



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

What happens next?

Information for kids about
separation and divorce



Canada

What happens next? Information for kids about separation and divorce

Information contained in this guide may be reproduced, in part or in whole, and by any means, for personal or public non-commercial purposes, without charge or further permission, unless otherwise specified.

You are asked to:

- exercise due diligence in ensuring the accuracy of the materials reproduced;
- indicate both the complete title of the materials reproduced, as well as the author organization; and
- indicate that the reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada and that the reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.

Commercial reproduction and distribution is prohibited except with written permission from the Department of Justice Canada. For more information, please contact us at webadmin@justice.gc.ca.

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, represented
by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, 2026

The Family Law and Youth Justice Policy Section, Department of Justice, would like to thank the Community Legal Education Association of Manitoba for sharing the text of their publication *Family Law for Children*, upon which this booklet is based, as well as the many people who shared their expertise in developing this booklet.

Cat. No. J2-215/2026E-PDF
ISBN 978-0-660-98126-0

Aussi disponible en français

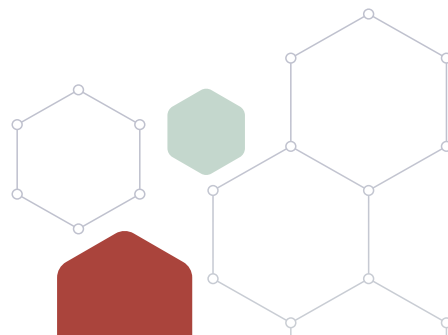


Table of Contents

Note to parents and those with parenting responsibilities for children.....	4	Chapter Five: What happens if there is violence?.....	33
Introduction.....	5	Tommy’s family finds shelter	34
Chapter One: Everything is changing ..	9	Abuse is wrong!.....	35
Farah’s story.....	15	Chapter Six: Blended families and extended families	39
Chapter Two: Coming up with a plan for you	17	Melody’s story.....	40
Things change for Randy	18	Aunt Janine moves in	42
Mom leaves Dad and everyone gets help.....	20	Chapter Seven: When one parent moves far away.....	43
Chapter Three: Decisions, decisions, decisions	21	Olivier’s big move?	44
Mohamed’s in the middle	22	Chapter Eight: Nothing is perfect, but... ..	47
Nela is not just a babysitter	23	Pearl’s birthday present.....	48
Emma shares her views.....	26	Appendix 1: Activities	51
“Our feet are sore!”	28	Appendix 2: More Information	59
Chapter Four: Living in two homes....	29	Appendix 3: Legal words used in this booklet.....	61
Jacques gets used to it	30		
When things work out.....	32		

Note to parents and those with parenting responsibilities for children

This booklet has two purposes. First, it's meant to help children learn some basic facts about family law and give them an idea of the processes that parents may go through when they separate.

Second, it's meant to help children realize that it's normal for them to have an emotional response to the divorce of their parents. The booklet encourages children to think about talking to someone they trust – like parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts or family friends, neighbours or someone from their community, such as their school, church, synagogue or mosque.

The language and activities in the booklet are designed for children. However, some children may need help reading the booklet.

Other children may want help. They may want an adult they trust to work through the booklet with them – helping them

understand key legal concepts and cope with any sense of loss, anger, confusion or anxiety.

The booklet is designed to be read all the way through or just in chapters. Kids can read only the chapters that interest them. They can always go back to other chapters later if they need to.

Because this is a booklet for children, a lot of technical, legal information has been left out. This booklet only provides very general information because family law is a complex subject and some aspects of family law are different in each Canadian province and territory.

A section listing more sources of information and sources of support has been included near the end of the booklet. This list will help kids and adults find ways to get more information.



Introduction



So... your parents have decided to separate. You probably have a lot of questions, like “What does this mean for me?” and “Do I still have a family?” or “Will I always feel this bad?” or “Will anyone listen to me?”

You’re not alone. A lot of other kids have wondered the same things.

Some of the information in this booklet is about the **law**.

In Canada, family law is a bit different in each province and territory. That’s why this booklet can only cover very general information. Look at the back of this booklet for ways to find more information. Or, ask someone close to you to help you get the answers you need.

Legal words are words people use when they talk about the law. The legal words in this booklet are explained on the pages of the booklet and also at the end of the booklet.

The **law** is a collection of important rules that people must follow.

Divorce is about the law and about feelings.



Why are potatoes good detectives?

Answer: Because they keep their eyes peeled.

The rest of the information in the booklet is about thoughts and feelings. The short stories will show you what other kids have been through when their parents separate. These stories won't be the same as the story of your own family because every family is different. But, they may help you figure out your own feelings.

Near the end of the booklet are some activities that you can try doing. Find the ones you think would help you. Try to have some fun while you do them.

There is a lot of information in this booklet. If you don't know where to start, try asking someone you trust (your parents, a relative or even a teacher) to read it with you.

You can take your time reading this booklet and you can take your time thinking about it. If you want, you can read part of it now, and save the rest for later. It's up to you.

You may find parts of the booklet upsetting. It's a good idea to talk to someone you trust when things worry or upset you. But, you may decide it wouldn't be a good idea for you to do that right now, and it would be better to wait. Do whatever feels best to you.





Remember...

- Your family has changed, but you're still part of a family.
- You didn't cause your parents to separate.
- You don't have to choose between your parents just because they don't live together.
- It's normal to be sad or even angry after your parents separate.
- Find someone you trust to talk to.
- You are not alone; many children go through this.
- You may have friends whose parents have separated. Your experience won't be exactly the same as theirs because there's no one else quite like you. You are unique. Your thoughts and feelings are important.
- And remember, your voice counts!



Chapter One:
**Everything
is changing**

The family

All families are different. You may only have one parent living with you. You may have stepparents. Your grandparents or aunts or uncles may live with you.

No matter what your family looks like, it's your family and it's important to you. Anytime there are big changes in a family it affects all the members of that family. This means you too!

How things might change

Separation and **divorce** are all about change.

But here are some things that won't change: your parents still care about you, and they still have to take care of you.

Taking care of you includes giving you affection and love, and also making decisions about where you go to school, what you can do after school and taking you to the doctor when you are sick.

If your parents were married, they need to go through a legal process to get a divorce. After they get the divorce, they won't be married to each other anymore.


One or both of your parents may get married again after they divorce, or they may find another person to live with. If that happens, you may have new people in your family. Even with all these changes, your parents are still your parents. They still have to look out for you until you are grown up.

Separation means your parents live in different places – a different house or apartment and sometimes in a different city, province or even a different country.

When parents who have lived together as a couple decide they don't want to be a couple any more, we say they are **separated**.

Parents who were married and then separate can get a **divorce**, which means they are not married any more.

After your parents separate, they have to make decisions about taking care of you, which means they have to decide on a **parenting arrangement**. This usually includes things like how much time you will spend with each parent and things each parent will do to take care of you.



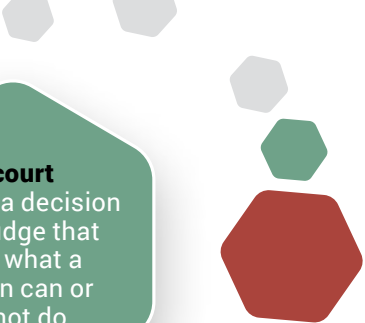
No matter where they live, they will have to work out a **parenting arrangement** for you.

