Practical ideas on looking after yourself after separation

Taking care of yourself

Me!

What about Me?
Providing helpful tips and hints on reducing conflict and building a workable relationship with the other parent for the benefit of the kids.

Addresses the challenges that arise around money issues following separation. Includes hints and tips on stretching your dollar further.

Practical ideas on developing and maintaining relationships with your kids after separation; in particular for parents who spend much of their time away from their children.

Deals with issues that affect separated families when parents re-partner. Includes tips on building healthy relationships after separation.

An interactive CD Rom where real people in real situations share their experiences, tips and tools about navigating their way through separation.

Disclaimer
The information in this publication is provided as a guide only on the understanding that the Australian Government is not providing professional advice. The Child Support Agency recommends that users seek professional advice for their particular circumstances.

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Australian Government
Child Support Agency

This publication was produced by the Child Support Agency’s External Relations Group. Queries or feedback about this booklet should be sent to CSACommunication@csa.gov.au
ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is about looking after yourself now you’re separated.

It’s about:

• Providing guidance about the importance of looking after your emotional wellbeing both during and after separation.
• Outlining the benefits of looking after yourself when you face the difficult issues associated with separation.
• Informing you how to recognise and help children deal with their feelings during and after separation.
• Encouraging you to feel comfortable about seeking extra help.

This book will help you to:

• Deal with change.
• Understand the way you are thinking and feeling.
• Learn survival skills.
• Know where to go for extra help.

It’s about looking after yourself.

By taking care of yourself, your kids benefit.
How are you today?
Flip through the book and read the sections that relate to you.

**DOWN**
Are you …
- Angry?
- Confused?
- Unsure?

Try starting with
Pages 15–25
which deal with a variety of feelings and provide practical ideas to help you get through them.

**DEALING WITH IT**
Are you …
- Working out what to do?
- Controlling your anger?
- Becoming more focused?

Particularly useful might be
Pages 11–15
which focus on coping, organising and prioritising everyday demands.

Pages 32–34 provide examples of what your children may be experiencing, and provides tips and resources to help you help your children.

**MOVING FORWARD**
Are you …
- More organised?
- Enjoying life again?
- Strengthening relationships?

In meeting your goals you might use
Pages 27–31
which outline steps to building self-confidence and dealing with conflict.

Pages 36–37 provide a practical worksheet to plan the changes you want to make in your life.

Extra help is available during this difficult time. See pages 40–43 for the list of Useful Contacts.
INTRODUCTION

Thinking, feeling, acting after separation

Separation can affect our emotional wellbeing. It is a major life crisis that affects the way we feel, think and act.

Can you recognise some of the following situations?

- Ongoing conflict with your ex-partner.
- Long and drawn out dealings with the legal system.
- More or less parental responsibility.
- Living apart from your children.
- Unemployment.
- Lack of money.
- Guilt in thinking you have ‘failed’ in maintaining a successful relationship.
- Changes and uncertainties about parental boundaries between you and your ex-partner.
- Your children’s reactions.
- Loss of home, friends and dreams.

What about me?
Some changes after separation can take place over a number of years…

I had to move out quickly and it was hard to find a place I could afford. I’m currently sharing with a mate but it isn’t really suitable for when the kids come around.

D.L. separated 3 weeks.

In the end I had to get a new job, with longer hours — just so we could survive. I finally found a full-time job but it means the kids have to go to after school care. We’ve all had to get used to some major changes.

M.C. separated 6 months.

Now that I’ve repartnered, we have to make new arrangements for Christmas, school holidays and birthdays etc. It’s difficult because they have to suit not just me, but the kids, the other parent, my new partner and my stepchildren.

A.P. separated 2 years.

Looking after your feelings and emotions is as important as taking care of your body. Most of us take care of our physical health far better than our feelings.
The separation roller coaster ride — stay buckled and keep your head!

The emotional impact of separation can be intense — like a roller coaster ride that you didn’t buy a ticket for. The emotions you feel can come and go. Separation can bring with it lots of highs and lows. You might feel these things separately or you could have a mixture of feelings at any one time.

