

# Men and Separation

Choices in Tough Times



*Relationships Australia*



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Additional writing, editing, graphics and production by Helpful Partners Pty Ltd.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank colleagues, clients and the providers and users of men's services as well as contributing Government departments, in particular funding assistance from the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

First edition, printed November 2003

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## **Why this book?**

This book is for you if you are a man who is going through a separation or divorce.

We have written this book to:

- ◆ show you are not alone
- ◆ help guide you through some constructive choices
- ◆ let you know about some services that may help you.

Relationships Australia and Mensline Australia listen to and work with men at the coalface by participating in men's groups, talking on the phone, and talking to individuals face-to-face. We're also familiar with research findings, which can help explain separation.

Separation presents many challenges for men. We would like to thank the many men whose experiences, advice and expressive words contributed towards the writing of this book.

We do not advocate separation or divorce, nor do we wish to diminish the level of distress that many women experience. Separation is an extremely difficult time for all concerned.

## **How to use this book**

This is a book to be read and reread. When you return later on to read sections, consider how your feelings may have changed since the last time.

***You will get through separation and life will get better!***

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# separation and men's experience

## Separation and men's experience

*"It was the most pain I could feel without being put in hospital."*

D.S. 41, 3 years after

Separation and divorce are among the toughest experiences you will ever have.

Men report a range of intense experiences at this time. Those listed below have been reported by men at various stages of separating. They are samples from a *very* long list:

- ◆ frustrated, powerless and angry
- ◆ relieved that differences are out in the open
- ◆ dizzy, with thoughts spinning in circles
- ◆ desperate, ready to drop off the planet
- ◆ determined to stand ground and battle to the bitter end
- ◆ aware of some hard choices having to be made
- ◆ lonely and sad
- ◆ bewildered and hurt.

These responses, all painful and distressing, are perfectly normal. It's likely you have other feelings you could add to the list.

The good news is that most men face these intense feelings and survive. Even better, they mostly go on to live fulfilling and happy lives. The not so good news is that it will take time.

*"Life does get better. Separation provides the opportunity for ongoing personal growth. Don't go it alone, there is help out there. Use it to your fullest advantage."*

F.L. 48, 4 years after

## Separation and grief

You may already know what it feels like to grieve the death of a close friend or relative. It was once thought that separation or divorce was like this. But many men report that separation is even harder to manage.

Separation is more complex and can involve:

- ◆ loss of partner
- ◆ loss of the usual family structure
- ◆ loss of the family home and home routines
- ◆ loss of friends and the social life you had
- ◆ loss of meaning and identity
- ◆ loss of a dream
- ◆ loss of involvement or contact with your children.

These losses are particularly difficult:

- ◆ if you didn't want the separation in the first place
- ◆ if you are still hanging on when there is no real hope
- ◆ if you have reduced or limited time with your children.

In addition, separation means:

- ◆ practical issues become more difficult, for example shopping and managing children
- ◆ abrupt changes in the nature of some of your adult relationships.

Small wonder then that we experience very intense emotions and may think we're going mad.

The path through separation is unlikely to be a neat straight line. You will find yourself experiencing the highs and lows that come with grief and loss. You will revisit memories and feelings you thought you'd left behind. The emotional and mental impact will test your strength and your capacity to look after yourself properly.

### **Can you identify and express your feelings?**

Some of us are not used to dealing with problems we can't solve. We may lash out in anger, drink too much, work too hard or allow ourselves to become isolated and alone.

Don't let anyone tell you how you should grieve. Find out what helps you. You may find comfort in focusing on activities like work, sport and hobbies or planning some strategies for the future.

*Refer research on men's grieving, page 30*

Talk to a mate – male or female. Talking does help. Some people might find it difficult to listen. Find someone who can.

*"I dealt with it (extreme fears) by psychological counselling and basically getting up every morning, every morning, every morning and riding my bicycle a lot."*

A.M. 46, separated 6 months



## Choices you can make

Knowing you have choices gives you the opportunity to assert some control over your life.

You may not be able to see choices easily when you are overwhelmed by intense feelings. But options do exist. With time you will begin to notice the choices that are open to you.

Here are some of the important choices other men have made as they've looked back on their own separations.

You can choose to:

- ◆ accept that it is over
- ◆ survive – one day at a time
- ◆ seek help
- ◆ hang in there for your children
- ◆ not be the victim
- ◆ not be hooked into fighting
- ◆ not be the one who drives a legal battle
- ◆ talk about it: learn, recover and rebuild.

***Be a reasonable man  
in an unreasonable situation***

### **Counselling – Talking to someone**

We all want to tell our story and feel like we've been heard. Most men who seek this kind of support say that they found it helpful and wish they'd done it sooner!

Call Mensline Australia 1300 789 978 or  
Relationships Australia 1300 364 277.