There are many ways your parents could come up with a parenting arrangement. No matter how they come up with the arrangement, it will say where you're going to live and it may spell out your schedule, who is going to pay for what, and who will take you to activities, sign your report card, meet you off the bus and stay with you when you're sick.

Parenting arrangements are usually written down in a parenting agreement or they can be part of a **court order** made by a **judge**.

There are lots of terms used in parenting agreements and court orders. The **Divorce Act** uses **parenting time**, **decision-making responsibility** and **contact**. In some provinces and territories, the words *custody* and *access* are used. In others, words like *care* and *control* and *guardianship* are used. Each of these terms has its own meaning.

Another thing that won't change after your parents separate – they will still be responsible for paying for things you need, like food, clothing, and a place to live.



A **court order** is a decision by a judge that says what a person can or cannot do.

A **judge** is a person in court who can make decisions about what happens after parents separate or divorce.

The **Divorce Act** is a law that tells parents and judges what the rules are when parents get divorced.

Parenting time is the time when each of your parents is responsible for looking after you.

This means that your parents will have to work out a way to pay for these things now that they aren't living in the same place. The money one parent pays to your other parent to spend on taking care of you is called **child support**.

Sometimes a parent doesn't pay the child support they are supposed to. This can cause problems. You don't have to worry about being involved in this. It is up to parents to deal with it.

Court

Your parents may have to go to court if they can't agree on a parenting arrangement or some other issues that they need to deal with because they are separated. (You probably won't have to go to court at all. Most kids don't.)

To get ready for court, your parents may each hire their own lawyer to give them advice and prepare the right documents for court. Family law lawyers are people who help parents work out problems about separation and divorce. These lawyers are trained to understand family law and help parents understand how family law affects them.

Decision-making responsibility is the responsibility your parents have to make really important decisions about you, like where you will go to school.

Contact is the time that people other than your parents can spend with you.

Child support is money that one of your parents gives to your other parent to help pay the costs of things you need like food and clothes.

The court documents can be about one or many topics. For example, they may be about getting a divorce, or setting up a parenting arrangement for you and your brothers and sisters. They could also be about money or other things your parents will have to deal with now that they don't live together.

Lawyers may also help each parent prepare documents that describe what has happened in your family. Each parent tells the story from their own point of view.

Going through the court process may take a long time. Often, before going to court, parents will meet with a family law professional. The name used for these professionals is different across Canada. They could be called a mediator, counsellor, or dispute resolution officer. Whatever they're called, they will try to help your parents come to an agreement about their separation or divorce.



If your parents still don't agree after meeting with a family law professional, they may need to go to court. In these situations, the judge makes the final decisions about parenting arrangements, child support payments and where you will live. These decisions are written in a court order. The judge's decision may not be the one you might want, but it will be made in your **best interests**.

In some places in Canada, when parents can't agree on parenting arrangements, a judge may decide that someone else, like a social worker or a psychologist, should make a recommendation about the parenting arrangement that would be in your best interests. They may ask to talk to you. If they do, it will give you a chance to tell someone how you see things.



Making decisions in your **best interests** means that everybody who is involved in deciding where you should live and who should take care of you has to think about what is best for you.

Farah's story

Eight months after Farah was born, her dad moved away and Farah and her mom began their lives together without him.

All that happened so long ago that Farah only remembers living with her mom. Her dad sends some money to help pay the rent on their apartment, for daycare while her mom is working, and for food, clothing and the other things Farah needs like dental care. Every few months, Farah sees her dad. If she misses him, she can call him. She always loves it when he calls her.

Sometimes things get difficult when he doesn't send the money on time and her mom starts worrying. Luckily her mom and dad are usually able to work out the money problems themselves.



What kind of clothing does a house wear?

Answer: Address



Remember...

- Your parents don't live together anymore, but they still care about you.
- Parents may have a hard time talking and listening to one another after they separate.
- There may be confusion and even arguments all around you during all this.
- It may seem like it's all about you, but the real trouble is between your parents.
- It isn't your job to try to make them happy.

Chapter Two: Coming up with a plan for you



Things change for Randy

Every Tuesday and Thursday night and every Saturday during the winter, Randy's dad took him to hockey. Randy and his dad both loved hockey, and his dad used to be happy to take Randy to his practices and games.

But lately, Randy's dad didn't seem very excited about hockey. He didn't talk much, and even worse, if Randy didn't do well on the ice, his dad would make him feel bad about how he played. Randy would feel upset.

When he got home, he couldn't wait to get out of the car. He would go in his room and slam his bedroom door shut.

One night after this happened Randy realized that he hadn't heard his mom or his dad laugh or talk much for months.

A couple of weeks later, Randy's mom told him that she was leaving his father and that they would move in with her parents, his grandparents.

He packed his suitcase, and he took his cat Tank with him to his grandparents' house. He didn't know what would happen next.

Randy's mom told him that she and his father would start going to something called mediation, which is a way for separated parents to talk about problems and try to find solutions. For the next three months, they met with a mediator. Randy went to see that person once to explain how he saw things and how he felt about everything that was happening.

After a while Randy's mom and dad started to seem more like themselves again. Randy still lived with his mom and grandparents, but his dad always took him to hockey. Randy would stay at his dad's house after his practices and games, and they had fun talking about hockey again.



What's mediation?

Why are Randy's parents going to mediation? What are they hoping to do?

If your parents are having trouble agreeing on important decisions, they may go to **mediation** instead of going to court or after they've been to court already. Their lawyers or the judge may suggest they do this.

Mediation may help your parents talk to each other better and make better decisions. But what about you? You might not go into the sessions with your parents, but you can share your feelings and wishes with them. Sometimes, the mediator may want to talk to you to find out how you have been doing since your parents separated and about how you see things.

If mediation doesn't work, your parents may have to go to court to get a judge to make important decisions.

Mediation is a way of talking about problems to try to work things out. A person called a mediator helps people sort out their problems during mediation.



Mom leaves Dad and everyone gets help

After Joey and Tasha's mom left home suddenly, both children had trouble sleeping. Their dad called a counsellor and asked them to meet with the children. Their dad told the counsellor that he and his wife had separated. The counsellor agreed to see the two kids and arranged to see their dad as well. The counsellor also asked to see their mom to get the whole picture. After the counsellor met with each parent, they agreed to work with her to help figure out what sort of parenting arrangement would work best for the children.

In the sessions, the counsellor asked Joey what he liked to do after school, and so he talked about his music. She asked him if he was sleeping well and if he was eating properly. "Dad's a good cook. He's the best, but I miss my mom's cookies," he told her. "Every year, she made them at Christmas. What's going to happen at Christmas now? Will we see mom? I miss her."

"When I meet with your parents, I'll explain how much you miss your mom and suggest you see her very soon," the counsellor promised him.

The counsellor met with the parents soon after. She suggested that Joey and Tasha live with their dad during the week and stay with their mom every other weekend. The parents agreed. They went to their lawyers who wrote up a plan for a judge to review. Now that there is a plan in place, Joey and Tasha are finding everything much better.



