

## Separation – helping the family

The point of separation is a crucial one in the divorce process. The family starts to live in two separate homes. Spouses are letting go, however slowly, of their attachment to each other as marital partners.

The emphasis now moves to the shared role as parents if they have children.

Adjustments may need to be made in coping with a host of new duties and routines concerning the children.

What about your own feelings after separation?

Just after separation, the bulk of the stress derives from loss and change. Each family member undergoes his or her own mourning process, at the very least for the loss of the intact family. Sometimes the extent of that distress prevents the couple from moving on. That is when professional help is most needed.

It can be difficult for a relationship to move on to one of necessary cooperation if one or the other parent feels unwilling or unable to do so. It can be difficult to support your child's relationship with the other parent.

All of this is happening when your own energy is being focused on realigning relationships and roles within the extended family and among your friends and colleagues. It is a time when your personal resources are spread very thin. For this reason it is better not to take on too many issues, particularly financial and legal ones, unless you really have to.

### **How is your husband or wife coping?**

At a time when tolerance and cooperation are in short supply, remember that how well the individuals cope with separation depends on how **all** the members of the family get through the process. If one member of the family is struggling, then that will affect everybody and may slow up the progress of the family as a whole in adjusting to its new life.

Respect and understanding for how your spouse is coming to terms with the new arrangements will pay dividends as the family emerges from the immediate trauma of separation. Conversely, a lack of regard for the other's feelings is likely to reinforce hostility. It may jeopardise cooperation in the future.

If an individual is having difficulties coming to terms with the breakdown of the relationship, counselling or therapy may be helpful.

Mediation may help you to discuss some of the immediate issues. See the section on [approaches](#).

### **Legal help**

At this stage, it may be helpful to take advice from a solicitor. A "one-off" consultation can be helpful in telling you what your priorities should be and addressing some of your anxieties (which may not be necessary).

It may be useful to have some legal advice about the arrangements for the children. This may simply reinforce what you are already doing. That in itself can be a comfort.

On separation, some financial questions will usually arise. Again, it can be helpful to see a solicitor to discuss these. It does not mean that you have to start legal proceedings or open the Pandora's box of the legal process. It is merely "first aid".

Many couples do not change their banking arrangements. This is fine if you can both trust each other not to spend too much money or run up debt.

What is happening about paying the bills in the future, particularly if there are two households? Again these preliminary points can be discussed with a solicitor. As with children, the advice may be simply to reassure you that you are doing the right things and not jeopardising your future position.

The solicitor is there to help you and answer your questions. You are the boss!