# you and your former partner

## You and your former partner

Do you remember:

- ◆ who sent out the Christmas cards each year?
- ◆ who knew all about the latest happenings in your family or neighbourhood?
- ◆ who invited friends to visit?

For many of us building and maintaining social networks was not in our job description. That was the woman's role.

### Stay in contact

Your social networks may not be so available now that you have separated. If they are still intact you might be reluctant to use them for support.

Withdrawing socially will limit the number of people you can talk to about the distressing events that have taken place. Without people around you for support you are likely to feel more isolated and alone.

The loss or lack of use of social networks increases the risk of prolonged depression, reliance on drugs and alcohol and even suicide.

Talking helps. Talk to at least one person you trust. You can ring Mensline Australia on 1300 789 978.



## Who initiated the separation?

*“It was the worse time of my life. I thought I would never smile again. I was scared and I felt alone.”* J.R. 28, 4 years after

Most men do not initiate separation. In fact only 21% of all separations were initiated by men in 1997.

### Initiators of divorces (separations)

Wife	(64%)
Husband	(21%)
Joint agreement	(15%)

(There were 55,300 registered divorces in Australia in 2001) <sup>1</sup>

## “How come I’m the one falling apart?”

If you were not the initiator of your separation you may be struggling while your former partner seems to be coping much better.

If she has been considering separation for some time it is likely she has already gone through many of the emotions you are presently feeling.

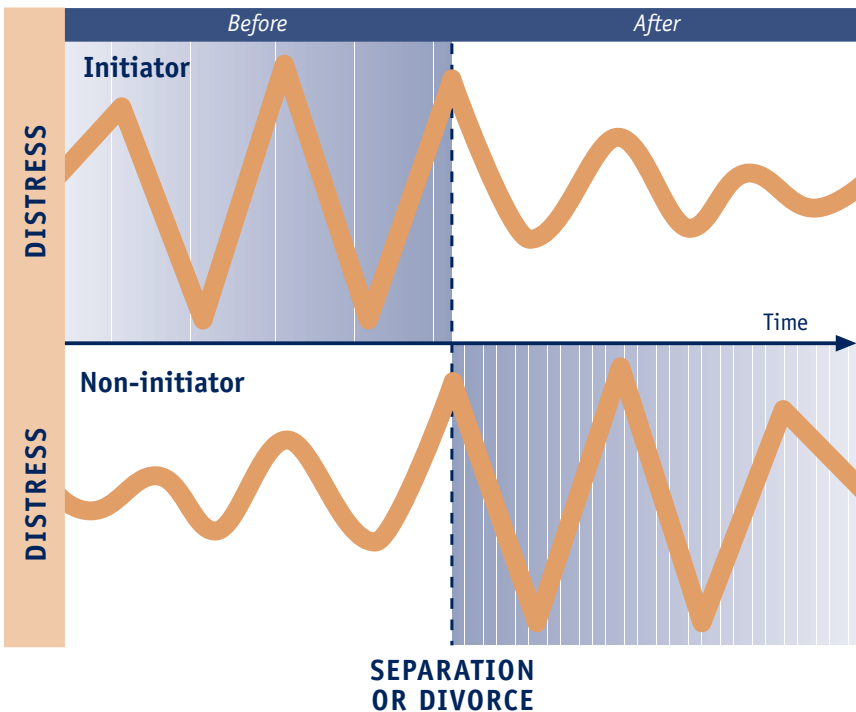
In response, you may:

- ◆ feel powerless and “shafted”
- ◆ be less prepared for separation
- ◆ feel that “something has been taken away” from you
- ◆ feel that “things are unfair”
- ◆ be in total shock or confusion after separation
- ◆ experience a variety of extreme emotions such as anger or frustration.

## Differences between the initiator and the non-initiator

Both the initiator and non-initiator have intense feelings, but they have them at different times, either before or after the separation. In the diagram you can see that the initiator has the most distress before separation, the non-initiator has most distress after separation. Either way you may feel you're on an emotional roller coaster.