What's the difference between a train and a teacher?

Answer: The teacher says "spit your gum out" and the train says "choochoo".

Chapter Three: Decisions, decisions, decisions



Mohamed's in the middle

Mohamed's parents never agreed on anything. They argued about doing housework, cooking dinner and paying bills. And they argued about everything else too. When they separated, Mohamed hoped the arguments would stop.

His parents wrote their own plan for what would happen after the separation. No court, no fuss. Mohamed's mom bought a house close to the school and Mohamed lived one week with her and one week with his dad.

After the separation, his dad stayed in the old house and started his own motorcycle repair shop out back. Mohamed loved hanging out there with him.

Then one day Mohamed's dad let him ride his Harley on the back roads all by himself. Excited, Mohamed told his mom all about it. His mom got mad. "What kind of a parent is he anyway? You could have been killed!" she exclaimed.

His mom phoned her lawyer. She wanted to be the one in charge of taking care of Mohamed and she wanted Mohamed to live with her most of the time.

This time, Mohamed's dad and mom met with a judge and arrangements were made for Mohamed to talk to a counsellor. It was good to have someone to talk to about how strict his mom was and how cool his dad was. He was tired of being in the middle of their arguments about him.

"I plan to race motorbikes when I grow up. I should live with my dad, because he'll let me do what I want. I don't want to hurt my mom's feelings but she's too strict," he told the counsellor.

The counsellor had a meeting first with Mohamed's mom, then with his dad, and talked a lot with Mohamed. Finally, Mohamed's parents went back to see the judge.

The living arrangements stayed the same as before, but the judge asked both parents to think carefully about how they were treating Mohamed. The judge wanted them to get help to stop putting Mohamed in the middle of their arguments. After a while, Mohamed's parents were able to think about his feelings instead of their own all the time. Mohamed was relieved when he could just enjoy the time he had with his dad and his mom.



Nela is not just a babysitter

Soon after Nela's parents got divorced, her mom married Ivan. Nela mostly stayed with her dad. Her mom moved in with Ivan and Ivan's two younger children. All that first year, Nela's mom made sure she spent time with Nela alone, even if they just went for a walk around the neighbourhood. Nela was 10 then. "No matter what happens, I'm here for you," her mom told her.

When Nela's mom told her that she and Ivan were going to have a new baby, Nela signed up for a babysitting course at school. She was so excited about having a sister at last.

After her new baby sister was born, things changed. Nela didn't get to see her mom alone anymore. "Things will get back to normal, honey. Just give us a bit of time. Eva is pretty cute, eh? She just needs more of my time right now," her mom would say.

When Nela was 12, things changed again. Whenever she went over to stay with her mom, her mom would suggest she and Ivan needed a break from the kids. At first, Nela was pretty proud of being left alone with them. But after three months

of babysitting and never spending time with her mom, she got tired of it. Her mom didn't even know that she was on the champion soccer team. There was no time to talk with her.

Nela's dad noticed that Nela no longer wanted to stay with her mom. "Maybe I can help sort things out," he told her when Nela explained. Nela's dad called up her mom to talk to her about Nela's concerns.

Nela was worried about whether her mom's feelings would be hurt or that she might be angry that Nela told her dad about what was happening. But Nela's mom told her that she loved her and would try to spend more time with her. After that, Nela felt much better.



Some people think that when you're 12 or even 14 you can decide where you will live. That is not what the law says, but your thoughts and feelings are important.

As explained earlier, if your parents go to court, the judge will make the final decisions about things like where you will live in a court order. The judge must consider what is best for you when making the court order. This will include considering your thoughts and feelings about where you will live.

Your parents may have different ideas about how to raise you. You may like one parent's rules better, but rules aren't the only things that matter. Your parents care about you even if they look at things differently. You don't have to choose between them and then feel guilty about it.

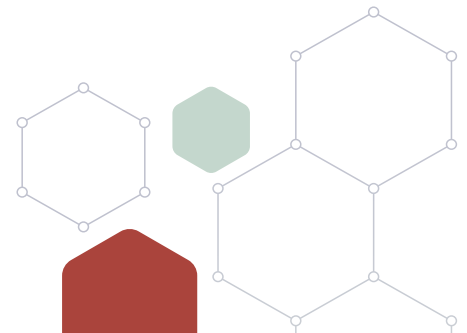
The important thing is that your family figures out where you will live and what's

best for you and what works for your family. And remember, it's possible for either of your parents to ask a judge to change the court order after a while, if it would be in your best interests.

In Canada, kids have a right to share their views on issues that affect them.

Lots of parents are able to make plans for their kids after separation and divorce without a judge or mediator. Your parents may ask you about your views to help them figure out what will be best for you. This doesn't mean you need to choose between your parents or get involved in their decisions.

When parents aren't able to come up with a plan on their own, judges and mediators may want to hear kids' views. This helps them make better plans for kids and families. A judge, lawyer or social worker could ask you about your life and what is important to you.



Depending on where you live in Canada, there are different ways that people may ask your views.

Sometimes judges meet with kids. A judge might ask specific questions about your life. Or they might just have a chat to get to know a bit about you. This sort of meeting often happens in the judge's office.

Sometimes, a social worker or lawyer will ask you questions so they can prepare a report to give to a judge or mediator. This type of report is often called a **Voice of the Child Report**.

The social worker or lawyer will usually ask about your thoughts and feelings. There may be some questions about how you feel about your parents' separation. The social worker or lawyer may ask you what you like best about each of your parent's homes. They will be careful to avoid questions that would make you uncomfortable.

It can make you feel better to talk to someone who really wants to listen to you and understand how you're feeling. Your views are important and they might help shape plans for your family, even if you don't get to choose what happens.



A **Voice of the Child Report** is a tool that can help make sure that judges know how you're feeling about plans for your care after separation or divorce.

Emma shares her views

Emma is very close to both her moms, Laura and Jen. The two of them have been unhappy together for a while now though. They've decided to get a divorce. Jen plans to move to an apartment downtown that is closer to her office and also to Emma's school.

Laura and Jen hope that a mediator can help them figure out a schedule for Emma, because they both want to spend as much time with Emma as possible.

The mediator suggests they get a Voice of the Child Report for Emma. The mediator tells them this will mean that a social worker would meet with Emma a couple of times to hear how Emma is feeling about the situation. The social worker would write up a report, review it with Emma, and then share it with the mediator and Emma's moms.

At first Emma feels nervous about talking to the social worker. She doesn't want to share all her personal thoughts and feelings with a stranger. When she meets the social worker though, Emma feels a lot more comfortable. He's funny and listens really well. Emma is relieved to be able to share her views without worrying about hurting anyone's feelings.

After going over his report with Emma, the social worker shares it with the mediator, Laura and Jen. Emma is happy to know that her views were heard and will be considered.



What is a parenting assessment?

If your parents can't agree on where you will live, the judge can order a **parenting assessment**. A parenting assessment can give the judge a clearer picture of what your life is like with each parent. The idea is to make sure that the judge makes the best decisions for you.

The person doing the parenting assessment will talk to few different people, including your parents, other people involved in your family's life and even you. You might talk to them a few times. Many of them like to speak with children more than once to make sure they understand how the family works together. Maybe they'll ask you to play a game of cards or checkers or ask you to draw a picture of what your family is like.

