

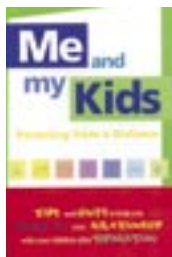
Me and my Changing Family

Moving forward



Tips on building healthy relationships after separation

Other free books available in this series:



Practical ideas on developing and maintaining relationships with your kids after separation; in particular for parents who spend much of their time away from their children.



Addresses the challenges that arise around money issues following separation. Includes hints and tips on stretching your dollar further.



Helping separated parents deal with emotional issues such as anxiety, with suggestions and resources for dealing with them.



Providing helpful tips and hints on reducing conflict and building a workable relationship with the other parent for the benefit of the kids.



An interactive CD Rom where real people in real situations share their experiences, tips and tools about navigating their way through separation.

Order copies at www.csa.gov.au or by calling 131 272.

Disclaimer

The information in this publication is provided as a guide only on the understanding that the Australian Government is not providing professional advice. The Child Support Agency recommends that users seek professional advice for their particular circumstances.

Although every care has been taken in preparing this publication the Child Support Agency gives no warranty or guarantee for the accuracy, currency or completeness of the information. Further, the Child Support Agency accepts no responsibility or liability for any loss or damage suffered as a result of reliance on the information contained in this publication.

Acknowledgements

The developers would like to thank all the parents and service providers, Edith Cowan University and the Stepfamily Association of Victoria Inc for sharing their insights and experiences.

ISBN 0-9751931-6-3

Designed by RTM Design

Author/Contributor: Child Support Agency; RTM Design (ill)

© Commonwealth of Australia 2006

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posed at www.ag.gov.au/cca.



Australian Government
Child Support Agency

This publication was produced by the Child Support Agency's External Relations Group. Queries or feedback about this booklet should be sent to CSACommunication@csa.gov.au.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is for people who:

- ▶ are thinking about starting a new relationship
- ▶ have started a new relationship – and are looking for tips for making it easier
- ▶ are affected by someone's decision to start a new relationship.

What's in this book?

- ▶ Important things to consider.
- ▶ What to expect when forming a new family.
- ▶ Practical tips on dealing with everyone's needs.
- ▶ Strategies for making it work.
- ▶ Support services.
- ▶ Tips and hints on how to support your children.
- ▶ Experiences from other re-partnered families.
- ▶ Where to get more information.

It may help you to:

- ▶ understand that your situation is normal
- ▶ understand the roles and relationships of everyone who is affected
- ▶ know where to go if you need extra help
- ▶ understand the challenges facing new families, and how to meet them head on!



A word of advice: Separation and re-partnering can be times of conflict between family members. If violent or abusive behaviour is affecting your relationships, seek help.



WHAT KIND OF HELP DO YOU NEED?

Are you	Try starting with
Thinking about re-partnering?	Pages 2–14 have information about what you can expect
Having trouble dealing with the practicalities?	Pages 24–36 have practical tips on how to make it work
Wanting to know how your kids might react to your decision to start a new family?	Particularly useful might be pages 15–19 which focus on kids reactions
Needing tips to help your kids adjust?	Pages 20–23 provide a range of tips for helping kids cope
A step-parent?	Pages 37–39 have tips to help step-parents
A grandparent?	Pages 44–45 gives information on what you can do to support the new family
The 'Ex'?	Try pages 40–44 for ways to support your children in their new family

Extra help is available during this difficult time – no matter which stage of re-partnering you are at. See pages 46–55 for a list of useful contacts.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this book	i
What kind of help do you need?.....	ii
Table of Contents	1
Information for parents	2
About re-partnered families.....	2
Changing relationships	11
What about you?	14
Through the kids' eyes	15
Relationships.....	15
Children's feelings	19
Tips for helping your children cope with re-partnering	20
Making it work.....	24
Sorting out family 'job descriptions'.....	24
Family meetings	25
Family goal setting	27
Rules	28
Discipline	28
Routines and family arrangements	30
Legal issues	32
Financial issues	33
Building family traditions.....	35
Help for step-parents	37
Tips for getting along with step-children	38
Getting along with your new partner's ex.....	39
Extended family	40
When your ex has re-partnered.....	40
Grandparents.....	44
Extra Help.....	46



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

About re-partnered families

What is a re-partnered family?

Re-partnered families go by many names; 'step-families', 'blended families', 'second families', 'bonus families'. Regardless of what name you give them, a re-partnered family is where one or both of the partners in a relationship have children from a previous relationship. For the purposes of this booklet, we have used the term re-partnered family.

It has helped just knowing that I am not the only one to go through this and that other people have felt just like I do

Ben, re-partnered 14 months

Re-partnered families are very common. It is estimated that one in four Australian families is a re-partnered family. There is no 'one size fits all' for re-partnered families. They are diverse and complicated and come in many forms.

Why do people choose to re-partner?

There are no right or wrong reasons for entering into a new relationship, although your reasons may affect the success of your relationship. Thinking about your reasons for re-partnering might help you meet possible challenges ahead.



Remember!

Separation does not end parenthood and re-partnering does not create parenthood. Be patient. It takes time to adjust to new situations.



Put your motivation under the microscope

Activity



Consider why you are re-partnering or why you would re-partner. Tick the boxes that apply to your situation. Be honest with yourself.

Tick which reasons apply to you

Intimacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Self esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stability or security	<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happiness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Relationship formed prior to the parent's separation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distraction	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loneliness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positive parenting role models	<input type="checkbox"/>	Convenience	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>	Desire to be in a relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>



Remember!

You have chosen your partner for various reasons, and you can't expect your children to understand and accept your decision for the same reasons. Many children hold on to the dream that their parents will get back together – even many years later.



Experiences of re-partnered parents

Re-partnered families are different in many ways. Knowing **how** they are different can help you understand that your new family situation is still normal. In the following story, a re-partnered parent shares their experiences.

Paul's story

Stacey and I were married for 9 years. We had two kids, Josh and Megan. We called it quits when we realised that it wasn't working anymore. The divorce was hard, but we tried to get along for the kids sake. We decided to share the care of the kids.

12 months after the divorce Stacey's boyfriend Martin and his three kids moved in with her. I think that Josh and Megan found it hard having three other kids living with them.

After three years I started dating Rachael. Rach was great, and we got along well. She had two boys – Adam and Sean – from her first marriage. Soon after we started dating, Rach and I decided that our kids should meet. It didn't go well. Josh and Megan were really angry with me, and wouldn't talk to Rach or her kids. Adam and Sean were very quiet.

Rach and I talked about what we could do to make things better, and decided to go with the 'take it slow' approach. We made sure that all the kids knew they could talk to us about anything.

After a year Rach and I talked about getting married. Although the kids were getting along better, we were worried that getting engaged could throw a spanner in the works. We held a family meeting so that we could tell all the kids together. Adam swore at us and ran from the table. We suggested that Adam talk with someone outside the family so that he could sort out how he was feeling.



After the wedding, we all moved into Rach's house. It was a tight squeeze, and there were some teething problems between the kids. Sean and Adam didn't like having their space invaded, and Josh and Megan felt like they had no space of their own. It was pretty tough. Rach's ex was calling all the time to complain about child support, and there were four sets of grandparents wanting to spend time with their grandkids – it was total chaos. Rach and I weren't getting any time alone together, and we often disagreed about how to raise the kids.