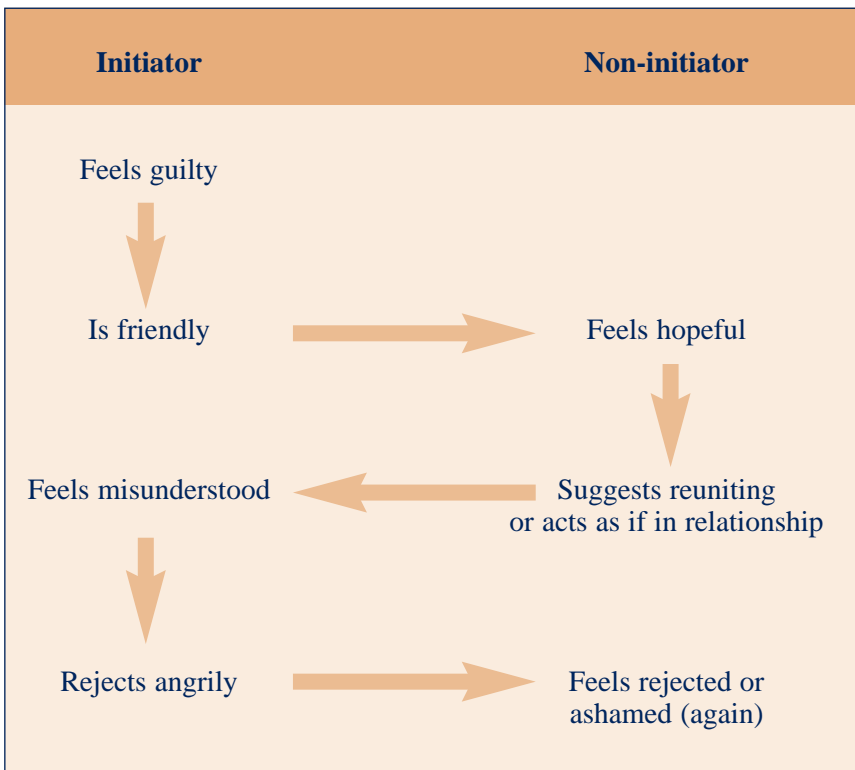
### Roller Coaster of Emotional Distress



## Mixed messages

Some men find it hard to let go and accept that a relationship has finished, hoping their former partner will change her mind. They may misread the signals and become too friendly.

Once one person begins it can set off a chain of misunderstandings which ends in arguments and distress. You may be able to recognise yourself and your former partner in the chain of events in this diagram.



## How to avoid mixed messages

Men who have found themselves caught in this painful chain recommend getting clear that the relationship has ended. They suggest:

- ◆ restricting contact with her (for example to one call per week, fortnight or month)
- ◆ restricting socialising or going out together
- ◆ restricting doing things for her
- ◆ not having sex with her
- ◆ avoiding comforting her.

Remind yourself that there is no evidence that she wants to get back together unless she specifically says so.

Separated people do sometimes rebuild a friendship together. But this may take a long time if it happens at all and usually follows a long period of non-contact. The emotional bonds created by the original relationship take a long period to disentangle.

*If it's over, it's over.  
Hanging on to false hope only prolongs  
the pain and distress.*



## Blame and guilt

If it was you who ended the relationship you may feel it was all your fault and experience guilt or cycles of shame and anger. However it is rare for one person to be totally responsible for the ending of a relationship. In the long run, it takes two to make or break a relationship.

Again, if the separation was initiated by your former partner it is very easy to find yourself blaming her. Blaming takes attention away from the pain. It gives a sense of justice in what feels like an unjust situation.

But blaming and complaining about your former partner does not help your recovery and you can end up constantly looking backwards rather than forwards.

Focus on what you can do for yourself and your children now and into the future:

- ◆ Talk with other people about new ways of responding.
- ◆ Realise that you have what it takes to get through this experience.
- ◆ Look for the constructive choices you still can make.
- ◆ Be wary of extreme views.



*“For ages I’ve been blaming everyone else. I’ve felt I didn’t have any power. My mate says I sounded like a victim.”*

A.B. 44, 23 months after

# looking after yourself

## Looking after yourself

### Ideas that have helped other men

- ◆ Be clear that separation is not like repairing a car. It can't be fixed quickly.
- ◆ Be honest with yourself and take responsibility for your life.
- ◆ Be clear about where you have choices and where you don't.
- ◆ Be aware of what is happening within and around you.
- ◆ Listen to what you are telling yourself. Be alert to signs of self-pity, hopelessness or revenge.
- ◆ Avoid the language of blame.
- ◆ Think about the consequences of what you decide to do.
- ◆ Commit to looking after yourself – continue to do the things you enjoy.

### Actions that have worked for other men

- ◆ Talk to people about how things are for you.
- ◆ Continue with normal activities and routines (work, sport, hobbies etc.).
- ◆ Experiment — find out what works for you.

### Maintain your health and well being

- select and eat sensible food (fresh fruit and vegetables don't need much cooking)
- exercise in ways you enjoy - riding a bike, jogging along a beach and better still - do it with a friend
- watch for signs of ill-health including stress, anxiety or depression
- visit your doctor earlier rather than later
- be careful with alcohol, drugs and smoking

*“I went and did the things I really enjoy like ballroom dancing and bushwalking.”*

D.S. 56, 3.5 years after

## Ask for help

*“Seek support from anywhere you can (preferably not drug based). It gets easier with time.”*

P.M. 29, 1 year after



Often the last thing men want is to seek support of any kind. Some feel so ashamed of the break-up that they go into denial. Support is available from:

- ◆ friends, family, and other separated men
- ◆ work colleagues, supervisors and employee assistance programs
- ◆ your local doctor or health centre
- ◆ community centre or counselling services
- ◆ men’s groups (see the resources section rear page).