The person doing the parenting assessment will write reports based on what they learn about you and your family life. They look at the whole picture and try to be fair. Here are some of the things they look at:

- your parents' work schedules
- which parent helps you with school, activities or homework
- who looks after you when you're sick

- the plans your parents have made for your care
- the schedule that works best for all of you.

Then, they will suggest to the judge where you should live and what your schedule for seeing your parents should be.

If you have brothers or sisters, the arrangement for you may not be the same as theirs. Older kids may need different things than younger kids. As you get older, your arrangement may need to change again.

Arrangements can be changed if the situation changes. When you're older, for instance, you may not want to spend a month at your grandparents' cottage or two weeks camping with your uncle and aunt along with one of your parents. You may want more time with friends or to work at a summer job.

A parenting assessment is a report that helps a judge make decisions about things like how your parents will take care of you and where you will live. The person doing the parenting assessment will talk to a few different people to find out about your family life.

Speak out when things go wrong

It's tough to tell an adult that what they are doing is upsetting.

Talk to someone who can help you, like your other parent, a grandparent or your favourite teacher.

If you feel it might be a bad idea to speak to one of your parents, pay attention to your feelings. Maybe you need to wait until you've found the right time to talk to them, or until you've found the right person to talk to.

“Our feet are sore!”

When the twins' parents first separated, both parents wanted Chen and Jiao to live with them. Their parents lived a block apart, so they decided to have them spend one night with their dad, the next night with their mom. Their mom helped coach softball. Their dad took them to art classes at the community centre. It was better than being separated from each other. Chen and Jiao were close and couldn't imagine being apart. Even so, they got tired of the arrangement their parents had made.

“We've got our suitcases and our school books and our favourite toys. Our feet are really sore from carrying them all from one house to the other every day,” complained nine-year old Jiao. Chen agreed.

There was no time to see their friends. Jiao was afraid she wouldn't be able to play softball because she often forgot where her stuff was. Would she be kicked off the team? Chen got in trouble at school when he kept losing his school books. Chen's teacher noticed that things weren't going well and spoke to their dad. Then he spoke to their mom. In the end, the parents agreed that spending a week with one parent followed by a week with the other would be easier for everyone.



Why did the jellybean go to school?

Answer: To become a smartie.

Chapter Four: Living in two homes



Jacques gets used to it

It was just after his birthday when Jacques' parents separated. He hadn't even seen them arguing. "The hardest thing is being told," he says now. "You don't know what to do or what to say."

"I'd go to my dad's house and I'd miss my mom; at my mom's I missed my dad. When it first happens you are so sad, you cry. My mom asked me how I felt about it but I was too mad and too sad to answer."

"It got better, but then my dad got remarried and everything changed again. My dad's new wife wasn't as much fun." That was two years ago. Jacques says

it's different now. "I sort of have two of everything — two homes and different things at both places. I collect stuffed animals but I keep them all at my mom's. At my dad's house, I collect board games. I get to have a birthday party at both homes which is awesome."

Today, Jacques finds things he likes about both homes. But on bad days, he can tell you a lot about what's wrong. On the days he finds the different rules and the different houses too much, he tells himself or his younger sister, Camille, "You get used to it. Just think of the good parts."



Your parents may have an arrangement that means that you will have two homes – like thousands of other kids in Canada. It might not always be easy. And, it might take time to get used to the changes taking place. But at times it could be fun to have two homes.

Most kids want and need to be a part of their parents' lives and to have a place in their homes as they are growing up – whether the parents live alone, whether they remarry and have new children, or whether they go back home to live with their own parents.



When things work out

Malaika lived weekdays with her mom and her mom's new partner. Her dad worked out of town. When her dad came back on the weekends, she lived with him. "It doesn't bother me because I know that I will see them both and it's been that way as long as I can remember," Malaika explained. "I used to bring an overnight bag to school. Now, it's just easier to leave things in both places."

Even when Malaika was young, she always knew her schedule. She liked to know where she was going to be and when she was going to be there. "When I was little, my mom made sure I got to see my dad when the schedule said I should. If she hadn't, I wouldn't know my dad as well as I do, so I'm happy that she did that."



Remember...

No matter what the living arrangements are, your parents are always your parents.



What object is king of the classroom?

Answer: The ruler.

Chapter Five: What happens if there is violence?



Tommy's family finds shelter

Twelve-year-old Tommy always looked out for his two younger sisters. Being the older brother made him feel very proud. If they were okay, then he was okay too.

Sometimes, when Tommy's dad drank too much alcohol, he would get mean and say horrible things to Tommy, his sisters and his mom. He would also punch walls and break things in their house.

When his dad arrived home one night, Tommy knew he was drunk. His mom told him to take his sisters to the neighbour's house. On his way out, Tommy could hear his dad yelling. Julie, the youngest one, began to cry and Amy was sniffing.

After about an hour, Tommy took the girls home and tucked them into bed. He sat with them until they slept. Then his dad started yelling again – really loud – and Tommy got scared that his dad would hurt his mom. So, he slipped outside and called "911" from the neighbour's house. His dad was gone when the police arrived. They took Tommy, his mom and his sisters to a shelter where they could be safe until his mom decided what to do. Tommy knew that things might be difficult for a while, but he was happy that he wouldn't have to worry about his mother's safety.



Sadly, Tommy isn't the only kid who lives in a home where abuse — hitting, punching, lots of yelling and other bad things — happen.

Abuse is wrong!

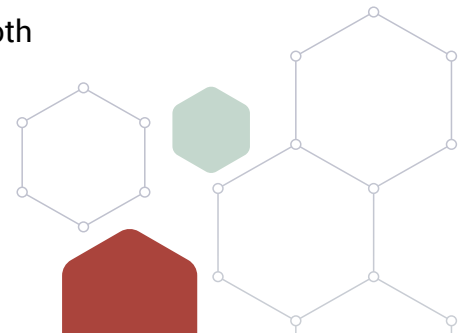
What does that mean? Some kinds of abuse, like beating someone up, or threatening to beat up or kill someone, are against the law. Doing something physical to harm you or someone you know is physical abuse. Most forms of physical abuse are considered an assault, which is a crime in Canada.

Sexual abuse is also against the law. Child sexual abuse is when an adult, teenager or older child does something to a young person for a sexual purpose, like touching their private parts. If someone in your family or anyone else harms you or does something sexual to you, tell an adult you trust.

Emotional abuse is saying or doing hurtful things that make a person feel sad, angry, scared, helpless, or alone. Saying mean things, swearing at you, threatening to wreck your stuff or hurt your pet, and yelling at you all the time are examples of emotional abuse.

Ask someone for help — it could be someone in your family, a teacher, a service like Kids Help Phone or anyone else you trust. If the police come to your house, try talking to them.

The police will make sure no one is hurt. They may take one or both of your parents away to cool down.



If someone is hurt, the parent who has been violent or abusive may be charged with committing a crime. In some cases, they might end up going to jail or to a place that can help change their behaviour.

It's confusing when you have mixed feelings — like feeling scared of someone and not liking what they do, but still caring about them. Try to find someone to talk to about how you feel and who can help you work out and understand your feelings.