Eventually we realised that we needed help, so we went to a counsellor to discuss our issues, and some options. We also joined a step-family support group which really helped. It was good to know that we weren't the only ones having trouble combining our two families.

Two years on and things are getting better. Our kids have adjusted to our new living arrangements, and we keep on top of things by having regular family meetings. We've just found out that Rach is pregnant. Megan is upset that she won't be the baby of the family any more.

We are trying to deal with things one day at a time...



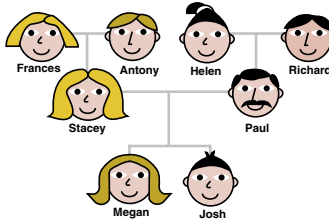
Activity



Why not draw a diagram of your own family, and write down the issues for each family member.

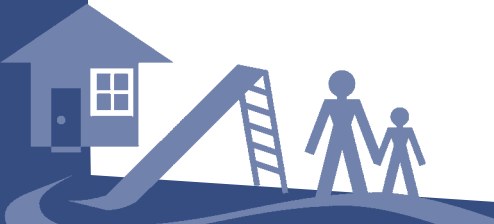
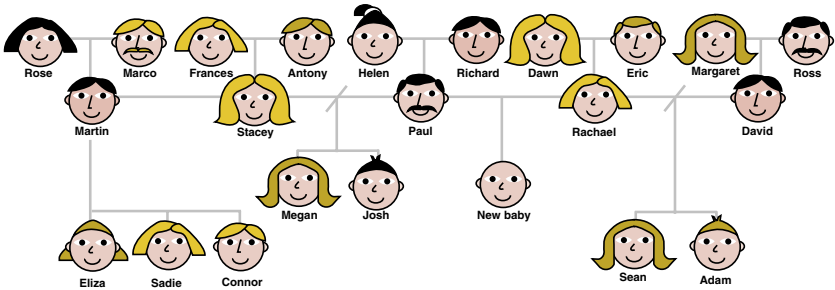
Paul's family

THEN



Paul's family

NOW



Stages of re-partnering

A newly formed family like Paul's goes through a number of stages that are quite common. For some, the stages could last for several years. Seeing the patterns and understanding what is happening can help you deal with the issues your family faces during this time.

<p>Fantasy stage</p> <p>Rachael: <i>'Paul and I put our new family on a pedestal. We had no idea of challenges we would have to face'</i></p> <p>Josh: <i>'I hope that my mum and dad will get back together'</i></p>	<p>What you can do</p> <p>To deal with the challenges, it is important to set aside a regular time each week to talk as a family about what's working well and what's not.</p>
<p>Confusion stage</p> <p>Paul: <i>'Things are not working out like we hoped they would. I have no idea what we need to do to make it better'</i></p>	<p>What you can do</p> <p>Be patient. It takes time to make a re-partnered family work. Focus on the things you can control and let go of the things you can't.</p>
<p>Chaos stage</p> <p>Rachael: <i>'It feels like every thing is falling apart! I don't have any energy to keep our new family together'</i></p> <p>Adam: <i>'I wish Mum would break up with Paul, we'd all be a lot happier'</i></p>	<p>What you can do</p> <p>This is the time when families often recognise the difficulties and seek extra help.</p>
<p>Stability stage</p> <p>Paul: <i>'Things are working much better now that we are talking to each other'</i></p> <p>Sean: <i>'I am glad that Mum has Paul to help take care of me and Adam'</i></p>	<p>What you can do</p> <p>To keep things going, try to have some 'couple' time during the week. Write down or talk about some of the triggers that upset you and how to manage them.</p>
<p>Commitment stage</p> <p>Paul: <i>'I actually feel like we are a family now, instead of a bunch of strangers living together'</i></p>	<p>A happy ending...</p> <p>Many families then benefit from having developed a solid foundation by working through the stages.</p>



Activity



Think about your situation. What stage are you at? Has your family repeated any of the stages? What is stopping your family from moving forward? Is it time to get some help with moving forward in a positive direction?



For more ideas on how to get through the stages of re-partnering, see the 'Making it Work' section of this booklet.

Reality Check

It's not what I expected at all, it's bloody hard work!

Sam, re-partnered 2 years

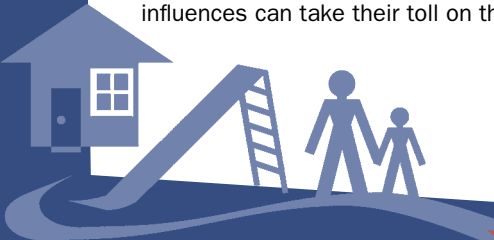
Society's beliefs and expectations about re-partnering can influence how people adjust to their new step-family. Being aware of the realities of re-partnering can help you to have a realistic expectation of what's in store.

My new family will be just like my first family

Reality: Re-partnered families are very different! They are much more complex, and there are many more people involved who need to be considered.

Our love will help us to overcome any obstacles we may face

Reality: Love has little influence on others outside the couple relationship. A strong relationship can help in weathering storms, however outside influences can take their toll on the new family.



The members of our new family will love each other eventually

Reality: If problems are not addressed, the family may always have difficulty in getting along. Love is a lot to expect.

Our kids are great, and they will get along well together

Reality: Jealousy can be a factor as children watch their parents make an effort to develop a relationship with their new step-children.

I have learnt from the mistakes of my first marriage and won't repeat them in my new relationship

Reality: Unless partners have truthfully identified what went wrong in the first relationship, they may continue to make the same mistakes.

My kids are only with us part-time, so we won't have as many problems as a full-time step-family

Reality: With children coming and going in part-time families there is not as much time to work on developing relationships. Part-time families are often more unsettled than full-time families.



If I am extra nice to my new step-children, they will accept me

Reality: Some children may never accept the relationship because they have not accepted that their parent's relationship is over. A step-parent who is overly nice to win the child's trust could be walked over by the child who takes advantage of the situation. Establishing relationships takes time, effort and boundaries.

My new step-mother won't like me because I am not her child

Reality: This is often a stereotype created by stories like Cinderella or Hansel and Gretel. Many step-parents genuinely care for their step-children. They care about the happiness of their new partner and recognise that their happiness is linked to their children's.

My kids would accept my ex's new relationship if I wasn't involved in their lives

Reality: The other parent can provide much needed stability for their children. In most situations kids do better emotionally and are more successful in life when both parents continue to be a part of their lives.

To see how children can react to some of these situations, see the 'Through the kids' eyes' section of this booklet.



Changing relationships

As a parent, your relationships may change after re-partnering.

The parent/child relationship

Often this bond between a parent and their children can be put to the test.

My daughter and I were close before I started dating, but now she is so distant, and I don't know how to get back to the way it was before

Damien, re-partnered 9 months



To see how changes in relationships might affect children-and for tips on how to help them adjust, see the 'Through the kids' eyes' section of this booklet.

The couple relationship

Your relationship is the corner stone of the new family; after all, if it wasn't for you being together, there would be no re-partnered family. Many couples don't realise how important it is to work on their relationship. It often takes a back seat to other issues in the family.



The new partner may be concerned about fitting into the family, and feel out of place at family celebrations such as birthdays and weddings. It is important to ensure that your new partner is made feel welcome and included.

