keep positive relationships with both your grandchildren's parents, so that they will want you to go on playing a part in the grandchildren's lives.
-  If your son or daughter remarries there will be other issues to think about. It is important to support the new relationship in front of the children, whatever you think about it.

- ✚ If step grandchildren arrive you will need to think and talk about other things such as:
 - what presents will each of the children receive for birthdays?
 - what will you do about family inheritance?
 - how will you be able to share your time between the grandchildren?

These are individual questions that need to be worked out for your own situation, but it is important that everyone's feelings are considered.

Sometimes grandparents are called on to do the parenting while a son or daughter goes back to work after a separation. If this happens, be sure that you are willing to do it. It will probably be of great value to your grandchildren as long as it is not a burden to you. Some grandparents in this situation resent the fact that it is hard work and they can't do things with their own friends. They worry about what will happen to the grandchildren if they lose their health and cannot continue the child care. Talk these things over with your son or daughter. Get support from a counsellor if necessary.

Your grandchildren may have problems as they struggle with their own feelings. This can show up in their behaviour. Behaviour problems come from unhappiness. It is important to talk this over with the children's parents, so you can get help with managing the children.

Grandparenting when the parents are teenagers

Becoming a grandparent when your teenage child becomes a parent can come as a shock and you may need time to get used to the idea. If you have mixed feelings when you find out you are to become a grandparent, it might help to talk it over with someone who understands.

- ☆ Grandparents-to-be often feel very worried about their young people and how they will cope. You might also be a bit worried about what your friends might think. This is normal.
- ☆ Your teenagers will need your support at this time, but will also need to take their own responsibility for the very grown-up task they are taking on. They need you to help but not take over!
- ☆ Some grandparents find it helpful to talk about feelings with other grandparents who are supporting young parents. You can share your fears and hopes.
- ☆ It is important to consider how much help you want to give. There may be extra pressure on you to offer child care. This is your decision. Child care given with resentment is not in anybody's interests.
- ☆ If the young parent(s)-to-be are agreeable you may be able to be there for the birth and provide positive support.
- ☆ One of the best things that you can do for your young parents is to notice what they do well and tell them.
- ☆ Sometimes you will feel torn in loyalties between your child and your grandchild if you see your grandchild being treated badly. This may mean you have to step in to protect your grandchild and risk conflict in the family.

REMINDERS

FOR GRANDPARENTS

- 📖 Be willing to talk things over.
- 📖 Ask your adult children what kind of help they most need.
- 📖 Support your adult children in their parenting.
- 📖 Notice what they do well and tell them.
- 📖 Ask their advice. Don't expect them to take your advice.
- 📖 One of the best things that you can do for your grandchildren is to support their parents.
- 📖 Grandparenting is a very special relationship. It is an opportunity to do for your grandchildren what you may not have had the time to do for your own children.

FOR PARENTS

- ☆ Ask your own parents (the grandparents) how they would like to be involved with your children.
- ☆ Be willing to talk things over.
- ☆ When you get advice, as you will, don't automatically reject it. Grandparents have had a lot of experience of the world. Think it over and then decide what you will do. If you decide not to take their advice, explain why.
- ☆ Remember that children can adjust to different ways of doing things if you have different rules at your house from the grandparents' house. It is one of the ways they learn about the world. If you think the rules at grandparents' house are too strict and are making your children unhappy, or they are not safe, you will need to explain to the grandparents why you feel that way. Remember that a bit of leeway (or spoiling) by grandparents won't hurt your children or damage their relationship with you.
- ☆ Some grandparents tire easily and managing more than one pre school child for more than a short time may be too much.

BOOKS FOR GRANDPARENTS

'The Australian baby and child care handbook'
by Carol Fallows; published by Penguin, 1994.

'The Magic of encouragement' by Stephanie Marsden;
published by William Morrow, 1990.

When a family breaks up it is usually difficult for everyone. It is like a death which brings with it feelings of grief and loss. Most people need time to get used to the changes and each person's response to the break-up can be very different. Parents try to grapple with their own feelings while they make practical and very important decisions that will affect the whole family.

splitting up

The best outcome for children can be reached by sharing the responsibility and all the decisions that will affect them. Most parents can agree and do their best to help children cope with the distress of the break-up. For the small number who can't talk to each other, professional help is needed, for the adults and the children.



Coping with your own feelings

You can experience a whole range of feelings that are very normal, but confusing and often scary. If you are the parent who chose to end the relationship, there may be some sense of relief and hope. If you are the parent who felt powerless in the decision, there may be feelings of hurt, anger and rejection. Your feelings may be so powerful that it is easy to overlook or not cope with what your child needs right now. Sometimes your feelings are so intense that the break-up seems like a war, with the need to win (especially your child).

When you are this upset, try to avoid:

- 💧 seeing your child as your possession - they are not, they are people
- 💧 saying things that you don't mean and might regret later
- 💧 saying unkind things about the other parent
- 💧 making your child afraid that they might never see the other parent again
- 💧 allowing your child to become 'caught up' in the adults' arguments.

What is your child going through?

Being aware of the sorts of feelings your child is going through may help you to understand their behaviour.

Most children are confused and fearful about what will happen. Sometimes they are ashamed. They might not tell you what is worrying them because they don't want to see you upset or angry.

Who will look after me?... Will the house be sold?... What if mum and dad cannot agree about us?... Can I decide who I live with?... Will I have to change schools?... What will happen to my pets?... Can I still see my friends?... Will there be enough money to do the things we did before?... What will I do if my other parent leaves or gets sick?... If I am separated from my brothers and sisters, will we still see each other?... Can I have a say about when I see my dad if I'm not living with him?... Can I make phone calls at any time to my other parent?... How can I tell my friends what's happening?