Some kids are hurt by their parents or by the people their parents choose to be around. Adults make bad choices sometimes. It's not your fault. But when abuse takes place in families, it affects everyone. **Abuse is wrong.**

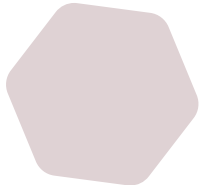
How can the law help?

A judge may make a court order to keep a parent who has been violent or abusive away from the rest of your family. This means they might have to stay away from your home or your other parent's work place, at least for a while. These orders are legal documents, put into place to protect you and your family.

Your school and after-school program may be out of bounds too. The staff will be told about the court order. If it would make you feel safer, you can ask the staff if they know about the order.

The idea is to protect you and your family by making sure that there are people who will take care of you and help you.

Get help. You have a right to be safe and it's ok to want to get help.



Can you still see a parent who has been abusive or violent?

That's a tough question, and it depends on the situation. If you've been spending time with a parent and want to continue seeing them, you will probably be able to. But it may take some time for visits to be arranged if your parent has been charged with committing a crime or if your other parent is worried about your safety or their safety.

If a judge decides it is not safe for you to visit, you may not be able to see this parent for a while. This is done for your protection.

Will you have to see a parent who has been violent if you are afraid?

First, if you are afraid, be sure to tell someone you trust – like your other parent, another adult in your family or a teacher. If you are afraid of spending time with a parent but miss them and still want to see them, you may be able to have someone else with you when you visit that parent. This is called supervised parenting time.

Parenting time can also take place somewhere in your community where you feel safe – like a park or a museum – or at a supervised parenting time centre, which is a safe place where a staff member stays with you during your visits.

If you can't handle visits with that parent, speak to someone you trust. Tell them how you feel.

If you have to go to court

If a parent hurts you or you know that a parent hurt someone else in the family, you may have to go to tell a judge what happened. If so, you will meet with someone who will explain what will happen when you talk to the judge and will give you support.

Remember...

If you or someone in your family is in immediate danger or needs help right away, **call "911"**.

You can **ask someone** to call "911" for you.

As soon as you can, **write down what happened** or draw a picture of it. Speak as openly as you can about what has happened.

Ask for help and support. You are not alone.

Chapter Six: Blended families and extended families



Melody's story

Everything seemed to go well for Melody's parents until her dad got a job out of town. Then things got worse and her dad moved out. After a while her mom started to see someone else who liked Melody and her sister Violet. Melody was happy.

Melody still saw her dad whenever he came back into town to visit. Then her dad moved back to town and introduced them to his girlfriend, Jenna. Jenna was going to have a baby, and Jenna and Melody's dad were going to get married. Maybe Melody would have the baby brother she always wanted. Now, Melody had even more family and everything seemed just right to her. She spent most of her time with her mom and her sister Violet, but she also had her own room at her dad's home and spent time with her new little brother.



Blended families like Melody's are made up of kids who have different moms or dads. It can be tough to be part of a blended family.

Maybe one or both of your parents has married or is living with someone who already has kids and you suddenly have stepsisters and stepbrothers.

No matter what kind of changes happen with your parents' living arrangements, your parents are still your parents – even if you have to share their time and affection with their new partner and other kids.



What did one potato chip say to the other?

Answer: Shall we go for a dip?

Aunt Janine moves in

Ron often had to stay with friends or neighbors while his mom travelled. At first this was fun, but Ron started to feel like he was never at home.

One day, his mom had an idea. She decided to invite Ron's Aunt Janine to live with them for a while. Aunt Janine had a job not far from where Ron lived. She had been looking for an apartment, and Ron's mom had a spare room for her.

Ron loved Aunt Janine. She was fun to be with. At first, Aunt Janine felt like a guest, but after a while, she started to feel like a second mom. She helped Ron with homework, made him dinner most days and often dropped him off at school.

Sometimes, Aunt Janine had to do things like meet with Ron's teacher or take him to the doctor when his mom was away. Some people wondered whether she was allowed to make decisions about Ron.

Ron's mom and Aunt Janine decided to talk to a lawyer. The lawyer said they could go to court to ask for an order that would let Aunt Janine make decisions about Ron too, just like his mom.

Now, no one wonders when Aunt Janine takes Ron to the doctor. She was always part of his family, but now she feels even more special. Ron knows his family is a bit different than most of his friends' families, but he's happy and he knows he's looked after.



What do whales like to chew?

Answer: Blubber gum

Chapter Seven: When one parent moves far away



Olivier's big move?

Olivier had just started to get used to his parents' divorce. When his dad Louis first moved out, it seemed like a big deal. But Olivier eventually adjusted to going back and forth between his two homes. His mom and dad lived about a ten minute walk away from each other, so it wasn't too hard to switch homes every Sunday. At his mom's, he had his dog, Digger. At his dad's, he had his cat, Mittens. Things were ok.

Then Olivier's mom Marie was offered an amazing job in San Francisco. At first, Olivier was thrilled when he heard about it. He'd always wanted to go to San Francisco! Then he realized he couldn't go back and forth between Hamilton and San

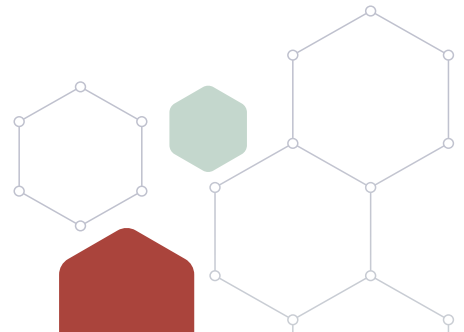
Francisco every week. What would he do? Olivier didn't want to leave Mittens, all his friends, and most of all his dad. But if he didn't go he would miss his mom, not to mention the chance to live near the ocean.

Louis wanted Olivier to stay in Hamilton. He would miss Olivier, and Olivier was at a good school and had great friends. Marie said there was a really good school in San Francisco, where Olivier could learn Spanish. Plus, they'd be closer to Olivier's grandma and grandpa, who lived close to San Francisco.