Tips for building an 'us' relationship



- ▶ **Communicate** – Take the time to talk to each other regularly, not just when life is difficult.
- ▶ **Compromise** – you don't have to win in every situation. Be willing to adapt, or live with what you can't change.
- ▶ **Have time alone together** – Have time alone together without the kids. Why not go out on a regular 'date'?
- ▶ **Make decisions together** – make the commitment that you both take responsibility for decision making.
- ▶ **Balance time together and time apart** – It is important to spend time together to strengthen your bond as a couple, but it is also important to have an identity outside your relationship.
- ▶ **Set goals as a couple** – Talk together about what you want to achieve in your new family such as having a baby, buying a home or going on a family trip.
- ▶ **Respect your partner** – Love and accept your partner for who they are. Treat them the way you would like to be treated.
- ▶ **Trust each other** – Give your partner the benefit of the doubt, and trust in your commitment as a couple.
- ▶ **Choose your battles** – Don't sweat the small stuff!



The Ex Factor

After years of fighting with my ex, I realised that my relationship with her had affected my relationship with my son

James, re-partnered 2½ years

Wounds from the past may be reopened when one or both parents re-partner. Your child's other parent can feel threatened by your new partner's involvement in the children's lives. Often without meaning to, parents can unknowingly put their children in the middle of the conflict.



Studies show that it is not separation, but ongoing conflict between parents that hurts children. For more information about how children are affected by conflict and re-partnering, see the 'Through the kids' eyes' section of this booklet. See Me, my kids and my Ex for more information about the painful games parents play and how to avoid them.

To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.

Practical things you can do

- ▶ Acknowledge that the kids will benefit from a stable relationship with the other parent.
- ▶ Don't talk about things that are upsetting you – such as child support or ex-partner issues – in front of the children.
- ▶ Try mediation if you can't talk without arguing.





Remember!

Your kids will see how you get along with your ex and will model their behaviour off yours.



Warning! *If there are issues with violence between you and the other parent, it may not be possible to develop a workable relationship. Seek help. For support services see the 'Extra Help' section at the back of this booklet.*

What about you?

To be able to look after your new family, you have to first look after yourself.

Do you feel:

- ▶ Depressed and not coping.
- ▶ Less interested in sex and spending time with your partner.
- ▶ Less dedicated to your family.
- ▶ Dissatisfied.
- ▶ Not taking care of your self (not exercising or eating poorly).
- ▶ Physical and mental tiredness.
- ▶ Disorganised.
- ▶ Left out of family activities.
- ▶ Unmotivated or uninspired.
- ▶ That you argue over silly things.



If you are experiencing any of these feelings, try reading What about Me? for tips on how take care of yourself. To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.



THROUGH THE KIDS' EYES

Re-partnering can impact children in many different ways. Many aspects of a child's life can change when they become part of a new family.



The good news...

Kids can benefit from the strengths and experiences of the various members of their re-partnered family.

Relationships

Children's relationships can change when one or both of their parents re-partner. Children used to having their parent to themselves, have to adjust to sharing their parent with a new partner, possibly step-children and eventually maybe even a baby. Children can feel threatened by new family members, as their parent makes obvious efforts to build relationships with them.



Getting on with my Mum and Dad

The relationship between a parent and child is often the most established relationship in a re-partnered family. They have had time together in the original family, and one on one time after the separation.

It used to be just Mum and us kids. Now we have to share her with her new boyfriend and his kids, and I never get to spend any time with her

Jack, 9 years old



For tips on how to strengthen your relationship with your child, see the 'Through the kids' eyes' section of this booklet.

Kids need love and reassurance from you that no one will ever take their place. When children know that their relationship with their parent is not under threat, they are more likely to:

- ▶ More easily accept the new family.
- ▶ Feel assured of their parents love and not need to compete for it.
- ▶ Be secure in their position within the new family, and not misbehave to get attention.
- ▶ Feel better about themselves.

I was so mad at Mum when she started dating. I was really worried that she wouldn't have time for me. Now I'm glad Mum finally found someone. She has been so lonely since she and Dad broke up

Zara, 13 years old



If your children are not living with you, and you want tips on how to keep in touch, see Me and My Kids: Parenting from a Distance. To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.





My step-parent

Children may not readily accept the new partner. They might refuse to speak or respond to the step-parent, or demand to live with their other parent even if this is not possible.

How could Dad have married her? Things were fine when it was just the two of us!

Brittany, 13 years



For tips on how to help step-parents and step-children get along, see the 'Help for step-parents' section of this booklet.



My step-brother, my step-sister

When children from different families come together in a re-partnered family, adjustments need to be made. Your children may go through a rough stage of trying to figure out their new position within the family e.g. the eldest is now the middle child. Children may feel like they are in direct competition for love, attention and possessions.

Examples of step-sibling rivalry

Turf wars – when one set of children were already living in the house before the other set moved in, children can become territorial.

Green eyed monster – when children are jealous of their parent's relationship with their step-siblings.



She's my mum, but she spends all her time with my step-sister instead of me!

Zach, 11 years old

Chinese Whispers – when step-children have conflicting stories about an incident.

Mine! Mine! Mine! – when children will not allow their step-siblings to touch their belongings.

My step-sister is always wearing my clothes. I wish she would leave my stuff alone

Bella, 14 years old

Space invaders – when children have to share a room with a step-sibling because the family home isn't big enough.

That's not fair! – when children feel anger over the different financial situations between sets of children, or unfair treatment by parents.

My step-dad is always telling me off, but he never yells at his kids!

Justin, 8 years old



For tips on helping step-siblings adjust to each other, go to the end of this section.



Children's feelings

Children can react to changes in many different ways. For information on what your child is going through, read *What about Me?* To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.

If I am really good, Mum and Dad will get back together

Stephanie, 5 years old

Now that Mum has remarried, nothing will ever be the same

Nathan, 16 years old

Dad doesn't have time for me anymore, because the other kids are always around

Keirah, 10 years old

Who is my Mummy now?

Jamie, 4 years old

Children can feel very uncertain about your new relationship. Here are some common questions children ask:

- ▶ Can my step-parent tell me to do things and tell me off?
- ▶ Who decides about pocket money and treats?
- ▶ Who can I ask for what?
- ▶ Who signs my school forms?
- ▶ Who has to know what?
- ▶ Do I have to tell my step-parent where I am going, or can I just tell my mum or dad?
- ▶ Do I have to call my step-parent 'Mum' or 'Dad'?



For some practical tips on how to help your child adjust go to the end of this section.



Tips for helping your children cope with re-partnering

Here are some ideas of how you can help your child deal with the different stages of re-partnering:

During the early stages of the relationship

- ▶ Protect them when dating – your kids don't need to have a relationship with everyone you date.
- ▶ When introducing your new partner, take things slowly. Keep the meetings short.
- ▶ Where possible, try to meet in a neutral location such as a park.
- ▶ To avoid uncomfortable silences, give your kids some background information about your new partner and vice versa.
- ▶ In the early stages try to avoid having your new partner sleep over when the kids are at home – this can be very confronting for them.

When you are ready to move in together or get married

- ▶ Remind them that they are really important in your life.
- ▶ Tell them in advance – don't spring any sudden changes on them, give them time to get used to the idea.
- ▶ Don't involve the step-parent in the initial discussion – your children may feel more comfortable in voicing concerns.
- ▶ If your child has issues you feel unable to help with, suggest that they talk to someone outside your family, e.g. school counsellors or the Kids Helpline. See the 'Extra Help' section of this booklet for contact details.
- ▶ Assure them that they will be told about all major decisions.