All these feelings are very normal and just as strong as your own. The only difference is that as an adult you are in

a position to make choices and take some control over the decisions. Your child, on the other hand, feels extremely vulnerable and powerless. It is even scarier when children hear you talking about going to court (court is often linked with doing something wrong or breaking the law).

How children cope with loss

- 10/10 Some children often start to act younger than their age. This is telling you that it is all too much (marking time or moving backward in their development is their way of seeking reassurance).
- 10/10 Some try to be really good at school and at home (it's easy to think they are not suffering).
- 10/10 Some try to stand up for the parent who is being put down. Some try to look after the one who seems the weaker.
- 10/10 Some show anger and hostility - in play, with their toys, with brothers and sisters, with their friends or with you.
- 10/10 Some show problems in their behaviour and get punished, which makes them feel worse.
- 10/10 Some do well at school, others can't concentrate and slip backwards.

Children don't show their pain and suffering all at once. They may seem to have got over it and then suddenly it reappears.

What parents can do

- ♥ Let your child know they are loved and will be protected and that it's not their fault.
- ♥ Tell them what is going to happen before the separation to sort out their worries about daily decisions, such as getting permission to go to a school camp or visiting the dentist.
- ♥ No matter how churned up your emotions, spend time to find out how your child is feeling (let them cry, let them talk, let them express their anger).
- ♥ Be tolerant with their behaviours. This may be the only way they can show how they feel (seek help if their behaviour is too difficult).
- ♥ Keep things as familiar for them as possible (same area, school, sport club, friends, pets). If this can't be done, then make sure precious and familiar belongings go with them.
- ♥ Give them a sense of you being in control, even if you don't feel it (this will help them feel safe).
- ♥ Let them talk over feelings or problems with other people they trust if they find it too hard to do it with you. They may find it easier to sort out their feelings without hurting you.
- ♥ Let their teacher know what is happening.
- ♥ Avoid putting your child under pressure to reject the other parent.
- ♥ Do not mention intimate details of the relationship.
- ♥ Try not to introduce new partners to your child while they are still coming to grips with the break-up (this can

create more problems for children who often resent a new person in your life).

- ♥ Make sure you have support yourself. Finding someone who understands is the key to getting through this difficult time.

How to tell the children

- 2/10 Talk to them when they're together if this is possible. This will save confusion.
- 2/10 Take into account the age and level of understanding of each child.
- 2/10 Then speak to each separately to make sure they really understand and can ask questions.
- 2/10 Let them know they will be kept informed of all important decisions.
- 2/10 Let them know that they can't change your decision and they can't bring you back together.
- 2/10 Remind them they have been one of the greatest pleasures of the relationship (only if this is true).

REMINDERS

- ◆ Your responsibility to your child doesn't stop when the family breaks up.
- ◆ Children have loyalties to both parents and need to feel OK about being able to still love both.
- ◆ Remember, it is hard for children to understand that parents need to separate, no matter how unhappy or violent the relationship.
- ◆ Children often think that their behaviour caused their parents to split up.
- ◆ Children often feel abandoned by the parent who leaves and angry and blaming towards the parent left to care.
- ◆ You will put pressure on your child if you keep on 'putting down' the other parent.
- ◆ Don't make your child feel they have to choose between the two of you.
 - Make it easy for your child to keep in contact with their relatives.
 - Be patient and remember it takes a long time for children's hurts to heal.
 - Make sure each family member has a special person for support.
 - Get legal advice if you can't agree about the children or the property.



grief AND **loss**

What is the issue?

Not all children and adolescents have two parents to give them love and security for a number of reasons. In NSW, an increasing number of families are experiencing the trauma and disruption of separation and divorce. Families may also experience loss through the illness or death of a family member. Even the death of a loved pet or a close friend moving away may cause significant distress to children and adolescents.

Moving house can also be disturbing for children and adolescents. They may find losing contact with familiar places and people, changing schools and having to make new friends very stressful.

Children and adolescents may feel vulnerable and insecure when families experience a loss. They may believe that they are responsible for what has happened. It is possible for them to misunderstand what is happening unless parents discuss the situation and any proposed changes with them.

When families separate

Parents may be devastated or relieved by a separation. However, children and adolescents are almost always confused and unsettled. They may feel responsible for their parents breaking up or for getting them back together. Let them know you will both still be their parents even though you no longer live together. Parents' commitment to their children's wellbeing is vital.

Warning signs in children and adolescents

Children and adolescents usually don't show their pain and suffering all at once. They may seem to cover it and then their distress may suddenly reappear.

Some of the ways they cope with loss are

-  Acting younger than their age. This may tell you that it is all too much and they need to be less grown up and less independent while they gather strength.
-  Trying to over-achieve at school or at home so that it is not obvious that they really are suffering.
-  Having difficulty concentrating at school and being preoccupied with their feelings.
-  Trying to defend their parent, brother or sister. They may try to look after someone who seems weaker.
-  Some may show anger or hostility in play, towards their toys, brothers or sisters or parents.

Children may feel vulnerable and insecure when families experience a loss

Preschool children see death as temporary and reversible, like the cartoon characters on their television. By the ages of 5 to 9, children start to think more like adults but still can't believe it could happen to them or anyone they know.

As well as the shock and confusion a child feels at the death of a family member, adults' own feelings may make it difficult for them to cope with the emotional and physical needs of their children. Professional counselling may help guide families through this difficult time.

How can I help?

There are a number of ways parents can help their children cope with loss.

-  Let them know they are loved and that you are there for them.
-  Let them know that it is not their fault.
-  Answer their questions simply and honestly and where possible include them when making decisions that will affect them.
-  Be tolerant of their behaviours as it may be their only way of expressing their feelings.
-  Try to find out how they are feeling. Let them cry, talk or express their anger in a safe way.
-  If they can't talk to you, encourage them to talk to others whom they trust.

-  Keep things as familiar as you can (school, friends, pets, precious possessions).
-  It is OK to show your feelings. Showing your children how you cope will help them.
-  Let their school or teacher know what is happening.

