

Ten memos from your child

1 Don't spoil me. I know quite well that I thought not to have all I ask for – I'm only testing you.

2 Don't be afraid to be firm with me. I prefer it: it makes me feel secure.

3 Don't make me feel smaller than I am. It makes only makes me behave stupidly "big"

4 Don't correct me in front of people if you can help it. I'll take much more notice if you talk quietly with me in private

5 Don't protect me from consequences. I need to learn the painful way sometimes.

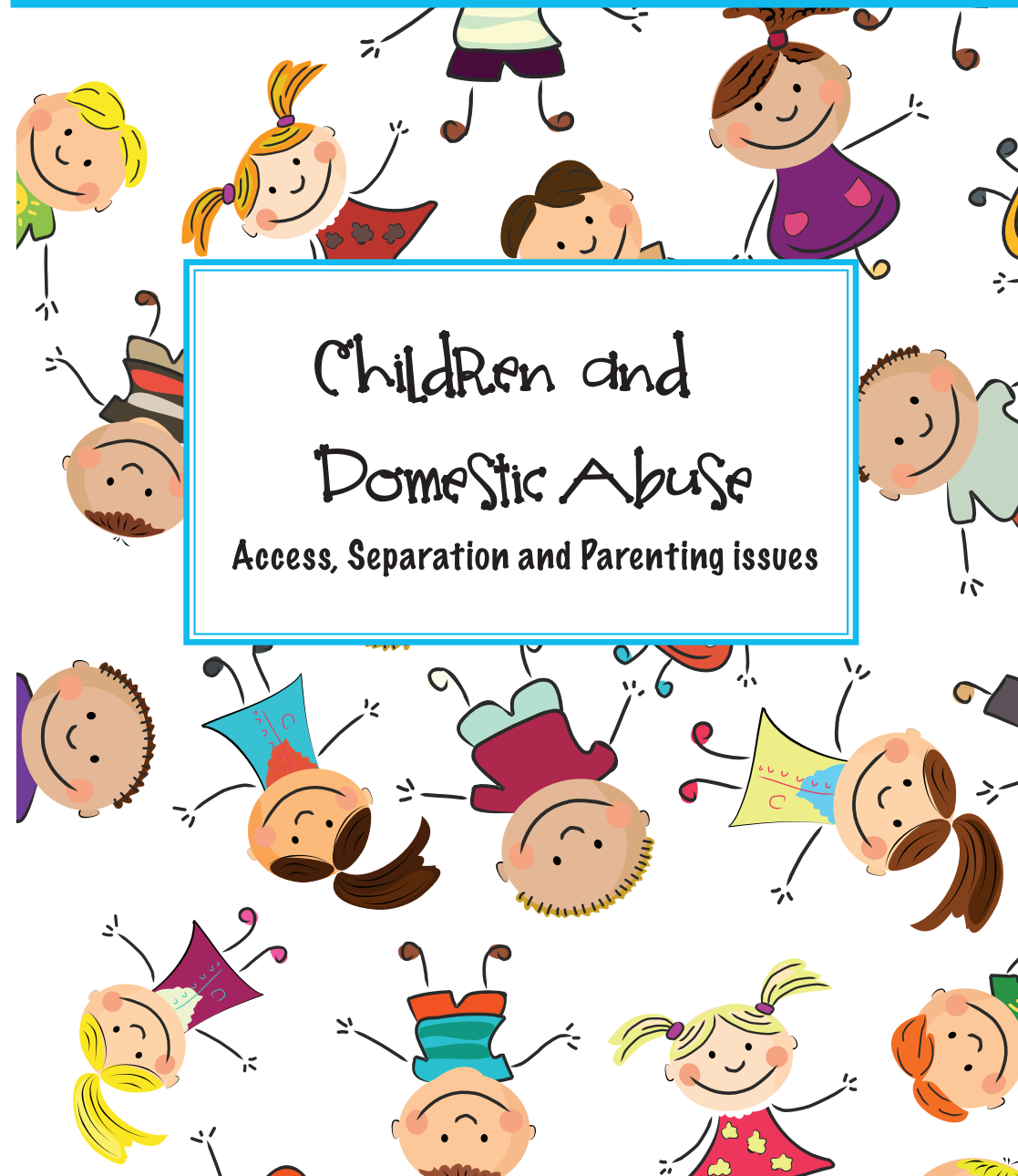
6 Don't be too upset when I say "I hate you". Sometimes it isn't you I hate but your power over me.

7 Don't put me off when I ask questions. If you do, you will find that I stop asking and seek my information elsewhere.

8 Don't be inconsistent. That completely confuses me and makes me loose faith in you.

9 Don't tell me that my fears are silly. They are terribly real and you can do much to reassure me if you try to understand.

10 Don't forget that I don't thrive without lots of love and understanding, but I don't need to tell you that do I?



Children and Domestic Abuse

Access, Separation and Parenting issues

An abusive partner can affect all parts of your life, including parenting. It is important to remember that undermining you as a mother is often part of an abusive partner's tactics and that with time, information and support you will regain confidence in your ability to parent your children.



How might this affect my children?

Some children become quiet and withdrawn.

