

A FREE GUIDE

Jacintha

When families *change*.

Five things your child needs after separation, and gentle ways to give them. A free guide for you and your child (or children).

Jacintha Field

Family and child counsellor | www.jacinthafield.com

Before we *begin*.

When a family changes, everyone has a story. There may be sadness, anger, relief, fear, confusion and hope, sometimes all within the same day. And there may be a child who seems to be coping beautifully on the outside but is carrying questions they don't yet know how to ask.

I created this free guide because it's the kind of resource I wish I'd had. In my work as a family and child counsellor, I see how much children benefit when the adults around them feel supported, steady and kind to themselves.

Inside are five things your child needs after separation, with words you can use and small reflections to try. You don't have to get everything right. You are allowed to need support, make mistakes and learn as you go.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This is a free educational resource with general information. It isn't a substitute for individual counselling, legal advice or specialist family violence support, and it can't assess your family's circumstances. Please read the safety check on the next page before you begin.



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A safety check *before you begin.*

The ideas in this guide are designed for families where both parents can communicate without fear. Before you go further, consider whether any of these apply to you or your child:

- You feel afraid of the other parent, or change what you do to avoid their reaction.
- There has been physical or sexual violence, threats or damage to property.
- Your phone, location, money, messages or movements are being monitored or controlled.
- You have been pressured, intimidated or punished for disagreeing or setting a limit.
- Your child is afraid to spend time with a parent, or has told you something that worries you.
- Alcohol or other drug use is affecting a parent's ability to care for your child safely.
- A court order or intervention order is being ignored.

If any of these apply, please pause the communication strategies in this guide and seek specialist advice first. Your safety, and your child's safety, come before everything else here.

Emergency

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If anyone is in immediate danger

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732

24/7 support. Text 0458 737 732 or chat at 1800respect.org.au

Safe Steps (Victoria)

1800 015 188

24/7 family violence response line

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01

Permission to *feel everything*.

Children can hold several feelings at once, just as adults can. A child might be excited about a new bedroom at one home and still feel sad about leaving the other. They might be angry with a parent and miss them at the same time.

Your child doesn't need you to convince them the separation is for the best every time they feel sad. They need to know they can talk to you, and that their feelings are welcome.

"You can enjoy your time at Mum's and still miss being here. You don't have to choose."

"It's okay to feel sad. I'm right here with you in your sadness."

TRY THIS

What feelings have I noticed in my child lately, and how could I welcome them?

02

To know it's *not their job to fix it.*

Children are naturally attentive to the people they love. When a parent is upset, a child may try to make them laugh, become extra helpful or keep their own worries quiet.

Be honest with your child about your feelings. You don't need to share the story or the details, but letting them know when you feel sad, angry or disappointed helps them connect with their own emotions. Keep the adult details for the adults who support you.

"I'm feeling sad today. It's okay to feel sad sometimes, and I'm looking after myself. You don't need to fix anything. Your job is to be a kid."

TRY THIS

One feeling I could name honestly with my child this week, without the story, is...

03

A calm adult *to lean on.*

Children's emotions can be BIG during this time, and they often let them out with the parent they feel safest with. Children borrow calm from the adults around them: when they go up, you need to come down. Your steady voice and slower breathing help their nervous system settle.

Give anger somewhere to go: scream into a pillow, stamp their feet, scribble hard with colour, go for a walk or spend time in a calm corner. All feelings are okay; what matters is how we respond to them. After a changeover, time in nature can help them land. And if they don't want to talk in the moment, don't push. Bedtime is often when children finally open up.

"I can see you're really angry. It's okay to be angry, but I won't let you hit. Let's work out what you need."

TRY THIS

What helps my child calm down, and what helps me stay calm when they can't?

04

To stay *out of the middle*.

Children shouldn't carry messages between homes, report on the other household or feel they must choose a side. If you need information, ask the other adult through an appropriate channel.

Be honest with your child, but try not to speak negatively about the other parent in front of them. We all have moments of dysregulation; you are human. But even if that person didn't treat you with love and kindness, they are still your child's parent. And when your child comes home happy, let them enjoy it without guilt.

"I'm glad you had a good time."

TRY THIS

Is there anything my child is carrying between our homes that I could take back?

05

A parent who *looks after themselves*.

You cannot pour from an empty cup. Your wellbeing matters in its own right, not only because it helps you parent. Rest when you can, speak to yourself kindly and do something each week that is just for you.

Your healing journey is your healing journey, and there is no magic number for how long it takes. Surround yourself with safe people. You don't need to share everything with everyone, and it's okay to step back from people who make things harder, even family.

This is a new chapter in your life. It may not be the one you planned, but it can be one where you come home to yourself.

TRY THIS

One small thing I will do for myself this week is...

When a hard message *arrives*.

Messages from a former partner can bring up a lot. Before you reply, check whether it involves a deadline, your child's needs, a court order or a safety concern; those take priority. If it isn't urgent, it's okay to take time to settle first.

Take the emotion out of your reply. Think of it like emailing your bank or your phone company. You don't need to match their energy. Be you. And you don't need to reply to every message; often, no response is a response.

TRY BIFF

Brief. A few sentences, focused on the issue.

Informative. Clear facts about the practical matter.

Friendly. A neutral, courteous tone.

Firm. A clear answer that closes the conversation.

BIFF was developed by Bill Eddy of the High Conflict Institute.

"Thanks for letting me know. Sam has soccer at 9 am on Saturday, so I'll drop him at your place at 11 am as usual."

Written messages can sometimes be used in family dispute resolution or court, so it's worth keeping them calm and factual. If you are experiencing threats, intimidation or control, better wording isn't the answer; please seek specialist support.

The full guide: *When Families Change.*

If this free guide has helped, the full guide goes much further. It's 65 pages of practical guidance, words to use and reflective exercises, written for the real circumstances separated parents face, including high conflict, absent parents and new partners.

Talking with children at every age

Communication and BIFF replies

Two homes, transitions and health needs

When a parent is absent or inconsistent

Conflict, boundaries and safety

Big emotions and co-regulation

New partners and blended families

Grief, healing and letting go

Parenting plans, consent orders and records

A 12-exercise workshop

Find it at www.jacinthafield.com.

WORK WITH ME

I have a private practice in Albert Park, Melbourne, and offer sessions in person as well as online. If you're needing support, please reach out to me at jacintha@jacinthafield.com.

Support and *further help.*

You do not have to navigate separation alone. These services can help, whether you need immediate support, advice about parenting arrangements or someone to talk to.

Emergency**000**

If you or someone else is in immediate danger

1800RESPECT**1800 737 732**

Domestic, family and sexual violence support, 24/7. Text 0458 737 732. 1800respect.org.au

Safe Steps (Victoria)**1800 015 188**

24/7 family violence crisis response. safesteps.org.au

Family Relationship Advice Line**1800 050 321**

Separation and parenting arrangements. familyrelationships.gov.au

Parentline Victoria**13 22 89**

Phone support for parents and carers. parentline.vic.gov.au

Lifeline**13 11 14**

24/7 crisis support. lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline**1800 55 1800**

24/7 support for young people aged 5 to 25. kidshelpline.com.au

If you are concerned that a device or account is being monitored, consider whether it is safe to access support from it. Contact details can change, so please check each service's website. Directory last reviewed: October 2026.

Be so kind *to you.*

Your family may look different from the one you imagined. That doesn't mean it can't be a family in which your child feels loved, secure and connected.

This can be a new chapter for you, one where you create a life that feels more aligned with who you are. I'm sending you so much love and understanding as you take each step.

*LLG,
Jxo*

Jacintha