Find support for yourself as this is the key to surviving difficult times

Everyone needs time to adjust to changes and deal with feelings of grief and loss. Children and young people may not want to tell you what they are feeling for fear they will upset you or make you angry. Your own feelings may be so strong that you may not notice or feel able to cope with what your children need.

When there is a death in the family

Funerals provide a means of saying goodbye to a loved one. It is helpful to include children. However, if children are frightened of attending a funeral they should not be forced. Instead help them have their own farewell such as lighting a candle or saying a prayer.

Spend as much time as possible with the child and let them know they can show their feelings. They may display their feelings of sadness on and off for a long period of time. Anger is a natural reaction to the loss of someone special. This may be shown by aggressive play, nightmares or irritability. Children may express anger towards the surviving members of the family or may become fearful about their safety.

Young children may persist in the belief that the family member is still alive. This should pass after a few weeks.

If not, seek professional assistance.

24 hour telephone services are:

Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800
Lifeline	131 114
Bereavement C.A.R.E. Centre	02 9869 3330

A free service is available for people experiencing financial difficulties.

Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians and child psychologists may also be able to provide help.

Youthline (youth counselling)	02 9951 5522 (Sydney) Or 02 9633 3666 (Parramatta)
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Compassionate Friends for parents whose children have died	02 9290 2355 or (freecall outside Sydney) 1800 671 621
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Where can I get more information or assistance?

In an emergency you can contact your:

- + general practitioner or local hospital Emergency Department
- + local Area Health Service (during business hours) including community health centres or specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

Parenting in a single parent household is different in many ways from parenting in a two parent household. Some people choose single parenting, others have it thrust upon them.

There are three paths to single parenthood:

- ♥ those who choose it from the outset
- ♥ those who choose to take it on by leaving a two person relationship
- ♥ those who are left behind with the children.

Each path is different and brings with it different things to deal with.

How is it different?

- ✿ Single parents are more likely to involve their child in the day-to-day running of the family. Children may have more chores and more responsibility for caring for themselves.
- ✿ Single parents often discuss things with their child that adults in a two parent household share together. For example, talking over what to buy, where to go for holidays.
- ✿ Children often take on chores such as cooking and cleaning, because there is no other adult to pick up the job.
- ✿ Many parents and children have to get used to children going back and forward between homes.
- ✿ Children from single parent households who have been given a lot of say at home sometimes have difficulties at school, because they expect to be treated in the same way by teachers.

singleparenting



What parents need to think about

Children need to be 'children' and sharing the load shouldn't take over. They need time to do the things that are usual in a child's world, such as being with friends, playing sport, doing homework or just dreaming.

Your child needs to know that you are the grown-up and are responsible for looking after them.

Your child needs to know that you need to have adult company too. It is not a good idea to rely on your child all the time for companionship.

For parents who have just separated, feelings can be very strong. It is also an extremely difficult time for their child. Seek support from other family members and friends rather than talking with your child about what is worrying you.

Children are often torn between loving both parents who live apart. They can feel disloyal and confused when they love a parent strongly and have to listen to 'put downs'. They often want to defend the other parent but are afraid of getting into trouble.

Some children are more likely to misbehave for the parent who has them most of the time and does most of the disciplining and routine day-to-day things. It is often easier for children to behave better when they spend a short time with a parent doing lots of fun things. But underneath, they know that you are there for them all the time.

Give thought to and make arrangements for your child's future in case anything should happen to you.

Discipline

- ☆ Discipline in a single parent household has pros and cons. It is often easier for one person to make the rules and carry them out. On the other hand, carrying out all the discipline can be demanding and having the support of another adult can make it easier.
- ☆ Check with other parents if you are unsure about what limits are reasonable. Make rules and make it clear what will happen when rules are broken.
- ☆ Carry out with action what you say will happen.

Visiting the other parent

Let your child plan and enjoy time with the other parent if you can. It will make a difference for your child to see that you are pleased about this contact. **Children want to be able to love each parent without feeling guilty.**

- 🏠 Children in single parent households are often very mature because of the extra responsibilities they have. Let them know you feel proud of their achievements.
- 🏠 Make sure your child has lots of time to spend with their friends.
- 🏠 If you are very close to your child, it might be hard for them to leave home when they are ready. Let them know that you have your own life to live and that you will be proud, not sorry, when they grow up and make their own choices.
- 🏠 Take new relationships slowly. This may mean some sacrifices on your part. If you decide to marry or remarry or take a partner for yourself, it can sometimes create problems for your child. They may show this with behaviour and feelings, no matter how old they are. Talk things through with them, listen to how they feel and let them know that they are still just as important to you.

Children who have no contact with the other parent need to have some understanding of where that person fits into their life.

Sort out your issues with the other parent in private.

Make changeovers as natural and friendly as possible. If you are unable to do this, try to avoid contact with the other parent. For example, pick up or drop off your child at a neutral place or with a friend present.

Allow time for your child to 'fit back into home' when they return. Some children take a few minutes, others hours, and some take days. Some act out, some become quiet and sad. Some need time to get used to the 'swapping'. They may feel sad about leaving the other parent and guilty about feeling this way. They may feel disloyal to you. They may be upset if they have not had an enjoyable visit.

Talk happily about what has been happening at home while they have been away. Allow them to talk about what they have been doing. Don't pressure with questions, as this may make them close up to protect the other parent.

If your child takes days to settle and it doesn't seem to be improving over time, you may need to get professional help.

Growing up in the single parent household

- 🏠 Growing up in this type of home can be a very positive experience for children. They often have a close and special relationship with the parent. Sometimes children envy their friends in two parent households. It may help them to know that all families have their ups and downs.

