

## **How do I get my child to talk to me about what's going on?**

It can be hard to get your child to open up to you at the best of times but when you are going through parent separation it is more essential. Children need to communicate to you how they feel about the situation so that you can help them manage and understand those feelings. There are potentially lots of changes going on in their lives, which they will need to talk to you about.

Children have a habit of wanting to talk to you when they want to and as a parent this is not always the most convenient time for us. Find a time when you and your child are not busy with other people and other things and make a date with them. Once they have a date with you they can have a good think beforehand about what they are going to say. Get your child to suggest what you can do together - perhaps you could go bowling, out for dinner or for ice-cream somewhere - an activity where you will have the opportunity to talk. Explain to them that this is their time to talk and they can ask you whatever questions they want and you will answer them honestly. When I say honestly think about the age of the child, the depth of information to give them and use appropriate language. When talking with them praise them for being so brave with their feelings and explain to them that you do not expect them to be brave forever. They are allowed to cry or be angry but talking things over with you can make them feel better.

Your child will feel more able to open up to you if you spend quality time with them and get them involved in things you are doing so they still feel part of a family. Talk to them about some of your feelings too so they know you have feelings about the separation and explain that you are learning and having to adjust to this new situation too.

If your child really does not want to talk to you perhaps there is someone in their class at school whose parents have gone through the same thing that they could talk to and share experiences of mum and dad splitting up. This could really help them. How did their friend feel when their parents split up? What did they do? Who did they talk to and what is life like for them now? Alternatively, there may be someone else they can trust with their feelings such as a teacher or a friend of the family. Counsellors, coaches and therapists can also be a great reference point for children to offload their thoughts and feelings. Encourage your child to speak to someone so they don't worry or get upset on their own.