## Never be afraid to ask. People want to help.

- ◆ Make a list of people you can talk to.
- ◆ Write down the questions you have.
- ◆ Be prepared to talk – don’t bottle it up.
- ◆ Don’t give up on people, no matter how hard it may be.

### Do a separation course

Support others while being supported yourself.

Mixed groups are available or ring Mensline Australia about men’s groups.

Check the resources section on the rear page.

### The benefit of talking it over

Counselling can open up your eyes to what is really happening and assist you to function better. It’s important to find a counsellor you can trust.

Call Mensline Australia 1300 789 978 or Relationships Australia 1300 364 277.

# fathers and children

## Fathers and children

### Children and separation

Children react to separation in different ways. The way *your* children will react depends on many factors including:

- ◆ family relationships before separation
- ◆ your children's ages and personalities
- ◆ how both parents manage the situation.

Most children will be vulnerable and have many fears, some realistic, some unfounded. Most will express strong feelings and younger children will often experience fear of abandonment and separation anxiety. This is often triggered by particular events such as saying goodbye.

But children are generally resilient in the face of major changes. These are normal reactions to an extremely stressful time.

Once the situation has stabilised, most children manage well. Occasionally some children take a while to settle down. Seek professional help, particularly if there are other difficulties in their lives such as problems at school.

### Helping your children accept separation

Explain what is happening in ways that they can understand. Make sure your children don't think it's their fault or that they can get their parents back together. Reassure them that both parents love them.

For effects of separation on children at various ages and what to do read *What about the Children?* Available from Relationships Australia.

## Residence and contact

*“My greatest concern was retaining contact with my two children at home.”*

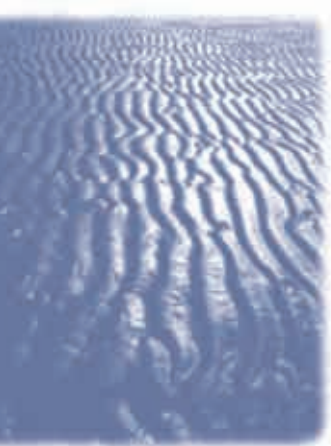
D.E. 30, 3 months after

Some of the arrangements for children after separation can include:

- ◆ living mostly with one parent (residence) and seeing the other parent at certain times (contact)
- ◆ spending equal amounts of time with each parent (shared residence).

Remember, parenting arrangements are not set in stone. They may need to be changed according to changing needs and circumstances.

Generally residence and contact arrangements reflect the ages of the children, the capacity of both parents to care for them and how the family worked before separation.



Try to work out residence and contact arrangements so that both parents continue to be involved. Usually the fewer the changes for the children the better. Different children may require different contact plans. Be sure the new arrangements work well for the children and take into account grandparents and extended family. You may find it helpful to get advice from mediators or counsellors.

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**Family and child mediation** assists separating couples to make decisions and develop plans around contact, financial and legal matters, as well as future parenting arrangements (refer page 24).

## Always a father

Separation does not mean the end of your relationship with your children. You and your former partner will continue to be parents and you will always be a father. The family will continue but in a different form. Your children will have two homes.

And while relationships will inevitably change, the challenge is to remain connected and involved with your children in a meaningful way. This will mean establishing new rituals and routines as you review your fathering role. Many fathers find being “primary carer” extremely rewarding.

**Contact with both parents is generally important for stable and happy children.**

60 percent of children say they'd like more contact although they were already seeing the absent parent. They liked:

- the loving and caring of each parent
- the positive personal characteristics of each parent.<sup>2</sup>

## Dad's house

Children are adaptable but require structure and stability. If you are moving house, it is important that children have a definite space in your home – ideally a room but at least a cupboard, storage box or shelf for possessions. These two books give lots of useful advice.

*Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes For Your Child.*  
*Me and My Kids: Parenting from a Distance.*

(Refer Suggested reading page 34)

## Being there for your children

Being there for your child or children is very important. While it may be difficult at first, new routines and ways of relating can be discovered together. Share activities like cooking, bike riding or fishing. Stay interested and in contact with their friends and start creating your own rituals for celebrating their birthdays and significant achievements. Keep in touch with their school and school activities. Children want to know you're thinking about them.

Have a special bedtime ritual with your child – e.g. a story, a little chat or prayers. A book with lots of other useful ideas is:

*On Being A Dad* (refer Suggested reading page 34).

### Consider a parenting course

It is not easy being a separated parent. There are many good courses and books that can assist you with parenting.

Call Relationships Australia 1300 364 277 or  
Family Services Australia 1300 365 859 or  
Centacare 1300 138 070 for details in your area.

*“I had to combine being the breadwinner with preparing my new home environment when the kids come and stay. Talk about multi-skilling and retraining. And at my age!”*

J.L. 52, 3 years on

***Don't give up!  
Kids need dads.***

## relating to your former partner

### Relating to your former partner

Some people believe when they separate they will no longer have to deal with their former partner. But if you have children, this is not possible – you remain linked forever as parents.