Quick tips on strengthening your relationship with your children

- ▶ Spend one on one time with your child. Read them a bedtime story, or go for a walk together.



- ▶ Get your kids involved in planning your time together. Discuss your ideas with your new partner first to make sure there will be no conflicting appointments.
- ▶ Do something your child will want to do, and take different age levels into account.
- ▶ Keep appointments with your child. They may lose trust if you keep putting it off.
- ▶ Don't withhold your time together as a punishment for bad behaviour.
- ▶ When your child isn't with you, schedule in time for long phone calls to catch up on what is happening.
- ▶ Write letters to your child, even if they are living with you so that they know you have been thinking of them.
- ▶ Write notes telling them how much you love them and pop them in their lunch box.

Tips for helping step-siblings adjust to each other

- ▶ Reinforce the message that you love them and how important they are to you.
- ▶ Introduce them gradually.
- ▶ Give them time alone so they can get to know each other.
- ▶ Be patient. Let them develop the relationship in their own way and in their own time.
- ▶ Let them deal with their own problems (within reason).
- ▶ Treat each child equally regardless of how often they have contact with you.
- ▶ Make sure they spend time alone with their biological parent.
- ▶ Be consistent with discipline, and have the same rules for all children.
- ▶ Talk to the children, and help them express how they are feeling. E.g. asking them if they feel angry about having new children in the house, and letting them have their say.
- ▶ Negotiate what names will be used.



A new baby?

Many re-partnered couples believe that having a new baby will bring the whole family together. This is not always the case. Children may feel threatened and fear that their parents don't have enough love to go around.

The arrival of a new baby has the ability to do many things:

- ▶ Create bonds within a family.
- ▶ Alienate children so that they withdraw.
- ▶ Bond the couple but not the children.

Tips for helping your children adjust to a new baby:

- ▶ Where possible, wait until things in your family have settled before having a new baby.
- ▶ Reassure your child that there is not a limit to the love you can give. A parent's love is endless, so there is plenty to go around between them, step-siblings and a new baby.
- ▶ Prepare your child for the birth, and for what to expect once the baby arrives, especially if they are younger.
- ▶ Think of ways to get them involved and excited, such as taking them to the ultrasound – if possible – and framing the pictures together. Allow them to choose some of the baby's clothes or toys.
- ▶ When possible spend one on one time with them after the birth.



There are many professionals in the community who can provide advice and support to you and your children. See the Community Services Directory on CSA's website www.csa.gov.au for services in your area.



Activity

List what you would like to try with your child:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



For more information about understanding what your child is going through, see What about Me? To order a free copy, see the inside front cover of this booklet.



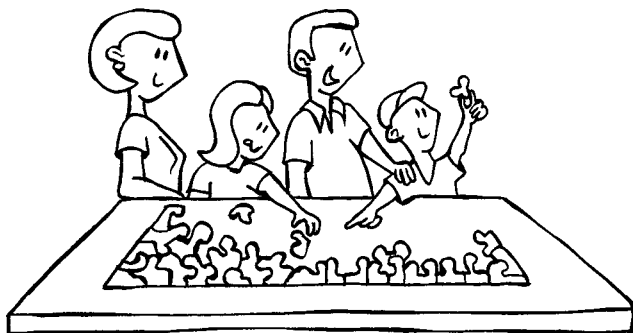
Warning! *If you have concerns about inappropriate behaviour from any family member – sexual or otherwise – it is important to address this as quickly as possible. Your local Police can provide advice on where to go for help. Look up 'Police' in your White Pages for contact details.*



MAKING IT WORK

A word about conflict

Re-partnered families can experience more than their fair share of conflict over things like finances or different parenting styles. If this is an issue for your family try reading *What about Me?* and *Me, my kids and my Ex* for tips and hints on managing conflict. To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.



Sorting out family 'job descriptions'

When you form a re-partnered family, there is often confusion about the role of each family member. To ease fear and uncertainty, it is important for you, your new partner and your kids (depending on age) to discuss everyone's expectations and what they want with regard to roles or how they see themselves in this new family.



It was really hard when my new girlfriend expected me to discipline her kids. I don't have any kids – I had no idea what I was supposed to do!



Marcus, re-partnered 15 months

Activity



Write down the agreed roles for your family and put it up on your fridge. Make sure you review them often.

Family meetings

Family meetings are a practical way for families to communicate. They allow everyone to be involved in family decision making, and to bring up issues that are important. Family meetings can help to bring structure into a sometimes chaotic life.

You can use family meetings to decide on household chores, arrange fun family activities and traditions, resolve any issues and just spend time together as a family.

Tips

- ▶ Set aside a regular time (20 or 30 minutes) each week for everyone to get together to talk. Let family members know that they can ask for a meeting whenever they think it is necessary.
- ▶ Rotate the responsibility for leading the meetings so that all family members have a turn.
- ▶ Make a list of things to talk about and put it up on the fridge or pin board before the meeting.
- ▶ Write down all suggestions to a problem and then take a vote.
- ▶ Don't have meetings during meals, but keep it fun by providing treats to nibble on.
- ▶ In order to control 'talking time' think about ideas such as an egg timer so that no-one is seen to get more time than others.

Setting ground rules for the meeting can help. Here are some ideas.

We will:

- ▶ Recognise that everyone's feelings count equally, regardless of age.
- ▶ Not judge them as right or wrong.
- ▶ Not accuse others.
- ▶ Use 'I' statements rather than 'you' statements. e.g. 'I feel happier and more comfortable when we all know the rules'.



- ▶ Discuss problems openly and honestly.
- ▶ Listen while someone is speaking.
- ▶ Not talk over others.
- ▶ Respect others point of view.

Here is an example of how your family may want to run your meeting:

Family Meeting Ideas

Catch up

How was everyone's week?

- *Good things that happened this week.*
- *Bad things that happened this week.*

Celebrate family achievements

Celebrate each others achievements and think about what makes our family special.

Things to work on

*Does anyone have an issue they need to discuss?
(eg staying out of each others things, pocket money, rules, discipline, roles).*

Family schedule

- *Contact arrangements for this week (i.e. Who is 'in' and 'out' this week).*
- *Appointments.*
- *Sporting activities.*
- *Identify schedule conflicts and determine who can help out with what (i.e. giving a lift or babysitting).*
- *Special events (birthdays, anniversaries etc).*
- *Chores.*
- *Planning the menu.*

Fun family activities

- *Trip to the movies.*
- *Sporting activities.*
- *Trying out some new traditions for the family.*



Family goal setting

Where would you like your family to be in a year's time?

Pick the goals that you would like to work towards and write them in the list below:

- ▶ Able to solve problems and manage conflict.
- ▶ Celebrating our achievements.
- ▶ Having closer relationships with each other.
- ▶ Able to find ways to manage money and legal issues.

Top 5 goals for my family:

Top 5 goals for my family	What we are going to do to meet our goals
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	



Tip: Revisit your goals every couple of months to keep focused...