REMINDERS

- Being in a single parent home can be a very positive experience for children.
- Help your child feel proud of their lifestyle so that they will not regard it as being inferior to a two parent household.
- Children need to know where they come from and who their parents are.
- Children need to be able to love both parents without feeling guilty.
- Let your child know you are pleased they can spend time with the other parent (providing you are not worried about their safety).
- When the time is right for them, give them your blessing to move out. Don't hang on to them for company.

For further information, contact:

Lone Parent Family Support Service 02 9251 5622

Building a new family is an exciting but challenging time. It needs a lot of time, energy and hard work. There are many different kinds of stepfamilies and each will have different strengths to build on and difficulties to overcome.

Some things that are different about stepfamilies

The various people involved in a new stepfamily may have very different ideas about what they want and how it will work. Some of these things are not spoken about out loud and can cause unexpected hitches. Grandparents, for example, may not want the new family. Teenagers may not be very enthusiastic, while husbands and wives and younger children could be looking forward to it. If these feelings are not out in the open and understood they can become stumbling blocks. Plans need to be discussed with everyone concerned.

Stepfamilies don't start with an empty slate. There is always some loss involved. For the children, the remarriage might be the event that finally makes them give up hope that their parents will get back together again. They may carry this hope even if the parents have been separated for many years.

A new partner is not immediately a new mother or father and may never be if the child is older. Parenting will probably still need to be done by the child's natural parents.

If a child has spent time with their parent in a single parent household, they may have been almost like a grown-up friend to their parent. This will be hard for them to give up.

There may be difficulties with the child's other parent over arrangements for ongoing contact with both parents.

All of the old family rules and traditions will need to be looked at afresh because each family will bring its own to the new stepfamily.

There are likely to be ongoing changes as children move between families.

There may be problems with loyalty. For example, children may feel it is disloyal to their other parent to become friends with the new stepparent, especially if they really like the new stepparent.

If you have gone from being single to being a stepparent, the cost and difficulty of bringing up a child when you are not used to it is likely to be a big adjustment. For example, even the way children speak today is very different from what you might be used to.

All people in a stepfamily tend to underestimate how difficult it is to build a complicated new family. It takes years, not months, and lots of effort.

STEPFAMILIES

The biggest and often hardest thing for parents can be letting go of ties from a previous relationship. The feelings aroused by separation and divorce or death are very powerful and can invade any new relationship. If you aren't yet ready to let go of these feelings (for example if you still feel angry or sad or upset with your ex-partner) you need to get some professional support before you start a new partnership. This gives a greater chance of the new family working well.

Some things to think about when starting a stepfamily

You cannot expect your stepchild to love you, but you can expect them to respect you, as you respect them.

Stepfamilies will experience some losses before they become a stepfamily and some as they are becoming a stepfamily, such as having to move to a new home or children losing their own bedrooms. Children might even lose their position in the family, with the oldest or youngest child ending up somewhere in the middle.

Stepfamilies cannot have tight boundaries. There are many other people involved, including branches of the extended family.

Grandparents and relatives may not want the new stepfamily or may be afraid they will lose contact with their grandchild or adult son or daughter.

