

# WEAVERBIRD TOP TOPS

## Separation & Divorce



### KEEPING CONNECTED

- Divorce and separation are life changing events for parents and children alike.
- When communicating sharing simple information about the situation in a non-blaming way will help minimise your child's emotional distress.
- Ensure you provide bonding opportunities where your child can have fun, giving them an emotional balance.
- Listen carefully and really hear what the child is saying. Asking open ended questions will facilitate two-way conversations where you can explore your child's emotions and thoughts.
- Use physical affection to show love and support; sometimes no words are needed and hugging, stroking a child's back etc can be soothing and help to settle any heightened emotional response and restore more balance.
- If possible, stay connected during periods when your child is with the other parent, via phone calls, FaceTime or take the child out for a quick trip to the park.
- Working through Weaverbirds activities which focus on connection. For example, the 'Always in my Heart' exercise, is perfect for exploring connection.
- Try and make the child feel safe, secure and connected wherever possible (eg. maintain a regular and predictable routine). Ensure you clearly explain to your child what will happen during the day – who will collect them, what time etc.
- Read other books with your child which focus on connection. Give the child a favourite toy and family photo which can be carried between homes, this will provide much needed comfort and reassurance.
- Tell the child's teacher about the change in situation and be proactive in keeping the communication lines open. Update staff about changes in the child's life and seek feedback on how they are getting on socially, academically and emotionally. You can arrange a regular check-in (eg. weekly during periods of high stress/change) at school pick up, via email or through a 'communications diary' which is kept in the child's schoolbag.

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Share age appropriate, basic information about the situation with the child. For example, 'Mummy and Daddy have decided that they need to live in separate homes,' keeping the finer details for sharing with adult family members and friends or a Counsellor.
- Young children are still learning the concept of time and will need regular reminders the evening before of 'what will happen tomorrow,' and in the morning, reminders of 'what will happen today.' A visible, visual weekly planner can be referred to, clearly showing the current day and where they will sleep each night, along with other activities.

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### MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS

- When listening, stop what you are doing, look at the child and allow them time to explain.
- Give your child opportunities where they can learn to identify body clues about feelings and emotions. For example, watch TV with the sound off and ask your child to guess how people in the show are feeling.
- When your child experiences an emotion, help them to name it. For example, 'I can see you are feeling sad.'
- Whilst continuing to validate the child's difficult situation and emotional distress, point out that other children with divorced or separated parents are in a similar position and share similar feelings.
- Try to stay connected while patiently managing acting-out behaviours. For example, 'I love you and see you are feeling sad; however, you know that hitting your sister is not ok.'
- If you are concerned by continuing or increasing 'big feelings,' seek further support for your child. Take note of feedback from your child's teachers. They can be a useful source of information and provide an unbiased perspective.

### MANAGING YOUR FEELINGS

- Try not to share big emotions with your child. It is natural to share that you are feeling sad or angry that things have not worked out, however any blaming of others or big emotions, like sobbing or yelling can be unsettling for the child.
- Sharing big emotions with children may stop your child sharing their own feelings. Big feelings from a caregiver can cause a child to worry that you might not be able to tolerate or cope with their concerns.
- Explain that any sad or angry feelings relating to your current situation are not caused by your child.
- Draw on other resources or use others for support, recognising when external support from friends or professionals may be helpful.
- Avoid blaming the other parent. When you need to share frustrations do this with other adults outside of your child's earshot.
- Regardless of how you feel, keep all adult issues between the parents. For example, if you hear the other parent has been talking about you negatively, try not to react to this in front of your child and take it up with the other parent (if necessary and productive) when neither of you are in the presence of your child.
- Remember you are only in control of what happens in your home, and providing a safe, predictable and loving home is protective for your child.
- If you have safety concerns for your child when they are not in your care seek immediate professional and legal advice.

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### PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

- Just like learning to read, understanding patterns in our behaviour, and articulating and understanding our own emotions takes practice.
- Your child may benefit from reading your Weaverbirds Story regularly, as well as children's books on this topic.
- Use the activities in your story and those on our [website](#).
- Sign up to our [Weaverbird Blog](#) for new tips and activities.

### CONSISTENCY

- Most children find change unsettling. Keep your routines and rituals the same. For example, have the same evening/bedtime routine in both households.
- Try to keep changes to a minimum – ideally keep your child in the same pre-school/child care/school/baby-sitter so that other areas of their life remain similar.
- Aim to keep their sleeping areas similar if possible. If the child has to share a bedroom with siblings/step-siblings have some special possessions, such as their favourite toy or teddies, kept in a place just for them.
- Whilst tempting to be more lenient with a child during difficult periods, boundaries and expectations are containing for a child and help them feel secure.

### ACCESS MORE HELP

- Make the most of existing social supports and family members.
- Don't be afraid to seek help.
- If you, your family members or school have concerns or are noticing any of the following behaviours, speak with your GP about a referral to a Child Psychologist:
  - Ongoing social isolation or withdrawal
  - Aggressive or acting out behaviour
  - Regression (not being able to do skills previously mastered)
  - Significant distress on separation from caregivers
  - Crying more than usual

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### OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE

- Ever heard of the book 'Your Fantastic Elastic Brain' by JoAnn Deak? – Well, our brain is just that – it can stretch and grow. Just as we exercise our bodies, we can also exercise our brains and learn and master new skills.
- Supporting your child to manage difficult times and ride the waves of emotions, provides them with the confidence that they are able to tackle the challenges that life will throw at them. Try and use this difficult time for your family as an opportunity for growth, so that you are able to experience some positives. There are a number of resources on 'Grit,' 'Growth Mindset' and 'Optimism' for both adults and children.

### FURTHER READING

#### Children's Books:

- Two Homes, Claire Masurel (Useful for Separation/Divorce; suitable for younger children)
- The Invisible String, Patrice Karst (Useful for Connection)
- The Day the Sea Went out and Never Came Back, Margot Sunderland (Useful for Loss)
- In My Heart, Jo Witek (Useful for Feelings)
- Your Fantastic Elastic Brain, JoAnn Deak (Useful for Perseverance, Growth Mindset)
- What Do You Do With A Problem, Kobi Yamada (Useful for Courage, Facing Fears, Grit)
- Have You Filled a Bucket Today, Carol McCloud (Useful for Feeling Uplifted by Giving to Others)

#### Weblinks:

- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-diversity/parenting-after-separation-divorce>
- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/psychological-effects-of-divorce-on-kids-4140170>
- <https://www.maggiedent.com/common-concerns/family-breakdown-sibling-rivalry/>

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