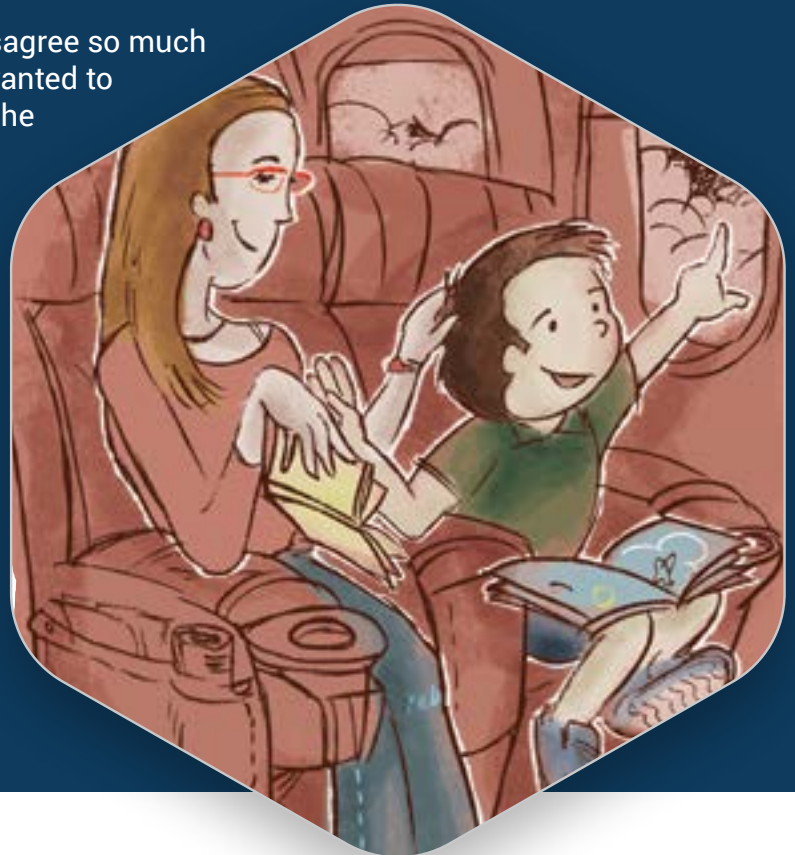
**What did the math book say
to the other math book?**

Answer: I've got problems.



Olivier had never seen his parents disagree so much about anything before. Neither one wanted to budge. Olivier didn't even know what he wanted anymore.

After a lot of meetings with lawyers and with a mediator, Louis and Marie finally agreed to a schedule. Olivier would move to San Francisco in September, but would come back to Hamilton for Christmas holidays and every summer. Louis would visit San Francisco every spring break. Olivier would miss his dad a lot, but they would FaceTime every day. And Digger would come to San Francisco, too!



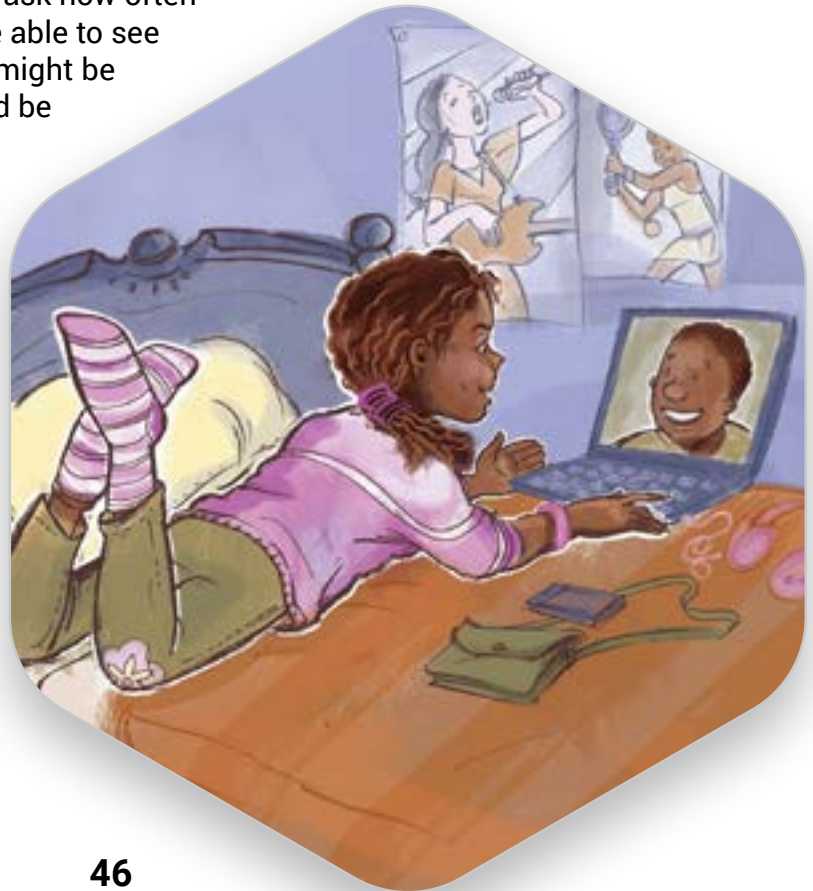
Sometimes it doesn't work out quite as well as it did for Olivier and his parents. Big moves can be tough, for kids and for parents. If one of your parents wants you to move far away, your other parent may worry about not seeing you very much. If your parents can't agree, they might go to court and ask a judge to decide.

The judge would consider your parents' views. People may ask you some questions. For example, your parents might be asked how they would make sure you still got to see the parent who would be staying behind. They may ask how often would you and that parent would be able to see each other if you moved away. You might be asked what you think your life would be like in the new place compared to your life now.

After hearing all about the situation, the judge will come up with a plan that they think is best for you.

Remember...

You won't be able to decide for yourself whether to move. But you may have a chance to talk with someone and say what you think about it.



Chapter Eight: **Nothing** is perfect, but...

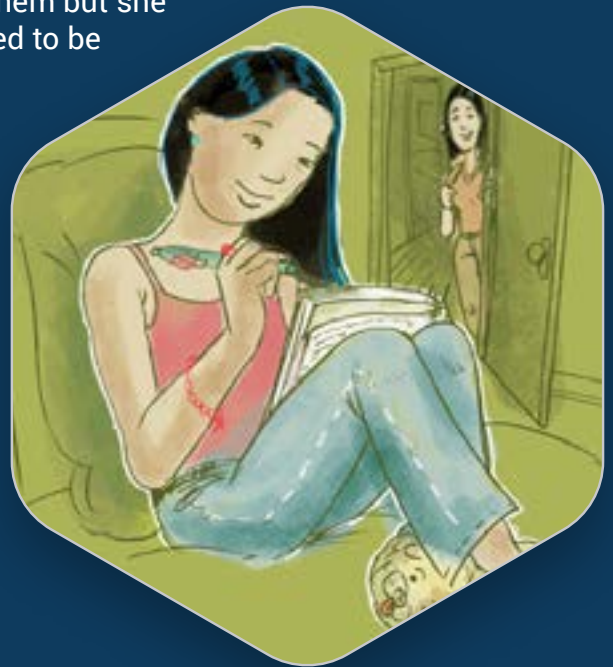


Pearl's birthday present

Twelve-year-old Pearl was feeling really sad. Her parents had separated a few months ago. She didn't see her dad as often as she wanted and she missed his jokes. Her mom was busy working or doing stuff around the apartment. On top of all this, Pearl was having a bad time at her new school. She was sure her teachers didn't like her and some of the girls at school teased her. She tried to ignore them but she couldn't. She cried a lot instead. Everything seemed to be wrong.

Pearl decided to talk to her sister, Daisy. Daisy told Pearl that she wrote in a diary nearly every day. First, she wrote down all the horrible things that had bugged her that day. Then, she wrote down one good thing. Daisy said it made her feel better to find that one good thing. Daisy's story helped Pearl realize that even small things can count as good things.

Soon after their talk, Daisy bought Pearl a birthday present. It was a big notebook to use as a diary. Now Pearl writes down at least one good thing every day.



Why was the music teacher unable to open his classroom door?

Answer: Because his keys were on the piano.