Rules

It is important to set rules so that all family members have clear boundaries around accepted behaviour. Talk to your partner about having consistent rules and discipline in your home. Your kids will benefit from your united approach to parenting and will be less likely to try to 'divide and conquer'!

Younger children may need reminders and rewards for following the rules. It takes time, practice and patience.

When you set rules, try following these steps:

1. Set the **rules** and **consequences** up front and remember to take the children's ages into account. e.g. 'If you don't come home when expected, you will be grounded for a week'.
2. Be **consistent** and **follow through**. If you say you will discipline the child, do it!
3. Have a **backup plan**. Decide on what you will do if someone continues to break the rules. e.g. 'If you keep breaking this rule, you won't get pocket money for a month'.
4. All family members should have to **follow the rules** – including you.

Discipline

Discipline can be a major cause of conflict in a re-partnered family. Partners may have very different ideas about how to discipline the children. Children can also add to the stress of the situation by testing limits and pressing your buttons.

*I hate it when my mum's boyfriend tells me off.
What right does he have to tell me what to do?*

Christian, 16 years old

We used to argue all the time about how to discipline the kids. The kids saw that we couldn't agree, and their behaviour got even worse. We finally sat down and decided how we would handle discipline. The kids soon realised that they couldn't play us off against each other, and started to toe the line

Ramon, re-partnered 4 years

Tips for handling discipline:

- ▶ Agree on how you will approach disciplining the children.
- ▶ Give explanations and reasons: e.g. 'When you talk to your step-sister like that, it makes her feel sad. Imagine if she spoke to you like that? How would that make you feel?'
- ▶ Early on the biological parent should make sure the rules are followed, and be responsible for disciplining the children. The step-parent should support them.
- ▶ If the biological parent can't be there, they should let the kids know that the step-parent is in charge.
- ▶ Eventually the step-parent should start to discipline the children, with the biological parent's support.
- ▶ Don't argue about discipline in front of the children.



Activity



Write a list of discipline issues in your family (e.g. swearing). Decide which issues you feel are important to address and decide together how to overcome them.

Discipline issue	How are you going to fix it together?
<i>Example:</i> Swearing	Be consistent and remind them that this is not appropriate and why. If they continue to swear, the consequence will be that they lose a privilege each time, e.g. reduced pocket money.

Routines and family arrangements



It was a nightmare at first. The kids were coming and going all the time, the housework was never done, and there was even a time when no one was there to pick my daughter up from school!



Corinne, re-partnered 4 years

When deciding your routine, keep the following in mind:

- ▶ Arrangements with the other household (access, family commitments).
- ▶ Work hours.
- ▶ Contact arrangements – part-time and full-time children.
- ▶ Location of school or childcare centre.





*For a detailed list of things to consider, see the **Parenting Arrangements Guideline in Me, my kids and my Ex.** To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.*

Hints for making your routine work

- ▶ Leave the TV off in the mornings.
- ▶ Praise your kids for following the schedule, and reward them for their efforts.
- ▶ Get the kids involved in chores as a way to earn pocket money.
- ▶ Check your local newsagent for calendars that suit your family. Some calendars have sections for each family member to keep track of activities.



Did you know?



Children can be included on more than one Medicare card? Just fill out a Copy/Transfer form available:

- ▶ online – visit www.medicareaustralia.gov.au to print off a form
- ▶ in person – at your local Medicare office
- ▶ over the phone – phone **132 011** to ask for a form to be posted.



Legal issues

The information in this section is intended as a guide only – you may need to obtain legal advice regarding these issues.

There are many legal issues you will need to consider when forming a re-partnered family.

Wills – Everyone needs a will, and they should be reviewed every five to ten years or whenever significant life changes occur, for example re-partnering, divorce, separation or birth of a child.

Property settlement – you may not yet have finalised your property settlement with your ex partner. Ongoing battles over the family home or other assets may cause tension in your new family.

Did you know?



Statistics show that nearly 60% of second relationships breakdown. A **prenuptial agreement** or binding financial agreement is probably the last thing a new couple would want to think about. However planning for yours and your children's future may save heartache and conflict later on. Contact a legal practitioner for advice prenuptial agreements.

Legal issues for step-parents

Adoption and name changes – You should always ensure that adoption or name changes are in the child's best interests. Adoption changes a child's legal identity permanently, which may affect other things such as child support and inheritance.

You may require the agreement of the child's other parent before changing the child's name.

Legal rights of step-parents – Unless specifically authorised in writing by a biological parent, a step-parent may not be able to:

- ▶ Sign medical consent for a hospital procedure.
- ▶ Sign legal consent for a school trip.
- ▶ Collect children from school.
- ▶ Take children to the doctor.





To find out more about legal rights, talk to a legal practitioner in your area. Visit www.csa.gov.au and look at the Community Services Directory or see the back of this booklet.

Financial issues

You may find that now you have re-partnered, money matters are more complex than before.

It's not easy to manage your money when you are dealing with issues that are specific to re-partnered families. Here are just a few:

1. Different financial experiences

Each partner has set ideas about how to manage the money; these ideas can come from past experiences and their own habits of spending and saving.

My partner thinks we should pay all our bills with the credit card, and then pay it off each month. I tried this with my first husband and we ended up getting into a lot of debt

Angela, re-partnered 12 months

Talk with your new partner about what your expectations are. You may have to work out a way to merge your ideas in a way that suits both of you.

2. Dividing finances between two homes

Child support, income or family structure changes (i.e. having more children) affect the other household. In a re-partnered family, there are sometimes more mouths to feed, and less money to do it.

Feelings of resentment can be strong if financial commitment to the first family means the new family misses out.

I guess it's fair enough that I have to support my kids from my first marriage – they are my kids after all. But now I have kids with my new partner, and sometimes it's hard to stretch the money between all of them

Andrew, re-partnered 4 years



If you have re-partnered, it can affect the amount of child support you pay or receive. Go to the Child Support Agency's website www.csa.gov.au or call 131 272 for the latest information.

3. Different standards of living under one roof

There may be differences in the level of financial support between families and between sets of children in the re-partnered family.

My step-brother got to go to Movie World for a week with his mum in the school holidays. My mum said that we couldn't afford that

Samuel, 12 years old

You can't control what your kids do when they are with their other parent, but you can control how you and your partner manage the finances in your home.

Do's and don'ts for managing money

DO

- ▶ Talk about your experiences and ideas about money with your partner.
- ▶ Try different ways of handling the finances until you find a way that suits your situation, for example separate or joint accounts or a combination of both.
- ▶ Develop a budget together. For more information about how to develop a budget see *Me and My Money*. To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.
- ▶ Talk to your ex about how to handle unexpected expenses for your children, e.g. emergencies.
- ▶ Consult a financial counsellor if you need extra help with your finances.

DON'T

- ▶ Talk about money problems with or in front of your children.
- ▶ Use money as a bargaining tool over your children.
- ▶ Allow your feelings for your ex to influence the financial support you give your children.





Tip: For tips on how to budget, and ideas on how to stretch your dollar further after re-partnering, see *Me and My Money*. To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.

Child Support

Many parents have questions about how their new relationship or family situation will affect their child support payments. For up to date information on how re-partnering may affect your child support, go to CSA's website www.csa.gov.au or call 131 272.

Other Government payments

Changes in your personal circumstances can also affect any payments you receive from Centrelink. If you re-partner you should tell Centrelink as soon as possible. For information on Government payments visit www.centrelink.gov.au or call 136 150.

