

## Is It My Fault?

Children may think it is their fault but of course its not. Mum and dad somehow cannot live with each other so they have to live apart.

Ask your children, 'what do you think would happen if we stay together? Would you want mum and dad to feel upset/angry etc with each other and how would they feel hearing them possibly argue or shout because they both did not want to live together anymore? Get them to imagine the situation and how they would feel. Now get them to think of mum and dad living in different places and returning home from school with no uneasy atmosphere etc. How do they feel now? Talk through the two different feelings. I am sure they would prefer the second scenario despite the hurt that they are feeling.

Children fear it is their fault unless they are told it isn't so tell them! An example of this is James who had been in trouble at school to the extent his mum and dad had been called into the school about his behaviour. He was really upset about his parents being called in and modified his behaviour. However, when his parents split up several weeks later he felt that it was his fault - he had caused them to separate. He believed if only he had been 'good' it may not have happened. After discussing it with him he decided to tell his mum which was a brave decision. She was relieved that he had admitted his feelings and explained to him that it was just a coincidence that the two situations had happened at the same time.

She told him that his dad and her had not been getting on very well for a long time and that they could not live and be happy together any more.

For Sarah the situation was different. Her mum and dad had been bickering for weeks on end and they had decided that dad would move out for a trial separation. In order for dad to go without the children around, they decided that Sarah and her brother to stay over at a friends house one Saturday night. Dad could then move some of his things out of the house unnoticed and without hundreds of questions thrown at him by the children. Sarah said goodbye to her parents and off she went whilst mum spent a stressful evening with 'moving out dad'.

When Sarah returned the following day mum explained to her why dad was not at home. Sarah could not understand that in 24 hours she had gone and had fun at her friends and dad had moved out in the same timeframe. What did that mean? Yes mum and dad had been arguing but why so quick and why did it happen when she was not there. What had she and her brother done? Mum explained to her that she wanted dad to go on a positive note and that this was the way that mum and dad thought would be easiest for her and her brother.

We mustn't let children mind-read what is going on in a situation. Be straight with them and be as honest as you feel you can be. Don't let them ever think that they did something wrong.