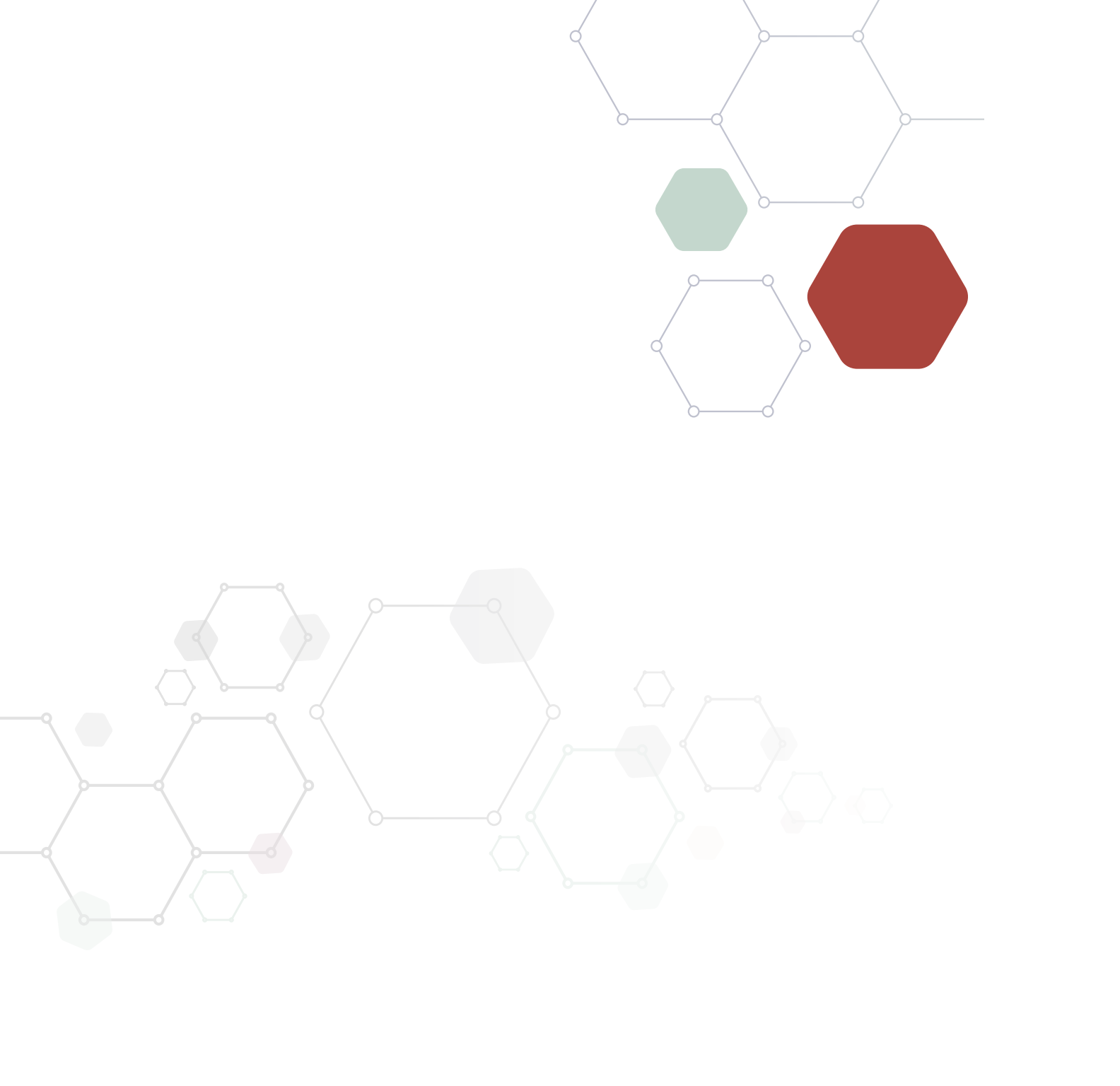


All kids have good days and bad days. Sometimes when parents separate it can seem like there are lots of bad days. It can even seem like every day is a bad day.

It can help to do what Pearl did and find something good to think about. For example, Pearl realized that it was a good thing that she was able to keep her cat after the divorce. She also thought it was good that she still had weekly visits with her favorite aunt. And, she counted it as extra good that her older sister was letting her listen to some of her music. Pearl was also thinking about joining the swim team at school and thought it would give her a chance to have more fun.

If you can never think of anything good to write down and if you stay in a very sad mood for a long time (a few weeks), it is important to tell an adult you trust how bad you are feeling. You may need to see a doctor for some help.





Appendix 1: Activities





Activity 1: Write a Letter

Writing letters is a good way to deal with confusing feelings. You may want to write a letter to each of your parents expressing your feelings about their separation. You do not have to send the letters if you don't want to. Just putting your thoughts and feelings in writing may help you.

Activity 2: Ask your parents

If there are big changes happening in your family you probably have a lot of questions you would like to ask your parents. You may find it helpful to make a list of questions on a piece of paper.

Activity 3: Draw your family or a picture that shows how you feel

On a piece of paper, try drawing a picture of your family. Or draw a picture of how your parent's separation makes you feel.

Activity 4: Draw Your Family Tree

A family tree is a drawing that lists your name and the names of other people in your family. It includes older relatives and even babies. Talk to the people in your family to get more information if you need it.

On a piece of paper, write in the names of your family members, including stepparents or stepsisters and brothers.



Activity 5: Word Search

J P L C X E V K U C U F V F R V N B
D S N Y H D P E H S O A A W Y M P C
B E A J U D G E X O W A W M D S P R
B C C O U T S F T W M I C V I U A Q
T X S I O X L U V G B E L H O L S O
J T C P S T B K T I Q Y A Q N X Y L
B I H A B I Q L P X S T K B L K P H
U M O R S S O O X T V I A I M G J E
Y E O E B C U N E S L W T L D X J L
G H L N N V S X E J L K U Q M S E P
F Q C T W T V Y L D B T B C T L L V
Z J B V X J S V V O J Z M H G A Q K

Find the following words in the puzzle. Words are hidden

→ ↓ and ↘ .

Pet
Kids
School
Family
Help
Time
Visit
Decision
Judge
Parent
Coach
Home

Word Game

Unscramble the following words:

1. sohem = _____
2. maifyl = _____
3. rapnet = _____
4. guejd = _____

Answer Key on p.58

Activity 6: Draw a Map

If you move into a new home or if you now have two homes, it helps to know where everything is.

Try drawing a map or a picture that shows the place or places you'll be living. Include your school, the arena or community centre, the library and other places where you'll go often.



Activity 7: Where's my Stuff?

You may have more than one home now. Try making a list of things you'll need in each home. You can also make a list of things you'll carry with you in a bag no matter which home you're going to.

These lists will help you to remember important stuff you'll want to have with you no matter where you are.

On a piece of paper, you can make a new list every week if you want.

- What I have at Home #1:
- What I have at Home #2:
- In My Bag:



Activity 8: What's Happening?

Remembering everything can be tough. Try to keep it all straight with a calendar. You could buy one or you can make one yourself. Write in where you'll be living on what days and what special events are coming up with different members of the family.

You can also ask your parents for your own calendar so that you can write down things you need to remember for the rest of the year.