The challenge is to make the ongoing parenting relationship as manageable and as constructive as possible. This may require some work.

You can choose to be civil to your former partner, irrespective of how your former partner approaches you.

Constructive co-parenting involves establishing a businesslike relationship with your former partner. Men who have successfully managed this offer these practical tips:

- ◆ Remember why you're talking. Keep your goals uppermost.
- ◆ Use a written agenda and stick to it. Don't get drawn into arguments.
- ◆ Focus on the children, not the past relationship.
- ◆ Hold meetings at a neutral location if possible.
- ◆ Use telephone, email or a communication book if face-to-face discussion is a problem.
- ◆ Consider mediation if you have difficulty.
- ◆ Don't be inflexible. Children have commitments and special occasions will arise.
- ◆ Do not breach any court order that prohibits contact.



## What if “businesslike” doesn’t work?

In some situations where there is high conflict, a businesslike interaction may not be possible. Some parents, for a variety of reasons, are not supportive of the children’s relationship with the other parent or make the children “the meat in the sandwich”. In these situations the unsupported parent can feel distressed, powerless and angry and in more extreme situations can become alienated from their children.

If you are in a high-conflict situation there are certain steps you can take:

- ◆ Examine your own behaviour and what you can do to alter the situation. Talk this through with a counsellor or mediator.
- ◆ Arrange mediation with your ex-partner and focus on practical issues.
- ◆ Do not use the children as a way of getting even.
- ◆ If all else fails consider legal advice and action.
- ◆ Don’t give up, but remain realistic.
- ◆ Make use of Children’s Contact Centres (see page 32).



***No matter how hostile the situation, many men find strength in maintaining their dignity and fighting “fairly”. Try to be a reasonable man in an unreasonable situation and remember: children get older and the situation will change.***

Stop any negotiation if the discussion becomes abusive.

Stay well away from your former partner if either of you is affected by drugs and alcohol.

## Violence and abusive behaviour by you

Your separation may be argumentative and volatile and there is a danger that your behaviour may escalate into violence or abuse. Abuse may include physical assault, verbal and emotional harassment, stalking, threats of harm to yourself or the family and damage to property. Some of these behaviours are criminal offences. Abuse is never an acceptable solution.

The conflict you are experiencing now may be part of a familiar pattern you had in the past with your former partner. It probably contributed to the breakdown of your relationship.

If you are being abusive, consider the consequences:

- ◆ Your children will be afraid of you.
- ◆ Your access to your children will be restricted.
- ◆ Assault charges and legal intervention orders can be taken out on you.

Good choices available to you now are to:

- ◆ stop all behaviour that is abusive and controlling
- ◆ take responsibility for your past and present actions, i.e. stop blaming, justifying, or denying that there is a problem
- ◆ seek support to change through a program at Relationships Australia or call Mensline Australia 1300 789 978
- ◆ seek counselling support through your local doctor, or health centre.

### More information

For some specific guidelines on handling conflict with your former partner, print out the two page resource:

*Managing Your Differences* [www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)

## Violence and abusive behaviour by your former partner

Some men are abused or threatened by their former partners. If this is your experience:

- ◆ avoid retaliating in kind – this only increases the risk of harm.
- ◆ take steps to look after yourself if you feel unsafe. This may include:
  - minimising contact with her
  - using alternative ways of communicating
  - meeting in a place other than your home or hers
  - being accompanied by a friend.
- ◆ initiate legal intervention in extreme circumstances, e.g. charges can be laid or a court order taken out.
- ◆ contact your local police if there is a serious threat to safety.

In all circumstances take responsibility for your behaviour and consider the consequences of what you do.



## Violence and children

Children can be frightened when they witness strong emotions and violence. Keep conflict away from children. You have to work to keep their trust. Children's Contact Centres can provide a safe place for handover or seeing your children (refer page 32).

# getting a settlement

## Getting a settlement

The best outcomes occur when two people negotiate their own mutually acceptable agreement about:

- ♦ parenting and contact arrangements – who the resident parent will be and what contact the other parent will have
- ♦ child support payments – who will pay how much to assist the other parent with child-related costs
- ♦ property settlement - how your cash and assets will be split up.

Reaching an agreement through your own goodwill and resources is best for all concerned, especially the children. You will probably need to use professional services such as legal advice and family and child mediation to help formalise your arrangements.

A very small percentage of couples are unable or unwilling to reach agreement in this way. If the settlement arrangements have to be decided for you by a court, it may well add to the confusion, stress and powerlessness you already feel.

Of those who divorce:

- 50% manage to sort matters out between themselves. They may use lawyers, mediation and counselling but will not go to court.
- Another 45% make Court applications, but most do not go to trial. They sort matters out through mediation or conferences.
- Only 5% of Court applications go to trial.<sup>3</sup>

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Special laws apply to separation where the partners are not married. Seek legal advice in your State or Territory.