Building family traditions

Family traditions help shape a family's identity. Everyone has traditions and beliefs that are special to them. When a person re-partners, they sometimes have to forgo their traditions or rituals to fit in with their new partner's. This can cause tension, as many people don't realise how important family traditions are until they don't have them anymore.

Changes in traditions can also cause distress for children, who already have to make changes and adjustments in a re-partnered family.

When Mum and Dad were together, we used to all sit on their bed to open birthday presents. When they split up and Dad got remarried, we didn't do that anymore. I talked to my dad and step-mum about how much the change upset me. They didn't realise how awful I felt. Now we have the same tradition in our new family

Madeleine, 15 years old



Did you know?



Different opinions about religion can cause conflict in a re-partnered family. For tips on how to reach agreement with your new partner, see the 'Parenting Arrangements Guideline' in *Me, My Kids and My Ex*. To order a free copy, see the inside front cover of this booklet.

What are your family's traditions?

In our family, we decided that neither of us wanted to give up our traditions, so now we do one, and then the other!

Melody, re-partnered 3 years

How do you celebrate special events like:

- ▶ Christmas.
- ▶ Birthdays.
- ▶ Christenings and naming ceremonies.
- ▶ Pregnancy and birthing rituals.
- ▶ Religious or multicultural events.
- ▶ Indigenous rituals.

Why not write down your family traditions? You could discuss these in your family meeting.



Tip: Communicate with the other household regarding your traditions so that differences don't cause tension or conflict.



HELP FOR STEP-PARENTS

It is common for step-parents to feel unsure about their new role. Step-parents may sometimes feel that they are not needed in the new family when the biological parents are around. They are expected to be a parent for a lot of the time, but as soon as the children's parents are about, they are expected to take a step back.

Kids of your own?

In a re-partnered family, conflict can arise if your experiences with your own kids are different to that of your new partner.

Andrew lets his kids get away with murder, but he yells at my kids for the smallest things

Sandra, re-partnered 3 years

Try to find common ground with your new partner – discuss what your beliefs are as a parent, and how you want to raise your kids. Decide where you are willing to compromise, and if you can't reach agreement, mediation may help you to overcome any conflict about parenting styles.

No kids?

You may not have had any experience parenting. That's ok – you may just need some help and guidance. Ask your new partner how they think you should handle a situation, or talk to a professional in your local area e.g. a parenting phone service.



To find a mediation service in your area visit www.csa.gov.au and look at the Community Services Directory or see the back of this booklet.



Tips for getting along with step-children

Listen. Take time to listen to your step-children and take their concerns seriously.

Be patient. Give your relationship with your partner's children time to develop.

Reassure them. Let the children know that you are not trying to take their parent away from them, or replace their other parent.

Compliment them. If things are tense, and your relationship is very negative, try giving your step-child a compliment. This lets them know that there are things you do like about them, and takes the focus away from the negatives. For example, say 'I like your outfit, it suits you'.

Maintain boundaries. Don't go overboard with your step-children by trying to be extra nice. Children still need firm boundaries.

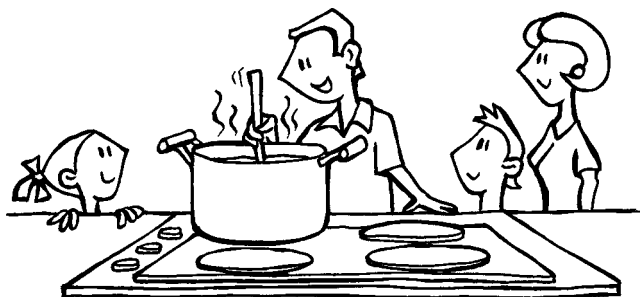


It's good to have someone around to help Dad, and take care of me and my little sister

Karl, 8 years old



Tip: Let your child know what to expect. Be clear about what role their step-parent is going to have in the family e.g. driving them to school, or cooking meals.



Getting along with your new partner's ex

My husband's ex is driving me crazy! She is always poking her nose into our business

Annelise, re-partnered 2 years

No one expects you to become best friends with your new partner's ex, but if you want your step-kids to adjust to the new relationship and have a healthy and happy family life, it is important to try to be civil.

Tips for easing the tension

- ▶ Make sure they know that you aren't trying to take their place as parent.
- ▶ Give them positive feedback about their kids (if possible).
- ▶ If you have not been a parent before, ask them for advice on matters relating to the children.
- ▶ Don't compare yourself to them.
- ▶ Don't say negative things about them in front of the kids.
- ▶ Don't get involved in conflict between your new partner and their ex.
- ▶ Try to appreciate what they are going through. They may feel threatened by your involvement in their children's lives.



There are many books and websites that can help if your relationship with your new partner's ex is under strain. See the 'Extra Help' section of this booklet for details.



EXTENDED FAMILY

When your ex has re-partnered

I've lost my kids, my wife, my house, I've got nothing left. I'm just a cheque book

Peter, separated 3 years

There are many challenges for parents whose ex has re-partnered:

- ▶ Maintaining an ongoing relationship with your children.
- ▶ Dealing with feelings associated with having someone else involved in parenting your kids.
- ▶ Dealing with unresolved feelings from the former relationship.
- ▶ Having a workable relationship with your ex-partner.
- ▶ Dealing with your ex's new partner.
- ▶ Taking care of yourself.

Relationships

Maintaining your relationship with your children

Some parents who don't live with their children may see them less after their ex re-partners. Some feel like they are just a wallet, paying for their children. Some don't want to upset things by placing too many demands on their kids who are trying to be part of a 'new family'.

Maybe they'd be better off without me...

Janelle, separated 12 months

You cannot be replaced by a new partner – you will always be your child’s parent. You can provide much needed stability for them. Studies show that kids are generally better off having both of their parents involved in their lives. The benefits are:

- ▶ increased self esteem
- ▶ wellbeing and
- ▶ success in their adult lives.

When my mum remarried, it was really good to know that me and my brothers could talk to Dad about what was bothering us without him bagging Mum or my step-dad

Charlotte, 14 years old



For practical ideas on how to help your children adjust to their new family situation, see the ‘Through the kids’ eyes’ section of this booklet.



Warning! Try not to ask your kids questions about their parent, step-parent or step-siblings.

Getting on with your ex

Sometimes parents confuse their own need for complete separation from their ex-partner with what the children need. The role of being a partner is given up at separation, not the role of being a parent.

Getting revenge on your ex may sound like a great idea, but what will that do to your kids? Think of a better way to release hostile emotions: talk it out, write it out, or scream it out in a pillow. It is your job to protect your kids, and you can do that by making sure they don’t get caught in the middle of conflict with your ex. Kids have their own issues to deal with regarding the new family arrangements.



Separate partner issues from parent issues

Things you can do if your ex has moved on:

- ▶ Accept that the relationship has ended.
- ▶ Give wounds time to heal.
- ▶ Accept the other parent's new choices.
- ▶ Treat the other parent the way you would like to be treated.
- ▶ Take a walk in their shoes – how would you like them to support you if you had entered into a new relationship.
- ▶ Get help – if you feel you aren't coping see the back of this booklet for books and websites that may help.



For tips on how to build a workable relationship with your ex, see Me, My Kids and My Ex. To order a free copy, see the inside front cover of this booklet.

