

what your children might feel

It can be quite difficult to spot signs of emotional stress and anxiety in children. This is because children see that you are distressed and don't want to make things worse for you. However, it's very important that you spot any changes in behaviour and help your children to deal with their feelings.

Children of all ages often feel:

- * confused
- * frightened
- * sad
- * hurt
- * let down
- * angry
- * guilty

Children very often feel responsible for their parent's separation, this can lead to feelings of guilt as well as a belief that they can bring you back together. They will be aware of the pain around the separation of your adult relationship and may well bury their own feelings so as not to make you feel worse. Any conflict that occurs during your separation will have a particularly unsettling effect on them.

Babies

It can be difficult to spot signs of anxiety in babies but angry or depressed parents will pass this on to babies at a crucial time in their growth. Try to give your baby plenty of cuddles, smiles and good eye contact.

2 to 5

Children may display anger and sadness. There may be increased tearfulness. Boys may become restless and withdraw or become disruptive. Girls often try to take care of parents and become 'little adults'. Children of this age also show regressive behaviour like bedwetting.

6 to 8

Children will often display sadness through increased tearfulness. Family separation can leave them feeling rejected and unloved. You may notice a drop in school performance or hear that they have become disruptive in class. Boys will very often miss their fathers intensely.

9 to 11

Children of this age will very often become angry, especially towards the parent that they think is responsible for the separation. They often feel frightened and want nothing more than for you to get back together again. You may notice a drop in school performance and sometimes an increase in headaches, sickness or nightmares.

Older

Some children in this age group, especially older ones, may become more independent and focus their energies outside the family and on their future. This can be a good thing. There is a danger that, whilst parents are dealing with the ending of their relationship, children of this age may drift away from the family unit and seek approval with their peers. This can lead to risky behaviour such as drinking, drug taking, inappropriate sexual activity and crime.