## Do your legal homework

*“(I was) unaware of my choices and obligations and also the ability to negotiate.”*

P.L. 38, 5 years after

It is important that you get good advice. Talk to friends or other contacts but remember that every person’s situation is different.

Because there are legal issues involved, especially around property and finances, legal advice is essential at some stage.

Legal advice does not mean a court battle. Good legal advice should provide sound information and explore options for settlement that may or may not involve taking legal action.

- ◆ Ring your state Law Society for names of family law specialists.
  - ◆ Look up Legal Centres under Community Advisory Services in the Yellow Pages.
  - ◆ Go to a Family Court seminar or ask them about mediation.
  - ◆ Ring the Family Law Hotline 1800 050 321.
  - ◆ Visit the Family Law Online website at [www.familylaw.gov.au](http://www.familylaw.gov.au).
  - ◆ Ring Legal Aid to see if you qualify for legal assistance.
- See [www.nla.aust.net.au](http://www.nla.aust.net.au) for phone numbers.



*“If I’d known more about law, many decisions would have been different. Get advice early.”*

T.F. 47, 4 years after

If your former partner has got a lawyer, her lawyer will be working hard to obtain the best outcome for her. Don't sign anything until you have got professional advice on how the law applies to your particular case.

Find a lawyer who is experienced in family law – many will give you a free initial consultation.

- ◆ Use your lawyer as a consultant. You decide how you wish to proceed.
- ◆ Ask a friend to take notes.
- ◆ Get a clear estimate of costs at each stage.
- ◆ Get a clear understanding of the likely outcomes.
- ◆ If you are not clear, ask questions. Your lawyer is working for you.
- ◆ Feel confident to get a second opinion.

*“There is a huge amount of information to take in. Do a separation course.”*

T.W. 37, 3 months after

### **Do your research before you visit a lawyer**

It will reduce costs because you will be clear about what questions to ask.

You, more than anyone else, stand to gain from understanding the system.

### **Don't give away the store!**

Some men give away cars, furniture or pay off credit cards.

Make no commitments immediately after separating.

Don't sell yourself short or go for too much.

Be clear and realistic about the outcomes you are seeking.

## Negotiation methods

Negotiation is hard work but if you don't attempt it, you may find yourself with:

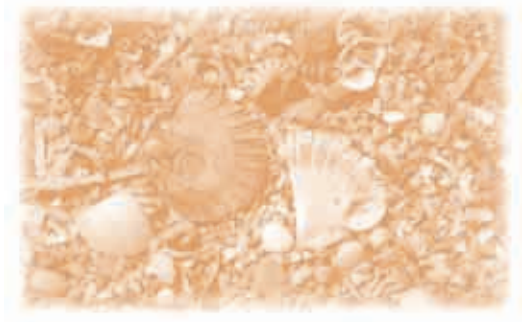
- ◆ other people (lawyers, judges) deciding things for you
- ◆ expensive legal processes taking over
- ◆ little or no contact with your children
- ◆ parenting arrangements that don't work for you
- ◆ resentment towards your former partner.

If it is impossible to discuss things directly with your former partner, family and child mediation can be a good solution.

Family and child mediation assists separating couples to discuss and make decisions about the practical aspects of their relationship and to develop a workable plan for the future. This can include sorting out assets and financial matters, as well as future parenting responsibilities.

You and your former partner can meet with a mediator who understands family law and is skilled at assisting couples negotiate their own agreements. Mediators do not take sides, represent either party, or provide financial or legal advice.

Relationships Australia and the Family Court offer mediation services. Contact them for their fee structure (refer page 32).



## The final settlement

### 1. Parenting and property

If you wish to have legally binding orders about property or parenting, you can prepare or have a lawyer prepare an application to Court for “Consent Orders”.

These applications must be in the required form setting out details of how the children will be cared for and/or how the assets and debts will be divided between you and your former partner. Documents must be signed by both of you and, once processed by the Court, they become legally binding.

### 2. Child support payments

The Child Support Agency (CSA) has very clear rules to work out how much child support must be paid. It depends on:

- ◆ your gross annual income and your partner’s
- ◆ the number of children
- ◆ how many nights per year your children will spend with each parent.

Within these rules parents have flexibility and a range of options.

Call CSA for all child support enquiries on 131272 or check out their web site at [www.csa.gov.au](http://www.csa.gov.au) where you will find child support calculators and all sorts of helpful information.

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When courts determine parenting and contact arrangements, their decision has to be based on what is best for the children.

## Going to trial

If all else fails and you are unable to reach agreement, a Family Court trial may be needed where a judge will determine your parenting arrangements and property settlement.

