



EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF PROCEEDINGS – FAMILY COURT OF WA

Adjusting to separation is a process and people rarely feel the same emotions at the same time. It is normal for your feelings and moods to change frequently as you move through this process. Your reactions may be different to the other party's. You may feel denial, disbelief, a sense of loss, grief, shock, anger, guilt, confusion, sadness or a sense of failure. It is important to remember these are all normal mood changes.

Children tend to pick up on their parents' emotional states, either directly or indirectly. It is important to remember they are also experiencing their own loss and grief and trying to make sense of their world as it changes.

CHILDREN AND SEPARATION

Children aged between birth and 5 may experience changes in their eating and sleeping habits, become distressed if they are separated from their primary carer and be more fearful or anxious

Pre-schoolers and older children may feel a sense of loss and they may fantasise that their parents will get back together. They can worry about what is going to happen to them, blame themselves for the separation or behave in an inappropriate manner towards the parent they blame for the separation.

School age children may show signs of social and learning difficulties or have a range of physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, and feeling sick or have problems sleeping.

Teenagers may become sullen, withdrawn, depressed, anxious and uncommunicative.



HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN

Protect your child or children from the conflict between the adults. Take responsibility for how you communicate with the other party and work out a plan how to do that. Recognise and focus on your child or children's emotional needs. If they are not coping they could see the school psychologist or a children's counsellor. Reassure your child or children that both parents love them. Explain that they are not to blame for the separation. With the absence of information a child or children will develop their own version of events which may not be correct or helpful. Respect the other party's different rules and different ways of doing things. Just because it is not your way does not mean it is the wrong way.

Children who witness family violence may:

- Develop stress related illnesses, with symptoms ranging from an upset stomach or headaches, through to post traumatic stress disorder
- Copy the violent behaviour they witness, both as a child and an adult
- Try to protect an adult victim and be harmed themselves
- Find it difficult to make friends at school or have healthy relationships when older
- Lose their confidence, become afraid and angry or blame themselves
- Feel like it is their responsibility for keeping the peace by telling each parent what they think they want to hear

ARE YOU IN A CRISIS?

EMERGENCIES 000

LIFELINE 13 11 14

1800RESPECT

FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

ADVICE LINE 1800 050 321