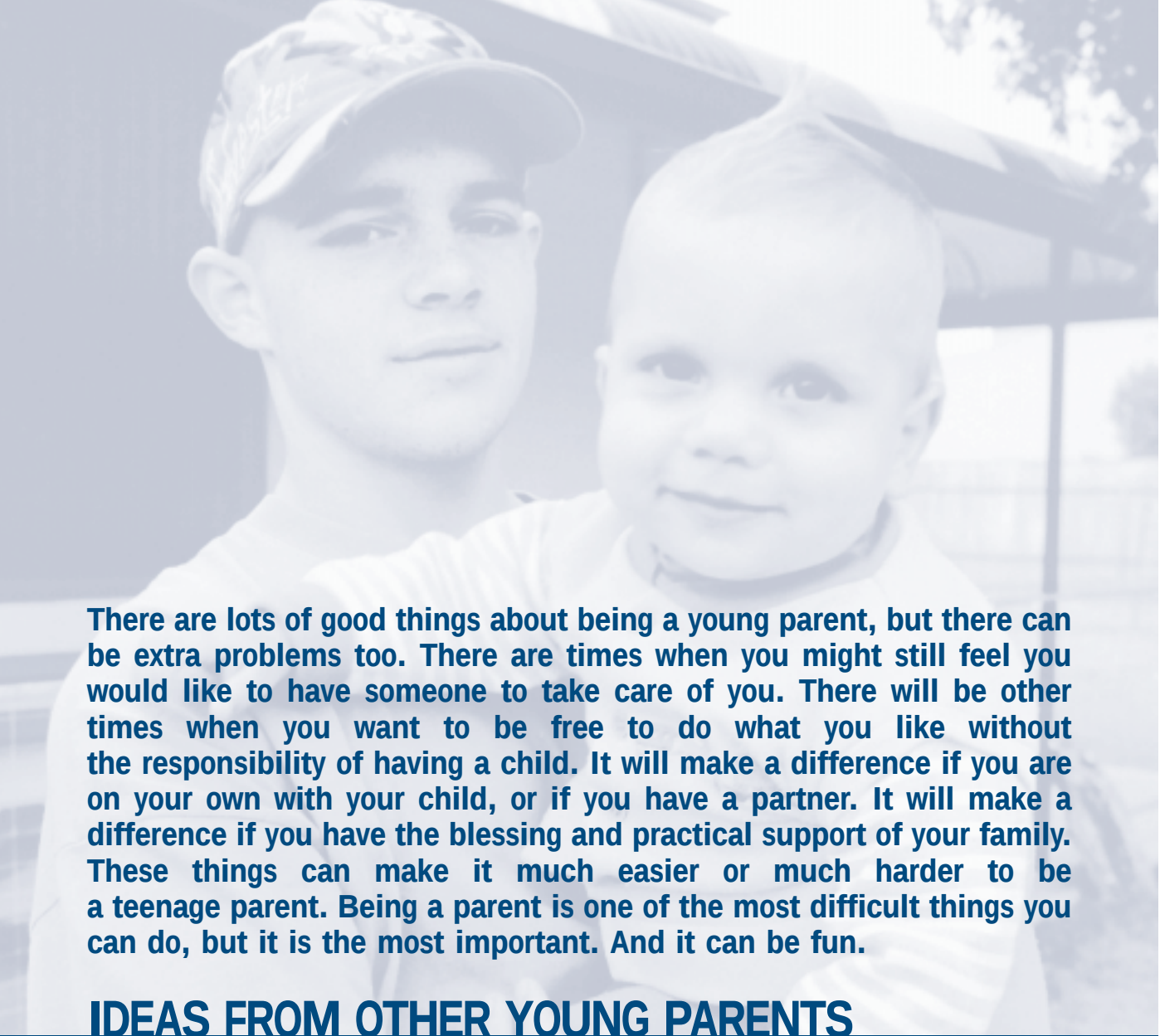
What parents can do

- ▲ Talk to each child and each other openly about all your plans.
- ▲ Tell each child it will be strange at first and will take time to get used to the new changes.
- ▲ Listen to children's feelings.
- ▲ Let each child know that their other parent who is not living with you is important. Tell them that you will still support their rights and needs to love and be with that parent.
- ▲ Never speak negatively of any of the children's parents in front of the children.
- ▲ Understand the strong bond between your new partner and their child. Make time for them to be together. Also make time for you to spend with your own child.
- ▲ Avoid taking all your partner's time so the children don't feel left out, but remember to keep time for your new partnership. There won't be a stepfamily for the children if the partnership does not work.
- ▲ Spend time building relationships with each child. Take it at their pace, which will be different for different children.
- ▲ Try to give children some control over things that will affect them.



REMINDERS

- ▲ Make sure that each child has some privacy even if it is only a drawer of their own in each house.
 - ▲ Find a new place to live if you can. It will be harder for everyone to feel they belong if you live in the home of one of the previous families.
 - ▲ Decide that unless a child is very young, parents should discipline their own child and not expect their new partner to do it. If the stepparent does the disciplining and does not do exactly as the other parent would have, it can cause problems for everyone. However, if there is a personal problem between the stepparent and the child, the stepparent needs to insist on a way of 'getting on' that is reasonable. For example, if your stepchild speaks rudely to you, you have a right to say that you will not respond to that kind of talk.
 - ▲ Work out what will be the new rules and traditions for your new family. New ways for celebrating birthdays and Christmas will need to be worked out. Be prepared to make changes.
 - ▲ Allow children time to sort out their feelings. There may be behaviour problems, unfriendliness or disagreements while they sort it all out.
 - ▲ Keep a diary of stepfamily events. It will help you to see the progress you have made.
- 🌀 Live for one day at a time and plan for short periods. Don't expect to be 'happy ever after' by next week!
 - 🌀 Stepfamilies are usually decided by two adults who want to be together. The children may not share the same feelings about it.
 - 🌀 Never fight in front of your child or stepchild.
 - 🌀 Remind yourself why you fell in love with your partner in the first place and make time and ways to take care of that love.
 - 🌀 Keep your own individual interests as adults and encourage the individual interests and activities of all your children.
 - 🌀 Every family and stepfamily is unique. What works for someone else may not be what works for you.
 - 🌀 Be honest about your feelings and sensitive about how you express them.
 - 🌀 Listen to the feelings of all the others in the family.



There are lots of good things about being a young parent, but there can be extra problems too. There are times when you might still feel you would like to have someone to take care of you. There will be other times when you want to be free to do what you like without the responsibility of having a child. It will make a difference if you are on your own with your child, or if you have a partner. It will make a difference if you have the blessing and practical support of your family. These things can make it much easier or much harder to be a teenage parent. Being a parent is one of the most difficult things you can do, but it is the most important. And it can be fun.

IDEAS FROM OTHER YOUNG PARENTS

Teenage parents

Looking after your child

Children need lots of love and cuddles (so do we all). Give your child lots of cuddles and tell them you love them many times a day.

Children are eager to learn and need lots of things to do. When they are very young their parents are their best playmates. **They like:**

- ♪ to be danced with
- ♪ to be talked to
- ♪ to be sung to
- ♪ to be taken for walks
- ♪ for you to lie on the floor and let them crawl over you
- ♪ for you to play with them and their toys.

Your child needs your time. They want you to be around them and to take notice of them. This might mean giving up things you want to do and it might mean making out you are interested in what they are doing, even when you don't feel like it.

Young children need to be closely watched, especially around water (even nappy buckets).

Your child can get into all sorts of mischief when you are busy. It is important to make your house and outdoor area as safe as possible. Washing up detergents, laundry powders and medicines need to be kept in a high cupboard with locks.

The best toys for young children are often ones you don't have to buy. **They love:**

-  saucepans and saucepan lids
-  pegs to put into ice-cream containers
-  walks in the park and picnics
-  home-made playdough
-  jugs with water to pour into them
-  cushions on the floor to crawl over
-  cardboard boxes of different sizes to crawl into and through and to make into cubby houses.

Change the toys occasionally to give variety. Keep a special toy for a treat.

Looking after yourself

Your child needs you to look after them, but you can't do this well if you don't look after yourself.

As a young parent you may find you lose friends who don't have children. Sometimes you feel that you don't have anything to talk about any more. By joining a young parents' group, you will make new friends who have similar lives to yours. Here you can have fun, your child can play with other children and you can talk over the problems you share with other young parents.

It's OK to need your own space. Arrange for someone reliable to care for your child so you can have a night out, go shopping or do something special. All parents need a break.

All parents have times when they get really busy and times when they get upset. Take a break, go outside, ring a friend or someone you trust and talk about it. But make sure your child is safe first. Often being outside can make you feel less stressed, so taking your child for a walk around the block in the pram can help.