Getting along with your ex's new partner

Accepting a new person in your child's and your former partner's lives can be difficult. You may experience the following feelings toward your ex's new partner:

- ▶ Replaced as a parent and a partner.
- ▶ Threatened by their relationship with your kids.
- ▶ Fear that your kids will like their step-parent more than you.
- ▶ Anger that they have a decision making role in your children's lives.
- ▶ Jealous of the time they spend with your children.

When I call to talk to my ex about the kids his new wife answers the phone. I feel really uncomfortable talking to her, so I just hang up!

Ellie, separated 3 years

How tension between you and your child's step-parent may affect your child:

- ▶ If your children like their step-parent, they may try to hide it from you for fear that you will be upset.
- ▶ They may not want to talk about their life in their other home to avoid mentioning their step-parent's name and risk causing conflict.
- ▶ They may feel torn between wanting to show support for both parents, and respecting their new step-parent, especially if you talk negatively about their step-parent.

Tips for keeping it civil

- ▶ When you have contact with each other, keep things on a 'business' level.
- ▶ Think about what you want to discuss and jot down some notes.
- ▶ Don't take advantage of your child's issues with their step-parent. Your child needs someone to listen to them and help them sort out the problem, not to jump on the 'anger bandwagon'.
- ▶ Don't make your child choose sides. Children have the right to ongoing relationships with all family members, and shouldn't be placed in situations where they have to choose between you and their step-parent.
- ▶ Find common ground. Talk to the step-parent about how the kids are doing at school etc.
- ▶ Respect the other household. Don't enter your ex's home without permission.

Children don't have a limited amount of love. They can come to love a step-parent without diminishing the love they have for you.

Taking care of yourself

It's important for you to take care of yourself, so that you can be there to support your kids through changes.



For hints and tips on looking after yourself, see What About Me? To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.



Grandparents

You may not like your child's choice of a new partner but you do have a choice about how you react to the separation and new relationship. You can offer a great source of stability to your grandchildren.

There are no ex-grandparents, just ex-partners. Where possible it is important that you and your grandchildren have an ongoing relationship.



Tip: To stay in touch with your grandchildren, send emails and call regularly. Continue to send birthday cards, so they feel that your relationship with them has not changed.

Supporting the new family

If your adult child has re-partnered, consider these ways of supporting the new family:

- ▶ Make yourself available to listen to your family's concerns. Just lending an ear can be a great help.
- ▶ Try not to compare ex-partners with new partners.
- ▶ Be flexible in when you can spend time with your grandchildren.
- ▶ Consider finding accommodation close by when visiting, instead of staying with the family, as space is often an issue for re-partnered families.
- ▶ Keep traditions alive in your home – this will add to the sense of normality and stability for the children who are trying to adjust to new and different family traditions.
- ▶ Don't talk to your grandchildren about your issues with the new family – this will make them confused, and question their loyalties in the new family.
- ▶ Be there to answer questions about the practicalities of raising children.



For more tips on how to maintain your relationship with your grandchildren, see the Dealing with Separation CD-Rom. To order a free copy, see inside the front cover of this booklet.

Becoming a step-grandparent

If you are a step-grandparent try to find ways to include your new step-grandchildren to show them you care and that they are an important part of your family.

- ▶ Give them time to get used to you, and encourage them to ask questions about your family.
- ▶ Display photos and gifts from your step-grandchildren.
- ▶ If possible take the kids on an outing for ice-cream or to the local park.
- ▶ Get to know them by listening and asking questions, like what their favourite sport is, or what they dislike eating.
- ▶ If you have biological grandchildren, try to treat them all the same.
- ▶ Never criticise another member of the children's family.
- ▶ Share your traditions with them so that they don't feel left out at family gatherings.



To find a grandparents support group in your area, contact your Local Government office. See the White Pages for details.



Extra Help

Disclaimer

This list of resources is provided for your information and convenience only. The Child Support Agency does not accept responsibility for, endorse, monitor or control external resources and is not responsible for their content, services or your access or use of them.



Tip: State, territory and local governments and community organisations also fund financial and other counselling, support and information services in Australia. Check the phone book for services in your area. For website links to state governments and local councils visit www.gov.au.

Self Help Books

There are many books and pamphlets available that can help you with re-partnering after separation.

Your local library, community centre or bookshops are good places to start.

Making Mole Hills out of Mountains: A Practical Guide for Stepfamilies, Howden, Margaret.

Stepfamily Life: Why it is different and how to make it work, Newman, Margaret.

When A Parent Marries Again: Children can learn to cope with family change, Heegaard, Marge.



Websites

Step-families

Stepfamily Association of Victoria Inc

Provides information and support to stepfamilies.

www.stepfamily.org.au

Stepfamily Zone

Information on how to make stepfamilies work and be successful.

www.stepfamily.asn.au

The Stepfamily Life

Articles from parents who have re-partnered.

www.thestepfamilylife.com

Parenting

The Raising Children Network

Online guide to raising children aged 0–8, including information on behaviour, nutrition, safety, health and daily care.

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Families.gov.au

Search for families-related online government information and services.

www.families.gov.au

Community.gov.au

Provides access to online services and information for community organisations, communities and individuals.

www.community.gov.au

Parent LINK, ACT

Links to parent guides, tips and emergency fact sheets.

www.parentlink.act.gov.au

NSW Department of Community Services

Information on child protection and children's services as well as tips and advice on parenting.

www.community.nsw.gov.au



Northern Territory Families Website

Tips about parenting and living in families.
www.families.nt.gov.au/asp/index.asp

Department of Communities, Queensland

Parent tip sheets, information for families.
www.communities.qld.gov.au

Parenting SA

Access to Parent Easy Guides – information on a wide range of parenting topics from birth through to adolescence.
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Department of Human Services, Victoria

Information about families and children of all ages. Includes link to Better Health Channel (health information).
www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Community Resources Online, WA

Provides parenting tips and information and details of services for parents.
www.community.wa.gov.au

Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania

A gateway to health and human services in Tasmania.
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

Especially for children

CSA recommends parents supervise their children's online activities.

Kids Health

This US site has separate areas for kids, teens and parents – each with its own design, content and tone. It provides doctor-approved information on topics such as health, growth, development, emotional well-being, behaviour, parenting, dealing with divorce and stepfamilies.
www.kidshealth.org



It's not your fault

Information and advice to kids of all ages whose parents are separating. The site has been developed by a UK charitable organisation.
www.itsnotyourfault.org

Relationships***Relate***

Information on relationships, family, love and life.
www.relate.gov.au

Financial

Commonwealth Financial Counselling Program
Directory of CFCP funded financial counselling services listed by state.
www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/family/cfcp-cfcp_directory.htm

Child Safety***Kidsafe***

The child accident prevention foundation.
www.kidsafe.com.au

NAPCAN

Provides information about child abuse and neglect, and promotes child-friendly communities.
www.napcan.org.au



Government Agencies

Centrelink

Phone: 136 150

www.centrelink.gov.au

Provides information on all government benefits if you are:

- ▶ a parent or a guardian
- ▶ recently separated or divorced
- ▶ looking for work
- ▶ planning to study or undertake training (or currently studying or training)
- ▶ self-employed or responsible for a farm
- ▶ in a crisis or needing special help
- ▶ recently moved to Australia to settle
- ▶ someone who is ill, injured or has a disability
- ▶ caring for someone who is frail, aged, ill or who has a disability
- ▶ needing help after someone has died
- ▶ planning for or needing help in retirement.