This happens in only a few cases but once the Court action is over, you will need to co-parent again. So keep the longer term view in mind. Sometimes the fight can be more damaging than the issue. What you think should happen may be different from what eventually occurs, so think carefully before going to trial.



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### Adversarial system

The nature of court proceedings is that it sets one person against another. This can cause even more conflict with your former partner.

Choosing this option will be costly and stressful and the outcome may well be uncertain. Many people end up spending more than they are fighting about in the first place.

Children in particular can find it distressing when their parents fight over them in court.

Remember, this path leads to someone else making decisions about your future.

## Dealing with “the system”

Remember that all institutions are acting according to legislation, not making things difficult just for you.

- ◆ Be courteous and respectful with the employees of institutions you deal with. This brings out the most helpful, human best in them.
- ◆ Ask questions if you don't understand - understanding new information is especially difficult under stress.
- ◆ Avoid blame or recriminations either towards your former partner or “the system”.
- ◆ If the service is unsatisfactory ask to talk to a supervisor or utilise their customer complaints procedure.

Gather all relevant information before you act or make decisions. Seek advice from the Family Law Hotline 1800 050 321 or talk about counselling with Mensline Australia 1300 789 978 or Relationships Australia 1300 364 277 or other services listed on pages 32 and 33.

Do all you can to reach agreement with your former partner. This will avoid or minimise your engagement with “the system”.



# the future

## **The future**

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Further down the track, many men report positive and healthy changes in their lives. Some things may still not be easy, but many men discover aspects of themselves that they never knew existed. There is recognition that life changes, and in meeting that challenge many talk of finding inner strengths and resources. Men who take up self-development courses report establishing new and important social and recreational networks that sustain them for many years.

### **New relationships and moving on**

Close relationships are important to everyone. Often after separation there is a great need to reconnect and to feel wanted and cared for once more.

Some men jump straight into a new relationship which may ease the pain initially. While this can often be a healing experience, it may also not allow sufficient time and space to sort through some of your feelings from your past relationship.

Whatever occurs for you, we suggest you take it easy.

- ◆ Make sure you have time to grieve the loss of the relationship.
- ◆ Join a men's separation group to reflect, learn and grow.
- ◆ Give yourself time to re-establish your own independent interests, pastimes and social networks.
- ◆ Look after yourself.

Some men join interest groups such as dancing or bushwalking, and enjoy mixing company and companionship and remain unattached. Some establish a committed relationship that includes children from more than one relationship as a blended family in one or more houses.

There is never one way which is “right”. It is a matter of choosing wisely and finding out what works for you.

Read the booklet *Partners – A Guide to Successful Relationships* available from Relationships Australia.

*“I think I am better at building a sound relationship based on openness and communication. I have gained a new partner; at the moment things are really good.”*

J.R. 41, separated 4 years



# research about men and separation

## Research about men and separation

### Separation and divorce

In 2001:

- the median age for men to marry was 31
- the median age for men to divorce was 42
- 42% of marriages end in divorce<sup>4</sup>

### Men and their children after separation

- 12% of separated children live with their fathers
- nearly one third (30%) of all children living with only one natural parent have either no or next to no contact with the other natural parent.
- 18% of children live in a 1 parent family
- 8% of children live in a step or blended family<sup>5</sup>

### Men's grieving

Some men:

- divert feelings into normal routines (work, hobbies)
- let off steam participating in team sports and solitary exercise
- express feelings in humour
- talk about their ideas for coping
- talk about strategies for dealing with practical concerns (house, parenting)<sup>6</sup>

### **Impact of separation and divorce on men**

- stress-related symptoms\* peak at the time of separation
- 33% continue to report stress-related symptoms 1-2 years after separation
- 60% report coping well 10 years later
- 33% claimed 10 years later they would never get over the divorce
- 67% stated 10 years later that they still felt dumped
- separated marital status is a risk factor for male suicide (not causal)<sup>7</sup>

\* Stress related symptoms include headaches, sleeplessness, reduced energy, poor appetite, & excessive tiredness.

A recent Queensland study found that separated men are 9 times more likely to take their lives than separated women.<sup>4</sup>

### **New partners and new families**

Blended families become complex, particularly when children from your former partnership are staying with children from another partnership. This can place a strain on parent-child relationships.

- 80% of men will re-partner within 5 years<sup>8</sup>
- 69% of women will re-partner within 5 years<sup>8</sup>
- over 50% of second marriages end in divorce<sup>5</sup>

# where to get further assistance

## Where to get further assistance

**Contact any of these national organisations.  
They can refer you to services in your area.**

**Centacare Australia** **1300 138 070**  
Australia-wide services for separating families and individuals.

**Centrelink** **13 61 50**  
[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)  
Information on all government benefits.

**Child Support Agency** **13 12 72**  
[www.csa.gov.au](http://www.csa.gov.au)  
Ensures all parents meet their child support responsibilities. Website includes information about services in your local area and calculators for child support.