Even though you are a young parent it is important to still plan for your future. Some areas have school programs designed for young parents and may have a creche on site. TAFE also has courses that may help you.

Getting help

Most parents want to be seen to be coping well. They want others to think that they know how to be a good parent. Sometimes there is a fear that asking for advice means you are not a good parent. This is wrong. Young parents often believe they can do everything themselves and don't want older adults interfering.

No matter how old we are, if we are parents we need information. We all need support and advice from others and we all need to be able to say 'we don't know' sometimes, without feeling ashamed.

Ask other young parents where they have found support.

Sometimes young parents feel they are being judged when they go to an agency, a doctor or a clinic for help. It is important to look around until you find someone you feel comfortable with.

If you have problems with professionals not understanding what you want:

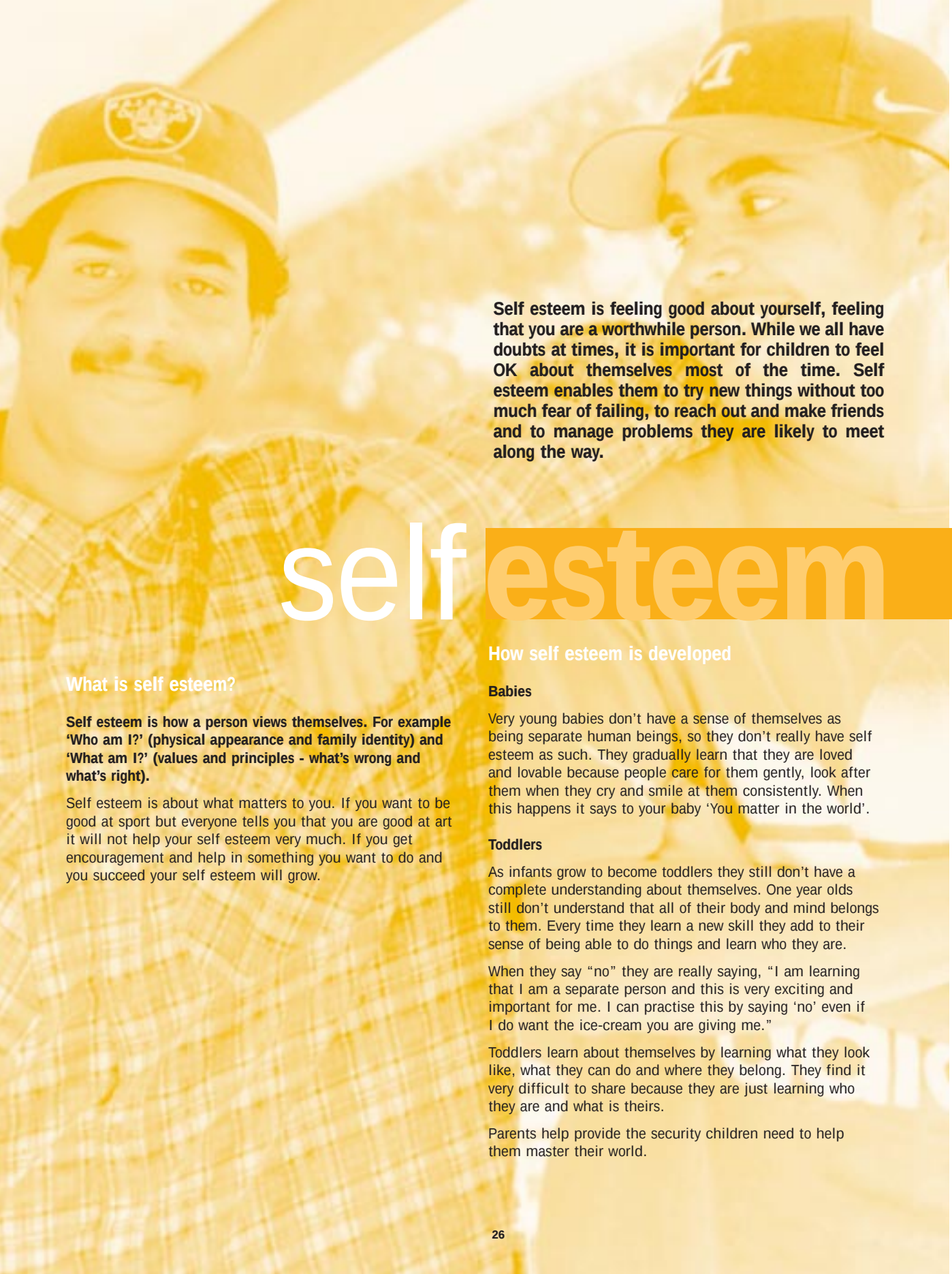
-  think about what you want from them
-  write it down
-  practise saying what you need and why, without getting angry
-  ask if there is someone at the agency who works with young parents
-  take a friend with you if you feel worried.

Be willing to listen to family members when they give advice. The more you get, the more ideas you have to choose from. It doesn't mean you have to follow all the advice. Pick out what feels right for you.

Ask workers you trust to refer you to people they know will be able to help you.

REMINDERS

-  Be wise enough to learn from others.
-  Be smart enough to say 'I don't know'.
-  Get lots of information so you have more ideas to make good choices.
-  Everyone is allowed to make mistakes. We learn from our mistakes.
-  Use the 'survival instinct' strengths that you develop as a young parent.
-  Find support for yourself and use it.
-  All parents need help sometimes. Don't feel ashamed to ask for it.



self esteem

What is self esteem?

Self esteem is how a person views themselves. For example 'Who am I?' (physical appearance and family identity) and 'What am I?' (values and principles - what's wrong and what's right).

Self esteem is about what matters to you. If you want to be good at sport but everyone tells you that you are good at art it will not help your self esteem very much. If you get encouragement and help in something you want to do and you succeed your self esteem will grow.