Child Support Agency (CSA)

Phone: 131 272

Teletypewriter (TTY): 1800 631 187

www.csa.gov.au

Includes calculators, budgeting guides, and contact information for community services in your local area.

CSAonline

CSAonline is a secure Internet service which allows CSA customers access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to:

- ▶ receive various letters and statements online
- ▶ update personal details, and
- ▶ advise CSA of changes affecting child support payments.

To register go to www.csa.gov.au and follow the links.



Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Phone: 1300 653 227

www.facsia.gov.au

Services include:

- ▶ family relationship services
- ▶ parenting education programs
- ▶ early intervention services to young people and families experiencing conflict
- ▶ support for young adolescents and their families where the young people are at risk of destructive or self-destructive behaviours.

Department of Human Services

Phone: 1300 554 479

www.humanservices.gov.au

Family Assistance Office

Phone: 136 150

www.familyassist.gov.au

The Family Assistance Office provides payment information for people about Family Assistance, including:

- ▶ Family Tax Benefit Part A helps families with the cost of raising children.
- ▶ Family Tax Benefit Part B gives extra assistance to families with one main income including sole parents.
- ▶ Child Care Benefit helps families with the costs of child care.
- ▶ Maternity Payment is money to help with the extra costs of a new child (including adopted and still born children).
- ▶ Maternity Immunisation Allowance is a separate payment for children aged 18–24 months and who are fully immunised or have an approved exemption from immunisation.

Family Court of Australia

Phone: 1300 352 000

www.familylawcourts.gov.au

If you are unable to reach an agreement with your former partner through counselling or legal negotiations, you may consider making an application to the Family Law Courts (the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia).



Family Relationship Advice Line

Phone: 1800 050 321

www.familyrelationships.gov.au

8am–8pm weekdays, 10am–4pm Sat (public holidays excluded)

Assists people from families affected by relationship or separation issues.

Federal Magistrates Court of Australia

Phone: 1300 352 000

www.familylawcourts.gov.au

Services include:

- ▶ **Applications for parenting and applications relating to matrimonial property** – All applications regarding children whether the parties were married or not
- ▶ **Applications for divorce** – all applications for divorce, but not applications for nullity or validity of marriage
- ▶ **Contravention applications** – an application alleging a breach of an order of a court exercising jurisdiction under the *Family Law Act 1975*
- ▶ **Enforcement applications** – an application to enforce an order of a court exercising jurisdiction under the *Family Law Act 1975*
- ▶ **Applications for injunctions** – an application for an injunction in proceedings that have been, or will be, started in the Federal Magistrates Court
- ▶ **Child support applications** – child support applications and appeals
- ▶ **Maintenance applications** – any maintenance application, including spousal and child maintenance
- ▶ **Superannuation** – From 28 December 2002 the *Family Law Act 1975* enables superannuation interests to be treated as property and superannuation interests can be divided on a marriage breakdown.

Legal Aid OfficesNational website: www.nla.aust.net.au**Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission**

Legal Information Line: 1800 019 343 (Toll free information only)

www.ntlac.nt.gov.au**Legal Services Commission of South Australia**

Legal Information Line: 1300 366 424

www.lsc.sa.gov.au

Legal Aid Queensland

Legal Information Line: 1300 65 11 88

www.legalaid.qld.gov.au

Legal Aid Commission of NSW

Legal Information Line: 1800 806 913

www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania

Legal Information Line: 1300 366 611

www.legalaid.tas.gov.au

Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia

Legal Information Line: 1300 650 579

www.legalaid.wa.gov.au

Victoria Legal Aid

Legal Information Line: 9269 0120, 1800 677 402 (Country Callers)

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Legal Aid Commission (ACT)

Legal Information Line: 1300 654 314 (9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday)

www.legalaid.canberra.net.au

Medicare Australia

Phone: 132 011

www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

Provides information on:

- ▶ claiming and collecting for someone else
- ▶ enrolment and eligibility
- ▶ Medicare financial tax statements
- ▶ the Medicare Safety Net registration and balances
- ▶ Family Assistance Office maternity payments and lodging forms
- ▶ registering as an organ donor
- ▶ requesting an immunisation statement for your child
- ▶ information sheets are available on the website.



Other useful contacts

Beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au

beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia.

Centacare

Phone: 1300 138 070

www.centacare.org.au

Family Services Australia

Phone: 1300 365 859

www.fsa.org.au

Services include:

- ▶ Family relationships counselling, mediation and education
- ▶ Adolescent mediation and family therapy
- ▶ Family relationships skills training
- ▶ Children's contact services
- ▶ Contact orders program
- ▶ Specialised family violence services
- ▶ Primary dispute resolution
- ▶ Men and family relationships program.

Kids Helpline

Phone: 1800 551 800

www.kidshelp.com.au

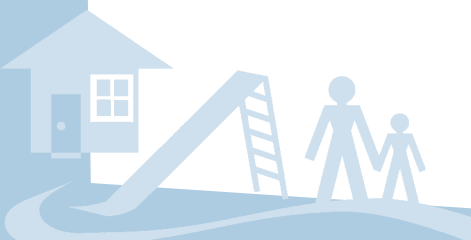
A free, confidential and anonymous, 24-hour telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between five and 18.

Lifeline

Phone: 131 114

www.lifeline.org.au

Telephone and face to face counselling services.



Mensline Australia

Phone: 1300 789 978

www.menslineaus.org.au

A service for men who are dealing with family and relationship difficulties, family break-down or separation.

Services include:

- ▶ confidential, professional and non-judgmental short-term counselling
- ▶ direct telephone linkage to local services if required
- ▶ relevant information and referrals to services and support.

Relationships Australia

Phone: 1300 364 277

www.relationships.com.au

- ▶ Counselling and Mediation
- ▶ Relationships and Parenting Skills courses
- ▶ Primary Dispute Resolution
- ▶ Post Separation Parenting
- ▶ Children's Contact Services
- ▶ Family Violence Prevention
- ▶ Trauma and Crisis Services.

Telephone Interpreting Service

Phone: 131 450

Need a service in your area?

The CSA Community Service Directory is a list of more than 2000 community service providers located across Australia. Details of services in your area can be accessed by calling **131 272** or on CSA's web site www.csa.gov.au.



'This book has helped me to realise that I am not alone and that my new family is normal'

Keith, re-partnered 2 years

'I like the tips for kids. I can find ideas for helping my kids straight away, without reading the whole book'

Kathy, re-partnered 18 months

'I never knew there were so many things to consider in a step-family. Having it all written down really helps'

Curtis, re-partnered 6 months

'This book is like a manual for step-families. It's my bible!'

Linda, re-partnered 18 months

'When my ex remarried, I thought the kids would be better off if they didn't see me as much. This booklet helped me realise that now they need me more than ever'

Richard, father

'It's good to know how my kids might react if I decide to remarry'

Kerry, mother

'I'm glad my mum met my step-dad. She is much happier and now I have two dads who care about me'

Amanda, 10 years old

'When my son married a single mother, I was worried about having new step-grandchildren. Now it's just like they are my own'

Frances, step-grandmother