

# SOS Détresse

## Separation and divorce

When a couple and a family decide no longer to live together, everyone concerned generally experiences major changes. This is a phase which gives rise to sadness, to deep wounds and to turmoil. What once existed is no longer there. The couple doesn't know how to go on, they feel impotent and overwhelmed. And yet, however painful the separation may be, it also represents an opportunity for a new life, perhaps less hampered by daily quarrels.

How should a separation be managed in order to limit damage to the children and the two partners? How can mutual respect be maintained? A "good" separation calls for great emotional strength but it is possible. Social skills and the ability to seek support are particularly precious at this time.

## The children need positive contact with both parents

Children are particularly affected by a separation. Depending on their age, children become aware at a very early stage of the threat to the family, often subconsciously. They frequently react by presenting difficulties in concentrating, anxieties and behavioural problems, or by over-compensating. A separation may lastingly undermine their confidence in relationships. They are witnessing the break-up of the family unit, whereas they have hitherto considered the presence of both parents as a given. Their self-esteem may suffer as a result of the separation.

Children can be spared much suffering if efforts are made to ensure that the couple's break-up does not also mean the destruction of the family. The ties between parents and children still exist. Parents are responsible for maintaining these ties and for nurturing them in the future, since children need the affection and attention of both parents in order to develop positively.

## What to do now?

Alongside the emotional difficulties created by the separation, changes in the organisation of daily life create very practical problems: the financial situation changes, there may be a new job, it may be necessary to move house or to change school, custody of and visits to the children have to be organised, the divorcing couple may face legal conflicts or fierce quarrels.

## Advice

The challenges posed by a separation or divorce are extremely complex but this shouldn't make us feel totally at a loss. The Ministry for the Family and Integration, together with the Working Group "Quality management Psy" and other authors have published on the internet a [guide](#) (in French) for families going through separation and divorce, which covers many aspects of the subject and makes suggestions to help manage the crisis better. We warmly recommend this guide to you.

It provides information on:

- the consequences of separation and divorce for the children
- how to behave towards the children before, during and after the separation
- advice on organising visits
- help and mediation in the event of separation and divorce
- addresses of legal advisers
- addresses of advice centres
- a bibliography on separation and divorce.