

# A guide to separation if you're a parent



**Gingerbread**  
Single parents, equal families

## A guide to separation if you're a parent

Ending a relationship with your partner can feel scary, especially if you're parents. So we've written a guide to help you start your parenting apart journey after you separate if you share a child or children.

This guide is full of useful tips to help you with the early stages of separating when you're a parent and is designed for all types of parenting apart, whether **solo**, **parallel** or **co-parenting**.

### Are you and your child safe?

The first thing to check is whether you and your child are safe. If there has been abuse (domestic, sexual or financial) during the relationship, there are professionals who can help you.

If you're in immediate danger dial 999 and ask for the police.

### Organisations who can help



The National Domestic Violence Charity for women and children

[Go to website](#)



Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men

[Go to website](#)



Search the Resolution database for assistance in obtaining legal aid advice specialising in abuse

[Go to website](#)

### Is your partner stopping you from seeing your child?

If your ex has stopped you from seeing your child and you're worried about their safety, contact [social services](#) or the police. If you've already tried [amicable negotiation](#) or [mediation](#), and you still can't agree on when you'll both see your child and how often, a last resort is to go through the court for a judge to decide arrangements for you. This can be very expensive and take a long time, as well as impact your ability to parent apart, so should be avoided if possible

### Does parental separation impact children's well-being?

There are two factors of parental separation that can negatively impact children's well-being; parental absence and conflict. Having two happy homes is often better than one unhappy home filled with tension. This means that if a child is in a high-conflict home where their parents are still together, this can be more damaging than if their parents separated. You can read more about this [here](#).

An amicable separation isn't always possible, for example, if there are concerns around safety. However, if you and your children are safe, by choosing a route where they get to see both of you often and where conflict is limited, you will help them cope better with your separation

#### Tip from amicable

The Parents Promise and Positive Parenting Alliance are a group of organisations that support parents in separating amicably. [You can find out more here.](#)

## Limiting conflict and parental absence

You can limit conflict by learning how to communicate with each other in a respectful and constructive way. There are lots of resources on this and you can seek professional help from [amicable](#), parenting experts, or through [mediation](#). Here is a [series of videos](#) that teaches you how to communicate with your child and their other parent.

### Tip from amicable

Set individual and joint goals around your child and your parenting relationship. This will help you look to the future and prioritise your child's well-being.

## Making living arrangements

Children need stability in order to feel safe and happy, so you and your ex will need to decide where they live and how often they will see you both. Getting the [basic arrangements](#) in place quickly is an important step that you can take to minimise the impact on your child.

There are many different [shared care patterns](#) you can choose for your family. You should agree on a pattern that works for your child at the age they are now and be prepared to change to a different pattern as they get older. You can document your arrangements in a [parenting plan](#), this helps create a structure and routine. If you're a solo parent and are struggling with childcare you can read about your childcare options on [Gingerbread's website](#).

Gingerbread tip: You can learn more about your childcare options if you're on universal credit [here](#), or childcare if you don't have a job [here](#), or read [Gingerbread's FAQs](#) around childcare.

## How to tell the child you're separating

You should wait to tell your child that you're separating only after the decision has been made, not when you're in the early stages of thinking about it. It's better to tell your child together and before a change, for example, if one parent is moving out.

Remember, ending an unhappy relationship is a sad thing, not a bad thing. What feels bad and what is bad are two different things. There are better ways of giving upsetting news to your children. Present what's happening as a change, not the end of the world. Acknowledge any sadness your child express and that change is difficult. The key things to explain to your child is that you love them, it's not their fault, whilst you're no longer together, you're still their parents, and you'll always be a family.

### Tip from amicable

Plan with your ex, when you will tell your child, leaving plenty of time to answer any questions they may have. If possible, prepare what you're going to say beforehand, including how you might answer any questions they have.

## School holidays and special occasions

Holidays and special occasions can be emotional and tricky to navigate. Always prioritise your child, and don't treat these days like a competition.

Whether you're a solo parent or co-parenting, when it comes to school holidays, think about asking friends or extended family for extra support. They might be able to help with childcare if you can't get time off work, or even join you on a trip if you plan on going away, to help manage things.

If you and your ex are parenting apart, agree in advance on what you plan on doing for special occasion days e.g. will you split the holiday or rotate important days on an annual basis? Think about travelling time and avoid having the kids spend lots of their holiday time travelling, just so you can have your share of time.

## Child maintenance





If your child lives with you on a more regular basis than the other parent, child maintenance will be due. You can either decide this between yourselves, known as family based arrangement, or through the [Child Maintenance Service \(CMS\)](#). You can work out how much by visiting the [government website](#) or by contacting Gingerbread for support. The government calculator only factors in the minimum you will need to pay to cover the most basic aspects of living costs. You should also think about how you will pay for after-school activities and trips, pocket money, birthday presents, phones and university etc.

## Education and health

School is an important part of your child's life and a central pillar providing structure and social support, as well as opportunities. When you and their other parent separate, school may become particularly essential as a source of stability for them.

You need to decide if and how you tell the school that you've separated from your child's other parent. They are there to help you and knowing will help them to keep an eye on your child's welfare and spot any worrying changes in their behaviour or performance. If possible, both parents should be involved with and contactable by your child's school.

## Things to talk about:

-  How and when will you tell the school about your separation?
-  Have you arranged for duplicate information to be sent to each of you – and do the school have up-to-date contact information?
-  How will you organise attendance at school functions, such as; parent's evenings and sports day etc?
-  How will you pay for school meals, activities or trips?


## Health and well-being

Talk to your ex about how who's responsible for your child's daily routine health matters. Remember your child's other parent will always want to know about emergencies and non-routine health issues, so agree on how you will communicate with each other and make decisions about your child's health. Have you discussed dentist or optician appointments, or vaccinations? Remember to talk about any medication schedules and pack medication when your child is going between homes.

### Tip from amicable

Use [Place2be's](#) free resources and information about education and mental health.

## Get help agreeing

 [amicable negotiation services](#)


 [Mediation](#)

## Sorting out the legal bits


There is no requirement for either parent to take legal steps to make child arrangements and there are alternatives before that should be considered [amicable negotiation](#), mediation etc.

If you're married, or in a civil partnership you'll need to go through the legal steps necessary to end your marriage through a divorce or dissolve your civil partnership. You can do this yourself through the government website or use amicable's services. amicable is a legal service for separating couples and offers free 15-minute advice calls.

## Tools and resources:


 [Free amicable guide for divorce](#)

 [Gingerbread helpline](#) - 0808 802 0925

 [amicable co-parenting app](#)

 [The Divorce Podcast](#)

 [Advice forum](#)

 [amicable's 15-minute advice calls](#)