A hand-drawn calendar grid on a piece of paper. The grid is enclosed in a rounded rectangular border. At the top left, the word "Month" is written, followed by a horizontal line for writing. At the top right, the word "Year" is written, followed by a horizontal line for writing. Below these, the days of the week are listed as column headers: "Sunday", "Monday", "Tuesday", "Wednesday", "Thursday", "Friday", and "Saturday". The main body of the calendar is a grid of 5 rows and 7 columns, with each cell being empty for writing.

Month _____	Year _____					
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Activity 9: Where is Everyone?

Too many phone numbers and addresses to remember? Why not write down the phone numbers and addresses (including e-mail addresses) of family members. This way you always know how to get in touch with your parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters and others who are important to you.

You could keep this paper with you.

Name: _____
PHONES
Home: _____ Cell: _____ Work: _____
E-mail: _____
Address: _____

Name: _____
PHONES
Home: _____ Cell: _____ Work: _____
E-mail: _____
Address: _____

Name: _____
PHONES
Home: _____ Cell: _____ Work: _____
E-mail: _____
Address: _____



Activity 10: My Story

On a piece of paper, why not write a story all about you? Try to use at least four words from the following list of words:

move
divorce
family
court
love

arguments
school
pets
friends
feelings

separated
brother
sister
teacher
coach

mother
father
aunt
uncle
lawyers

Activity 11: Hidden Treasures

On a piece of paper, make a list of the things you like to do or things that make you feel better when you're feeling sad.

Try to think of a few things that you've never thought of before.

Examples

- Having a pet
- Going for pizza with your big sister or brother
- Getting e-mails from a parent you don't see that often
- Riding your bike with friends
- Joining a club
- Reading a good book from the library
- Taking a babysitting course when you are old enough to get extra money for things you want
- Thinking about things you want to do when you're grown up



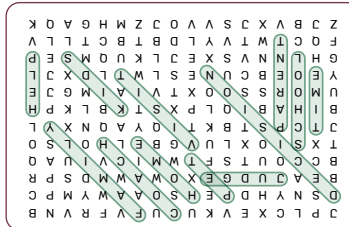
Activity 12: What's Next?

On a piece of paper, try making a list of things you're looking forward to. For example, are you looking forward to a visit with relatives, or your next birthday, a trip you might be taking with family, getting together with a friend, a school you'd like to go to someday, learning to drive when you're older...?

- Next week
- Next month
- Next summer
- In two years
- In ten years



Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden → and ↱.



Word Search

- ### Activities Answer Key
1. sohem = homes
 2. matyl = family
 3. rapent = parent
 4. guejd = judge

Appendix 2: More Information

Information for Kids

Books

There are some good books for kids about separation and divorce. Your school or local library may have some of these books or other information that may be helpful.

Websites

Here are some websites that you can check out:

Families Change: Guide to Separation and Divorce

<https://on.familieschange.ca/en>

*Click on **Go to Kids***

Kids Help Phone

<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca>

You can also call Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868

Department of Justice Canada's family violence site for youth

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/fv-vf/fvy-vfj/index.html>

Information for Parents

Websites

Because Life Goes On... Helping Children and Youth Live With Separation and Divorce, A Guide for Parents (Public Health Agency of Canada)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/because-life-goes-on-helping-children-youth-live-with-separation-divorce.html>

Families Change: Guide to Separation and Divorce

*Click on **Go to Parents***

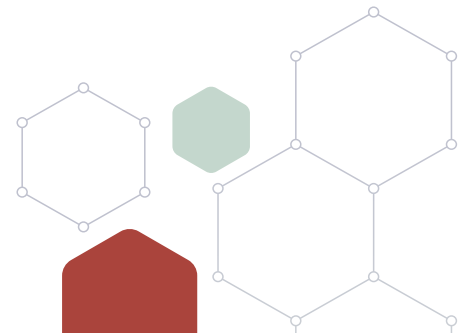
www.familieschange.ca

Department of Justice Canada information about family law:

www.family.justice.gc.ca

Department of Justice Canada information about family violence:

www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/fv-vf/index.html



Appendix 3:

Legal words used in this booklet

This booklet uses some legal words because you may hear them used by your parents or even other kids whose parents have separated or divorced.

Best interests of the child

Everyone (judges, parents, mediators, guardians, lawyers and experienced professionals) involved in deciding where you should live and who should take care of you after your parents separate has to consider what's best for you. There are a few things that everyone usually considers when your best interests are being decided:

- The type of relationship you had with each parent before they separated
- Your physical and emotional needs
- Your parents' ability to care for you and make good decisions
- Your culture, language and religion
- Your views on the arrangement they are thinking about
- Whether there has been any violence in your family
- Lots of other things that are important to you!

Child protection

When parents cannot provide adequate care for their children, child protection workers may get involved to protect the children and care for their physical health as well as their emotional well-being.

Child support

The money one parent gives to the other parent to help to pay for things like rent, food and clothing for a child. A child support order is the document prepared by the court saying what amount must be paid for the child's food, clothing and other living expenses.

Contact

The time that people other than your parents can spend with you. For example, your grandparents, an aunt, an uncle or maybe a very good friend of the family may want to have "contact" with you.

Court order

A decision by a judge that is written down. The order says what a person can or can't do and what they must or must not do. Court orders can be changed by going back to the judge and asking for a change, but only if there is a good reason.

Decision-making responsibility

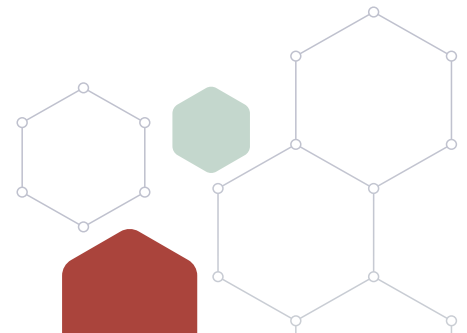
The responsibility to make really important decisions about you, like where you will go to school or what medical care doctors can give you.

Divorce

Parents who were married and then separated for a while (sometimes a long time) can get a divorce. When parents get divorced, a judge gives them a document that says they are not married anymore.

Divorce Act

A law that tells parents, lawyers and judges what the rules are when parents get divorced.



Judge

A person in court who makes decisions about parenting arrangements, child support payments, and where children will live.

Law

A collection of important rules that people must follow.

Mediation

A way of talking about problems and exploring solutions to help solve them. A mediator is a person who runs the mediation sessions. They are a bit like hockey or baseball coaches. They try to help your parents work better as a team by giving them ways to talk with each other and make some changes.

Parenting arrangement

After they separate, your parents will have to make decisions about how they will take care of you. A parenting arrangement is often written down and usually includes things like how much time you will spend with each parent and the things each parent will do to take care of you.

Parenting assessment

A report that helps a judge make decisions about things like how your parents will take care of you and where you will live. The person doing the parenting assessment will talk to a few different people to find out about your family life.

Parenting time

The time when each of your parents is responsible for looking after you and making day-to-day decisions about you.

Separation

When parents who have lived together as a couple decide they don't want to be a couple any more, we say they are separated.

Voice of the Child Report

A tool that can help make sure that judges know how you're feeling about plans for your care after separation or divorce.



For more information on family law,
visit the Justice Canada website at:
www.family.justice.gc.ca.