

Explaining Family Relationships



Introduction

This booklet is a guide for parents to explain different family formations or changes in family circumstances to children. It is important for children to have information about their personal and family history to help them develop a clear sense of identity. They need to understand their family situation to develop a sense of belonging. The diversity of families should be explained in a clear positive, age-appropriate way that lets children know that all families are different, and that difference is perfectly normal and should be embraced.

The United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), states that if children are separated from their parents, they have a right to know the identity of their parents and information about their relatives. For children who's parents do not live together, it is especially important to have information about both their birth parents and their extended families.

Talking to your child

It is normal for children to want to know about their parents. They may ask questions that can cause discomfort, but it is important that these questions get answered in a positive manner that is appropriate to the child's age and understanding. It is natural that they want to know about the other parent, what they are like, or why they don't live with them.

- Your child needs to feel free to talk about their other parent.
- They should be able to ask questions and know that you won't get upset.
- They need to feel you will answer their questions honestly and, in a calm, positive manner.

Be prepared to respond to negative statements from your child

- I don't have a Daddy/Mammy.
- Why doesn't Daddy live with us like other Dads?
- Mam doesn't love me anymore.
- Did I make Daddy leave?

When talking to children about their other parent, be honest and give them as much information as is appropriate about

- Why are both parents not living with them.
- What the other parent is like.
- Who is the biological parent, if there is a new partner.
- Why they have two Mams or two Dads.
- Why do they live with Granny/Auntie.
- Who is their extended family.

Answer questions truthfully and don't invent stories.

Children can handle the truth when offered in a sensitive and appropriate way. Talk about the other parent, what they look like, if the child resembles them, their interests, who the extended family is etc. Tell children early on in a simple age-appropriate way about the family situation and build on this information as their understanding grows. Very young children are usually satisfied with a simple explanation. Age five- to ten-year-olds will look for more information about their other parent, like their age, appearance, likes and dislikes, and any details of extended family. Teenagers will look for more detailed information about their other parent, and information on your relationship with the other parent.

Remember to be positive about the other parent, if you can't be positive, be neutral.

Let relatives, staff in the school or nursery know the basic situation and what the child has been told, it is important that everyone is dealing with the same facts to avoid misunderstandings. People will be in a better position to support if they are aware of what the child has been told. Ensure your child feels that they can freely ask questions, without fear of negative reactions.

Listen to your child

Children need to feel that they are listened to and heard. They need to know that their point of view is valid and understood. They need time and space to process things and to express their opinions on what is happening. When children don't feel listened to, they can feel powerless, and this can influence their feelings of self-worth and can impact their behavior. Listening to children lets them feel valued and understood, it is important and healthy for children to express their views on issues that impact their lives.

Keep your child informed

Children can deal better with situations if they have a clear explanation and understanding of what is happening, and what is likely to happen. Parents should be honest in explaining what is happening, in a sensitive way that the child can understand. Trying to hush things up or brushing everything under the carpet does not benefit the child, they may feel like they cannot ask about the other parent and may internalise feelings of rejection or loss. Unpleasant situations need explanations, which should be brief, honest and age appropriate.

Keep in mind that:

- Children need to be given basic information in a way they understand.
- They need to be able to process what is happening and what has happened.
- They need to know that it is ok for them to love both parents, even if they are no longer together.
- They just want to know about their family situation to build a sense of their own identity.
- They should be told as much as possible about the other parent.
- They need to know that it is ok for them to ask questions, and that they will be listened to, and information will be given to them in a sensitive, truthful and appropriate way.

Useful Contacts

One Family - *for married/divorced/separated couples*

<https://www.onefamily.ie>

(01) 662 9212

info@onefamily.ie

8 Coke Lane, Smithfield, Dublin 7.
D07EN2Y.

Rainbows Ireland* - *for children and young people bereaved by grief or parental separation*

<https://rainbowsireland.ie/>

(01) 473 4175

ask@rainbowsireland.ie

Loreto Centre, Loreto College,
Crumlin Rd, Saint James, Dublin

*Member of Treoir's

National Parents Council

<https://www.npc.ie/>

(01) 887 4034

12 Marlborough Court,
Marlborough Street,
North City, Dublin

Young Parent Support Programme**

(YPSP formerly TPSP - parents up to 24)

www.youngparents.ie

info@ypsp.ie

089 410 4619

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Equality for Children

<https://equalityforchildren.ie/>

Outhouse, 105 Capel Street,
Rotunda, Dublin 1, D01 R290.

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

<https://www.mrci.ie/>

01 889 7570 / 083 075 53 87

info@mrci.ie

13 Lower Dorset Street
Dublin 1, D01 Y893.

Parentline - *parent supporting service*

<https://parentline.ie/>

(01) 873 3500.

Jigsaw

<https://jigsaw.ie/>

(01) 658 3070

44 Essex St E, Temple Bar,
Dublin, D02YR92.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

Visit www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/camhs/

Kinship Care Ireland**

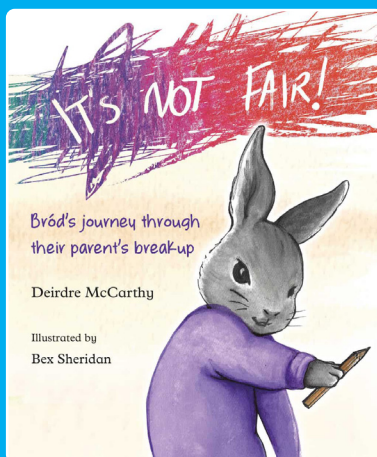
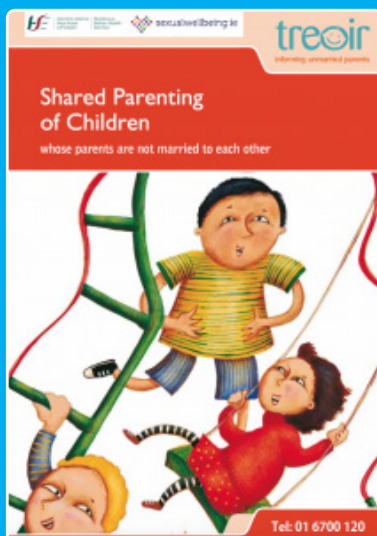
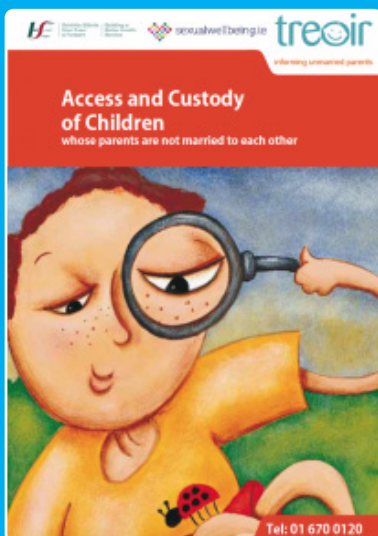
www.kinshipcare.ie

087 148 7124

info@kinshipcare.ie

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Visit www.treoir.ie to find more publications



Contact us at info@treoir.ie or **01 670 0120** for more information on these workbooks for children that can help explain family relationships.

If you would like to talk through your individual situation, call Treoir on our confidential helpline at: 01 670 0120



sexualwellbeing.ie

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