

Living Apart Together

Hints and Tips

For all of us, the economic situation is difficult. If you are separating or going through a divorce, the recession may mean that you have to spend rather longer living together than you might have hoped.

If you find yourself having to live apart but together, it is important to try and find a workable way to continue to share your home – especially if you are parents.

Below are a few hints and tips that may be of help.

Try to agree some 'ground rules' – especially around subjects that are likely to prompt argument. If you can't do this together – think about using a professional – such as a mediator – to help you to discuss and agree things calmly.

Don't try to 'score points' against each other or to deliberately enrage each other - the situation is tough enough.

Get short breaks from one another – a week-end with a friend, a day out – or even a short holiday will help you to see things from a fresh perspective.

Try a hobby that will both get you out of the house for a short while – but will also help to keep your stress levels down – yoga, meditation, squash – or even joining a local choir are all ways that might help – and will increase your circle of friends.

Get some personal support – think about using counselling – or perhaps a friend who can be supportive – but impartial – someone who fuels your anger about your soon to be ex may not be helpful!

If you can, try to stay cost efficient whilst you are still under the same roof Continuing to share costs in regard to food, housekeeping items etc. will be better than doubling costs unnecessarily.

Play fair in regard to new partners or relationships – and don't expect to use your home as a base for entertaining! – this is particularly important if you are a parent.

Don't lose heart – no recession lasts forever – keep thinking creatively, get specialist advice in regard to finances, property and the lettings market.

If you are a parent . . .

Put your children first - This is a tough situation for you – and an even tougher one for them. Try to ensure that you consult each other and continue to work together as parents.

Do not assume that older children and teenagers will find the situation less difficult than younger ones or that they see the world as you do. Older children and teenagers may find this situation very difficult – and embarrassing.

Stress, tension and especially arguments can be very damaging for children and teenagers – reassure them that although this is a difficult time – it will get better and that although you and their other parent have decided not to live together anymore – your love for them will not change.

Think of ways in which you can ensure the children get a break too - stays with grandparents or special adults in their lives or sleepovers with friends will give them (and you) some space.

Think carefully about delaying telling the children because of your inability to make a practical move. It will be much worse for them either to overhear it, hear from somebody else (who may not realise they don't know) or for you to blurt it out in an angry moment.

When you tell them, agree ahead of time what you are going to say, keep it short and avoid blame. Above all, stay calm – if things go wrong, explain to them that this is a difficult time for the two of you – and that you both love and want what's best for them. Sometimes, using an example with younger children – i.e. what it's like when they don't get on with a friend anymore may be helpful.

Answer their questions where you can and be honest when you can't because the current situation doesn't allow you to.

Remember children do not need a blow by blow account of the ending of your relationship – but a clear reassurance that you remain their parents and you will make all your decisions about the future with them at the top of your list.

Do not involve your children in your disagreements – and do not ask them to take sides – it is all too easy to involve them (especially older children and teenagers) – but remember your children love you both and see themselves as part of each of you – criticising their other parent may lead them to believe that you are also criticising a part of them – or may force them into taking sides – which is damaging for all of you.

If you have extended family – ask for their help – especially with the children – but agree with them beforehand that ‘badmouthing’ your ex is off limits.

Start thinking about how you can best share your children’s care in preparation for the time when they will have two homes. This will also allow each of you to take some time out from the situation.

Useful contacts

For children and young people

www.childline.org.uk or call Childline's free 24 hour helpline on 0800 1111. Lines are busy so please keep trying and you will get through. Childline provides lots of information including advice on living as part of a stepfamily.

www.cafcass.gov.uk. Cafcass looks after the interests of children in family courts. If your parents are going to court because they can't agree on who will look after you, visit the children's section.

www.divorceaid.co.uk/child/children.htm Read the children's section on this site, which is all about divorce. It discusses your emotions and has details of helplines, online advice, useful sites and books.

www.nyas.net (**National Youth Advocacy Service**) Advice and information for young people, including free legal advice, on 0800 61 61 01 or email help@nyas.net.

NSPCC - Call the NSPCC's free 24 hour helpline on 0800 800 500. You can email help@nspcc.org.uk for advice and they will reply within 24 hours.

www.worriedneed2talk.org.uk, the NSPCC's site for young people that includes lots of info about all sorts of problems, including family break-ups.

www.youngminds.org.uk Visit the children and young people's pages on this website for help and advice.

CD-rom

Many schools have a copy of a CD-rom called ***Coping with family change***. Try looking in the school library for it, or ask a teacher. You can download a clip from the CD-rom at www.coping-with-life.org.uk

For Parents

Please note that there is helpful information for parents as well as for children and young people on the websites detailed above in addition to those listed below.

www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk – website providing information and fact sheets for parents who are separating or parenting apart.

www.parentlineplus.org.uk – website providing information, on-line community and a range of publications for all parents.

www.separatedfamilies.org.uk. The Centre for Separated Families. The centre has an excellent email advice service dealing with issues from benefits advice to the court process (email: advice@separatedfamilies.org.uk) Tel: 0845 478 6360.

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org The Fatherhood Institute describes itself as the UK's Fatherhood Think Tank. The website has a lot of useful information and links for Fathers – and a section for separated Fathers

www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk This helpline provides information about mediation, how to find a mediator (including links to finding a mediator in your area) and what to expect. Family mediation can help in resolving all sorts of family-related disputes. Tel. 0845 60 26 627

www.resolution.org.uk – An association representing over 5700 family lawyers committed to the constructive resolution of family disputes. Home of the new '**Parenting after Parting**' initiative. See the [Parenting After Parting pages](#) on the website for information and advice for separated parenting and supporting your children through separation and beyond.

General Advice

www.nacab.gov.uk Citizens' Advice (formerly Citizens Advice Bureaux) Citizens' Advice has offices across the country and can help with a broad range of issues – from debt advice to housing – and lots of things in between. The website also has a link to information specific to separation and divorce. Local offices are often very busy – but don't give up – and use the website for general help.

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk Free, confidential advice on any debt issues. Tel: 0808 808 4000.

www.advicenow.org.uk The website of Advice Now – an organisation offering advice on a huge range of subjects – from benefits to divorce to dealing with bailiffs – they also have a range of downloadable guides.

www.direct.gov.uk – Government website – go to Parents for further information and help on a range of parenting issues.