

When to tell the children

Children may already have sensed a change of atmosphere within the home. The news about a separation may not come as a surprise.

Even so, the words about mummy and daddy separating or divorcing will still be chilling and deeply upsetting. As a parent, you must be prepared for how difficult it will be to break the news.

It is important to pick a time that is best. There is no perfect time to do this.

Remember these points:

- Pick a time that is free from interruptions. You will need to deal with tears and spend a lot of time answering questions and comforting your child.
- It needs to be as good a time for the child as possible. Do not break the news, for example, before an important exam, after an illness or after your child has had to cope with some other problem or difficulty (perhaps to do with their own relationships).
- Children need some time to be free of problems. Strike a balance between giving them enough time to come to terms with the news (before going back to school) while giving them some time at the beginning of a holiday, perhaps to relax free from problems.
- Make sure that friends and family are available to support your child. He or she may have somebody special already to talk to about problems – a grown up friend, a school friend, an aunt or a grandparent.
- Because your child will want to know what is going to happen, it helps if you have sorted out some of the practical things before you break the news. When are they going to see the other parent in the immediate future? Are they going to have to change schools or move house? Some of the questions may be impossible to answer. It may simply be too soon to have thought these things through, but try to anticipate some of the likely questions and have as many answers as you can.

The hardest stage for children is just after separation. Both parents will need to give a lot of support at this time.

If the emotional difficulties of the parents prevent discussing things sensibly about the children, consider mediation. See the [approaches](#) section. Mediation can provide somewhere that is neutral to talk about these problems, away from the home and with the expertise of mediators to help the discussions move forward.