Self esteem is feeling good about yourself, feeling that you are a worthwhile person. While we all have doubts at times, it is important for children to feel OK about themselves most of the time. Self esteem enables them to try new things without too much fear of failing, to reach out and make friends and to manage problems they are likely to meet along the way.

How self esteem is developed

Babies

Very young babies don't have a sense of themselves as being separate human beings, so they don't really have self esteem as such. They gradually learn that they are loved and lovable because people care for them gently, look after them when they cry and smile at them consistently. When this happens it says to your baby 'You matter in the world'.

Toddlers

As infants grow to become toddlers they still don't have a complete understanding about themselves. One year olds still don't understand that all of their body and mind belongs to them. Every time they learn a new skill they add to their sense of being able to do things and learn who they are.

When they say "no" they are really saying, "I am learning that I am a separate person and this is very exciting and important for me. I can practise this by saying 'no' even if I do want the ice-cream you are giving me."

Toddlers learn about themselves by learning what they look like, what they can do and where they belong. They find it very difficult to share because they are just learning who they are and what is theirs.

Parents help provide the security children need to help them master their world.

REMINDERS

- 😊 Self esteem is very important for everyone.
- 😊 Young children learn self esteem through what they can do and through what their parents think of them.
- 😊 'Put down' messages really damage self esteem.
- 😊 'Doing' messages such as giving time, hugs and smiles are very important in building self esteem.
- 😊 Keep giving your adolescent sincere messages that build self esteem, even if they say they don't believe you. These messages matter.
- 😊 Self esteem is learned and can be changed.
- 😊 Take care of your own self esteem as well.

Give your child the opportunity to face new experiences and challenges.

Pre schoolers

By about the age of three children have learned that their bodies and minds are their own. They can manage time away from their parents or main caregivers because they have an inner sense of feeling safe, having learned that their parents will be there to meet their needs. They still learn their self esteem in fairly physical ways by comparing themselves with others (*'Who is the tallest?' or 'Who is the fastest?' - how am I the same and how am I different*).

Primary school years

Many children's self esteem is threatened when they start school and have to cope in a strange new situation with lots of other new children and new rules to learn. Self esteem in the primary school years is about how well children manage the learning tasks of the school, how they do at sport, how they look and how they can make friends with other children. Stresses at home such as parents fighting with each other can affect children's self esteem. So can problems at school such as having trouble with schoolwork, being bullied or not having friends.

What parents can do

Almost all parents worry about their child's self esteem at some stage.

Here are some things you can do to help build their self esteem.

- 🌻 Give your child the opportunity to face new experiences and challenges.
- 🌻 Tell your child often that you love them. Let them see that you are glad they are who they are.
- 🌻 Show your child you love them by spending time with them, listening to their point of view and being willing to help them achieve their goals. For example, drive them to sport and watch when they play.
- 🌻 Support your child's school work. Take an interest without taking over. Support school working bees or tuck shop if you can.
- 🌻 Encourage friendships. Make your child's friends welcome and get to know them.
- 🌻 If your child needs extra help with school work try to provide it, but don't make them feel life is only about practising what they are not good at. Children also need to practise what they are good at to feel successful.
- 🌻 Talk with their teacher. A good relationship between school and home is very important.
- 🌻 Help your child to explore any hobbies they are interested in.
- 🌻 Help your child feel that they are needed in your family. Depending on their age, ask and expect some help with family chores such as feeding pets and setting the table (not just cleaning up their own mess, but contributing to the family).
- 🌻 Let your child assist *you* with something. For example, your teenager may be better than you at making the video work.
- 🌻 When you play games with your primary school age child, make sure they have opportunities to win. If children win now and then it is easier for them to learn to be good losers.
- 🌻 Involve your child in the wider family. Help them to know their relatives and about your family and its history.
- 🌻 Keep special mementos of your child's successes and important milestones.
- 🌻 Maintain little family rituals such as stories at bedtime, a kiss goodbye and the other ways of doing things that are special to your family.
- 🌻 Celebrate achievements and successes.
- 🌻 Don't solve every problem for your child. Help them learn problem solving skills and to feel they can manage many things for themselves. Show them that you have faith in them.

If your child has had a lot of changes, such as coming from another country, parents separating, or even moving house a lot, try and keep them in touch with their roots as much as you can. Keep a diary with pictures of where they have been. Try to keep them in touch with both sides of the family if possible. Let them know what you can about their family history. Adopted children can have two sets of roots. Adolescents are often specially interested in finding out about their background as part of working out who they are.

Some messages that help to destroy children's self esteem

- ☹ Ignoring them, not taking an interest in them or only listening half heartedly.
- ☹ Messages that say you do not like your child such as 'I love you but I don't like you'.
- ☹ 'You are ...' messages that say something bad about them as people such as 'You are lazy, untidy, naughty, a nuisance, a bully, shy, a sook'.
- ☹ Comparing them with others, especially brothers and sisters.
- ☹ Giving messages that life would be better without them such as 'If it weren't for the children we could have a good holiday' or 'I wish you hadn't been born'.
- ☹ Threatening to leave them if they do not do as you wish.
- ☹ Frowning or sighing when they want to talk to you or ask you for something.
- ☹ Restricting them from taking on new ventures.

Adolescence

Adolescence is a very sensitive period and your teenager's self esteem can fluctuate depending on the circumstances. Self esteem can be affected by physical and hormonal changes and most importantly by how they look or how they think they look. Young people who have a goal in life often do a bit better in the self esteem stakes. So do those whose families are there to support them. Belonging to a group of friends is also very important to adolescents' self esteem. This is why they seem so attached to the telephone and why wanting to do what their friends are doing is so important.

What parents can do for adolescents

Adolescents undergo major changes in their lives as they prepare for young adulthood. Their self esteem is often shaky.