**Children's Contact Services**  
Provide a safe, neutral location for handover of children between resident and non-resident parent, and for supervised contact. Information about these services can be obtained from  
[www.facs.gov.au/frsp](http://www.facs.gov.au/frsp) **1800 050 321**

**Commonwealth Financial Counselling**  
Free financial counselling services to people in low income groups experiencing financial crisis. Information about these services can be obtained from  
[www.facs.gov.au](http://www.facs.gov.au) **1800 050 321**

**Community Legal Services**  
Provide legal assistance to disadvantaged people. Information about these services can be obtained from  
[www.familylaw.gov.au](http://www.familylaw.gov.au) **1800 050 321**

**Debt Counselling and Mediation Centre** **1300 731 722**  
[www.debt-rs.com.au](http://www.debt-rs.com.au)  
Assists people with debt crises and money management skills.

**Family Assistance Office** **13 61 50**  
[www.familyassist.gov.au](http://www.familyassist.gov.au)  
Payments information for people receiving family assistance.

**Family Law Hotline****1800 050 321**

A free telephone service that assists the public with information about the family law system including services available for separating families and individuals.

**Family Law Online**

[www.familylaw.gov.au](http://www.familylaw.gov.au)

Provides access to comprehensive online family law system resources, including information about relevant services.

**Family Services Australia****1300 365 859**

[www.fsa.org.au](http://www.fsa.org.au)

Australia-wide services for separating families and individuals.

**Legal Aid Offices**

[www.nla.aust.net.au](http://www.nla.aust.net.au)

Adelaide	1300 366 424	Tasmania	1300 366 611
Alice Springs	(08) 8951 5377	Melbourne	(03) 9269 0234
Brisbane	1300 651 188	Perth	1300 650 579
Canberra	(02) 6243 3411	Sydney	(02) 9219 5000
Darwin	(08) 8999 3000		

**Mensline Australia****1300 789 978**

[www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)

email: [talkitover@menslineaus.org.au](mailto:talkitover@menslineaus.org.au)

**Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs**

[www.dimia.gov.au](http://www.dimia.gov.au)

**Regional Law Hotline****1800 050 400**

Legal information and advice for people living in rural and remote areas.

**Relationships Australia****1300 364 277**

[www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au)

Australia-wide services for separating families and individuals.

**Website links to all local councils**

[www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov/local.html](http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov/local.html)

Also see the Local Government section of your telephone book.

## Suggested reading

There are many books and pamphlets available that can help you with parenting and separation. Some are downloadable from websites, or a local library, community centre or bookshop can assist you.

Steve Biddulph. *Manhood: An Action Plan for Changing Men's Lives*. 2nd edition. Finch Publishing, Sydney, 1995.

Mark Bryan. *The Prodigal Father: Reuniting Fathers and Their Children*. Three Rivers Press, 1997.

Child Support Agency. *Me and My Kids: Parenting from a Distance*. Commonwealth of Australia, 2002.

Order free from [www.csa.gov.au](http://www.csa.gov.au) or [www.familycourt.gov.au](http://www.familycourt.gov.au)

Thomas R. Golden. *Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing*. Golden Healing Publishing, 1996.

Michael Green. *Fathers After Divorce*. Finch Publishing, Sydney 1998.

Isolina Ricci. *Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes For Your Child*. Collier Books, 1982.

### **Relationships Australia publications**

*On Being a Dad*. 2003.

*What About the Children?* 2003.

Call 1300 364 277 for details.

# references

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3. Attorney Generals Department, *Family Law Reform Act 1995*. Discussion Paper. AGD Family and Administrative Law Branch, 1996.
4. P. Baume & others, *Suicides in Queensland 1990-95: A Comprehensive Study*. Australian Institute for Suicide Research-Queensland Health, Griffith University, 1998.
5. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Marriages and Divorces*. 2001.
6. Kenneth J. Doka & Terry Martin, "Masculine Responses to Loss: Clinical Implications." *Journal of Family Studies*, vol. 4, 2 (October 1998), p. 143-158.
7. Peter Jordan, *The Effects of Marital Separation on Men Ten Years On*. National Forum on Men and Family Relationships. Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra, 1998.
8. Funder, Harrison and Weston, *Settling Down: Pathways of Parents after Divorce*. Monograph 13. Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1993, p. 58.

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# Relationships Australia

**1300 364 277**

Relationships Australia provides counselling, mediation, courses in family violence prevention, relationship skills, family skills and parenting, and other relationship services. Branches across all states and territories of Australia.

[www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au)



**1300 789 978 (24 hours - seven days a week)**

Mensline Australia provides telephone counselling, information and referral services for men with family and relationship concerns. This service is available from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call.

[www.menslineaus.org.au/home.html](http://www.menslineaus.org.au/home.html)

email: [talkitover@menslineaus.org.au](mailto:talkitover@menslineaus.org.au)

