

Services For Education

DSL DISCUSSIONS - PARENTAL SEPARATION

Raising the topic...

Official statistics from the Department for Work and Pensions estimated that in March 2020 there were 2.4 million separated families in Great Britain including 3.6 million children in separated families. Parental separation or divorce can be an adverse childhood experience and have a significant impact on a child's development, education and relationships.

Separation can involve tension or upset between parents and within the family as a whole. Children are very perceptive and even when parents aim to hide these difficulties children become confused or unhappy – or even blame themselves for a break-up.

It is important to remember that not all separations are acrimonious, and some parents successfully manage co-parenting or are able to navigate the separation with minimal impact on their children- but for others the damage can be substantial.

Children in your setting going through parental separation will be impacted in different ways, but it can include changes in behaviour, an impact on self-esteem and self-worth, difficulties within relationships, difficulties concentrating or managing their emotions, or physiological signs such as head/stomach aches, tiredness, sleep issues etc.

Questions to discuss...

- How do we talk to children about parental separation in a positive way?
- What might a child be feeling as they go through the separation?
- What other changes may happen in their life as a result of the separation? (housing, finances, custody battles etc)
- How can we deal with emotional or aggressive parents? How do we maintain a neutral stance and not take sides?
- How can we advocate for the child and share their feelings with parents?
- How best can we support children in school?
- What is your understanding of parental responsibility? Do you know what this means during a parental separation?

What can you do?

To support children during a separation and help them with their worries, you should:

- Let them share their experiences, worries or fears.
- Think through questions the child may ask and how you can best answer them.
- Reassure the child that they are not responsible for the breakup or for the feelings of their parents.
- Listen to the child with your eyes as well as your ears. What are they “showing” you in their behaviours?
- Identify key, trusted adults that they can talk to– explain that it's okay to be sad, confused or angry.
- Help the child to feel included in school, working on resilience and self-esteem.
- Use stories and books to help children understand the situation and manage their emotions.

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- Or want guidance with auditing your procedures and practices? For bespoke, tailored Safeguarding consultancy contact us at... safeguarding@servicesforeducation.co.uk