You can help by encouraging your adolescent and showing you believe in them. Even if they deny it when you tell them they look good, the message goes in. Don't let 'brush offs' put you off! For example, if you say 'You look really great with your hair that way', they might reply 'You're just saying that because you're my mother. You're biased'. Then you might say 'Well I am your mother, but that is what I think'.

Even if it takes much nagging and explaining that it is part of belonging to the family, not just their job, still expect some help in the home. This says to your teenager that they are valued and needed as part of the family.

Try and take an interest in their interests. For example, try to find something you like in their music. Ask them about the words of the songs and what they mean, but don't criticise.

Listen to their opinions without always having a better or wiser answer. Help them to explore their own ideas. Let them know that they don't have to have the same opinions as you.

Ask their help or advice sometimes. Show that you don't have all the answers.

When something is really important to them, go out of your way now and then to help them achieve it, even if you don't think it matters.

Take an interest in their school work, hobbies and sport and let them know that you are proud of their achievements.

Keep them involved in the family. Expect them to attend special family celebrations and occasions, such as Christmas, even if they don't stay long.

When they make mistakes because they're trying new things, see them as mistakes to learn from. Let them know that is how most of us learn to do better.

Try not to reprimand and criticise them in front of others.

Hang in there. When young people are the most trying it is usually because they are not feeling good. This is the time they need to know that you are hanging in there with them.

Special tips for parents

- It is important to look after your own self esteem too. It is part of good parenting to let your child see that you feel good about yourself.
- Take time out for yourself regularly. Do some things you really enjoy or feel proud of. For example take a bubble bath, join a team, read a book, go for a walk or run, go to a movie, learn something new.
- Spend some time with friends who support you and help you to feel good.
- If you have a partner make sure you both put aside regular time to be together.
- If your child is growing up start thinking about branching out into new interests for yourself.

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"It is easy to forget how hard at times it can be to care for small children. You can help protect a child by being a good neighbour to a family which may be having some trouble. Offering a cup of tea or a sympathetic ear, may help a parent feel less alone against the odds. If you think the situation is more serious, call DoCS, and chat about it to one of our staff."

Mark Allerton

Deputy Principal Psychologist
Department of Community Services (DoCS)

Protecting children from abuse and neglect is everyone's business. Children are powerless to protect themselves from abuse. Children have a right to be safe in their own homes and in the community.

Children will only be protected from abuse and neglect if responsible adults take action on their behalf.

Child abuse can happen to any child in any family. It hurts and it has lasting, damaging effects. Children who experience abuse often become unhappy and angry adults with low self esteem. Some children even die because of child abuse.

Reporting child abuse is the first step in stopping the abuse and protecting children from further harm. Sometimes, children are being hurt because:

- their families do not have adequate support
- their carers are experiencing a lot of stress such as unemployment, illness, isolation or loneliness
- their parent/s may not have experienced good parenting themselves.

Reporting suspected abuse also gives the Department of Community Services (DoCS) the chance to help families in situations where a child or children may be at risk.

spot it - help stop it!

What is child abuse?

There are different forms of child abuse. These include sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is when an adult or someone else who is bigger or older than a child involves a child in a sexual activity by using their power over a child, or by taking advantage of a child's trust. Often children are bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them participate in the activity. Child sexual abuse is a crime.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child caused by a parent, caregiver or any other person. It includes injuries which are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings, bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation, attempted strangulation and female genital mutilation. Children also sometimes die after suffering physical abuse.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is behaviour by a parent or caregiver which destroys a child's confidence resulting in significant emotional disturbance or trauma. This can include a range of behaviours such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour.

Neglect

Child neglect is the continued failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision.

DoCS has a brochure which sets out signs that may indicate a child is suffering child abuse, 'Spot It - Help Stop It'. To get a copy phone DoCS on **02 9716 2255**. You'll also find it on DoCS' website at www.community.nsw.gov.au

How do I report child abuse?

Anyone who thinks that a child has been physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected can report it to us - the Department of Community Services (DoCS).

You can report it by telephoning or visiting your local DoCS office. Look in the White Pages under 'Community Services Department' to find the telephone number. In case of an after hours emergency call the After Hours Emergency Child Protection Service on 1800 066 777 (freecall).

We won't tell anyone who reported the abuse to us. You don't have to tell us your name if you don't want to.

What will DoCS do?

By law we must assess reports of child abuse and neglect. When you tell us about it, our staff will ask you for more information to help them find out about the risk of harm to the child or children involved.

We will talk to the family of the child. We may also need to talk to other people to find out about the family's circumstances. For example, we might contact the child's teacher or child care worker or relatives. If we think the law has been broken we will talk to the police. We will link the child's family to services if they need support to help them care for their child safely.

If the child or young person is at risk of harm, we work with other agencies and professionals to make sure they are safe. If we think a child is in immediate danger, we will move them to a safe place.

Visit our
Parenting Website
at

www.community.nsw.gov.au

to get copies of all our parenting magazines:

Parenting: the most important job in the world

Tips on being a parent, building self esteem and managing grief

Caring for babies & toddlers (0 to 5 years)

Tips on tantrums, toilet training and mealtimes

Caring for children (6 to 12 years)

Tips on choosing the right child care, discipline and TV addictions

The teenage years (13 to 18 years)

Tips on discipline, drugs and peer group pressure



NSW Department of
Community Services

How we help

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) is one of the biggest and most important community service organisations in NSW.

Our job is to:

**work with the community to help protect and care for children
and young people and support their families**

**provide and monitor care and support for children
who can't live with their families**

**help people with intellectual disabilities and high support needs achieve greater
independence, community involvement and a better quality of life**

provide and regulate adoption services

help people separated from their families trace their records

fund and regulate child care services

regulate children's employment

**fund community agencies to ensure there are services for the care and support
of children and their families as well as for people who are homeless**

coordinate services to meet the basic needs of people affected by disasters.