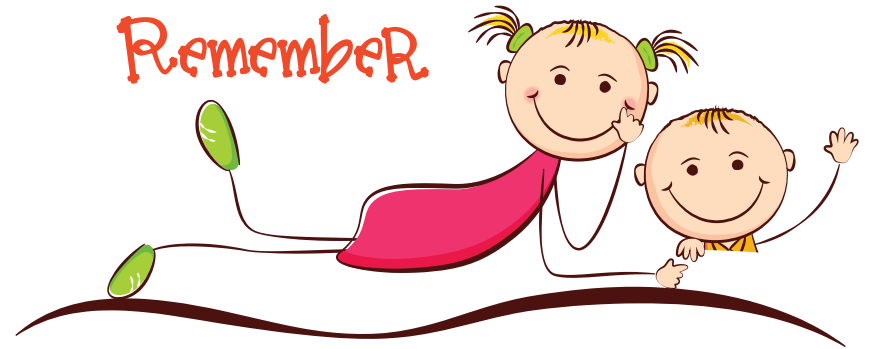
Children sense tensions and are often aware of tension in home even if you don't think so.

Young children tend to act out how they are feeling because they don't have the words to tell you. Older children may also display behavioural changes e.g. they may become withdrawn, you may see changes in school performance etc.

Children may feel guilty or confused; they may love both parents but feel they have to choose sides.



Remember



- Never give out about your child's father to the child. Even though you may feel hurt and angry with him. It is not good for the children to listen to you criticise their father especially if they love their dad.
- Keep in mind that you will be probably dealing with the child's father for many years. You can train yourself to not over react to when he pushes your buttons.
- During access visits do not use the children as messengers.
- Talk to friends or other supportive adults about your frustrations.

FAQ'S?

Q. How do I talk to the children about what has happened?

A. It is important to be honest and to speak to them in an age appropriate way. This does not mean confiding in them.

You can say "Mum and Dad are not getting on very well. We are arguing a lot and neither of us are happy so we have decided to live in a different house"

If the issue is related to violence you can say; "it isn't safe for us to live with Dad anymore"

If you are uncertain about the future tell them that.

You can say; "Right now I'm not sure about what will happen but I do know that when the time is right I will make a decision that I feel is best for the family".

Q. I'm afraid of what it will do to them if I tell them the truth. Won't it make things worse?

A. If we don't tell children the truth they will only try to imagine what is happening. Young children tend to associate something bad happening with their behaviour and may think that you have separated because they were bold, or if they had behaved better then dad wouldn't have been abusive. It is important to reassure them that they haven't done anything wrong. If they have witnessed violence they may be very frightened and imagine all sorts of things might happen to you or to them.



Q. I feel so bad about how all of this has affected the children, how can I make it up to them?

A. If dad was very strict it may be tempting to "over-compensate" by being soft on rules and giving in to demands. This may work in the short term but does not teach the children important values. Clear boundaries are very important in a child's life. Even if they try to resist them they are often just testing you. Remember being consistent makes them feel secure.

Q. My son is throwing a lot of tantrums and seems to be angry all the time. Is this because of the separation? What should I do?

Separation is also a confusing time for children. They are often trying to make sense of what is going on and get frustrated. During a tantrum make sure that the child is safe. You could try hugging him if he allows it. Do not get locked into a battle with him. Later on when he has calmed down you could try and help him talk about what happened earlier how you felt and help him name his feelings.

e.g. "John you seemed very angry today, do you want to tell me what is wrong?".





How do I arrange access?

- You can arrange access informally.
- You can arrange to use a local service (Time 4 us, Public location).
- You can seek advice from a solicitor and try to arrange access formally through the court.



Coping with access

- Don't ask the child lots of questions when they return this make them feel that they have to choose sides.

How can I help?

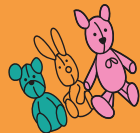


• Do not assume that your child feels the same about the situation as you do, you need to ask them how they feel?



• Try not to criticise the other parent this only adds to the child's confusion. However, children need to know that abusive behaviour in a relationship is not ok.

• Try to be honest and open in answering their questions.



• Children need lots of praise and encouragement. This helps to build their confidence.



• Checking in with children while doing everyday activities (e.g. putting away the shopping) and making contact at eye level is much more effective than putting them on the spot and "having the big chat"

• It's a good idea to notify the child's school/croche/playschool about changes in family circumstances in case of changes in behaviour as they can support any noted changes in behaviour.

• If your unsure what to say to a child that's upset sometimes a hug or holding them can be enough.



• Some children can appear anxious before or after going on their access visits. Some of the following tips may help

• One or two days before the access is due remind the children that they are going on their visit. It may help to have a calendar in your child's room so he /she can mark off the days to the next access visit.

• Make sure that everything that they will need is packed for the visit and that the child is part of the packing activity. This will help to make sure that they do not forget any special things like teddy, or a book etc.

• You may need to look at the "handing over" arrangement. It may be safer to drop the child off at a neutral venue rather than you go to his home or he come to yours.

• If you are genuinely concerned about your child's safety during access you may need to contact a social worker and your solicitor.

• Try to pick a fun quiet activity or you could have a favourite meal ready each time they return.

• If the child is angry or upset on return try not to load him with questions but focus on the feelings e.g. "you seem very angry do you want to talk?" If the child doesn't want to talk don't push it perhaps he just needs a hug for now.

• If behaviour is extreme either physically or verbally then you need to be clear that this behaviour is not acceptable. It's important to be consistent with this from the beginning.