Do you have more ups than downs?

- I had a great day at work today
- I’m losing my temper more with my children
- I am taking more sickies
- The kids and I had a great day — things are settling down
- I’ve started exercising again and really feel good
- I’m drinking more alcohol
- The household jobs are getting on top of me

What about me? Am I coping?
Every person who is involved in separation experiences it differently. The one who is ‘left’ may have different feelings to the one who did the ‘leaving’ or to those who mutually agree to end the relationship.

**ANGER**
- Feelings of resentment
- Thoughts are confused
- Behaviour is unpredictable

**SHOCK AND DENIAL**
- Feelings of fear
- Thoughts are mixed up
- Behaviour is frozen

**DEPRESSION/ISOLATION**
- Feelings of helplessness
- Thoughts are jumbled
- Behaviour is unwilling

**ACCEPTANCE**
- Feelings of resolve
- Thoughts are practical
- Behaviour is energetic

**CHANGE**
- Feelings of empowerment
- Thoughts are focused
- Behaviour is productive

Some feelings connected with separation will not appear until later on and can affect people differently at various times. New feelings can arise many months or years after the time of separation.
Signs

There are certain signs that you should be aware of after separation that could mean you need to pay attention. **USE A PENCIL AND TICK HOW MANY YOU IDENTIFY WITH.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Acting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slowed thinking</td>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>Crying for no real reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful thoughts</td>
<td>Fear of the future</td>
<td>Increase or decrease in physical activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorientation</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Withdrawing from friends and social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory problems</td>
<td>Grief at the loss of family</td>
<td>Increase or decrease in appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td>Cheated/anger</td>
<td>Frequent arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illogical thinking</td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Increase or decrease in sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor judgement</td>
<td>Rejected/isolated</td>
<td>Increase or decrease in sex drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty making decisions</td>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Short tempered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming</td>
<td>Sense of relief</td>
<td>Frantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashbacks of arguments</td>
<td>Hopelessness/helplessness</td>
<td>Impatient with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unable to concentrate</td>
<td>Uncoordinated</td>
<td>Increased smoking, drug and/or alcohol use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubts about your self worth</td>
<td>Low morale</td>
<td>Difficulty falling or staying asleep</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do-It-Yourself tips for managing signs

**Have healthier thoughts**

- Write things down instead of trying to remember them.
- Pick a place and time to do your worrying. Make it the same place and time. Spend 30 minutes thinking about your concerns and focus on what is really happening — not what might happen.
- Know your limitations and let others know them too.

**Balance your moods**

- Practice relaxation to reduce the impact of frustrating situations:
  1. breathe in slowly, fill up your lungs and try to make your stomach rise,
  2. hold your breath for a few seconds, and
  3. breathe out slowly; let your stomach go back down.
- When irritated find a quiet spot (even if it's in the loo) and take the time to sit still.
- Let yourself cry if you need to.

**Be positive**

- If feeling rejected — look at what are the triggers (for example a song or a special place) and do something different.
- If feeling guilty — work out whose expectations you are trying to meet. Check these expectations are really true and negotiate them if you can’t meet them.
- If you are afraid of the future try to focus on the things you can change now.
- If feeling isolated — consider joining a social group such as a sports, hobbies or sole parents support group.
- Try positive self talk, self praise and self encouragement (see pages 27 and 28 of this book).
Good communication

- Check the way you react to the other person — 60% of your message is sent through your body language e.g. rolling of your eyes in frustration or arms crossed in anger.

- Tell friends what you need to maintain their friendship. When together, agree not to discuss or criticise the other person involved in the separation.

- If an argument starts, STOP and think — is this helping or making things worse? Agree to meet later after you have had time to consider the options.

- Write your frustrations and anger down on paper and throw it away.

- Keep things business-like with the other parent, and don’t get into personal issues. Stick to agreed topics.

Look after your body

- If your appetite has reduced, eat small portions more often of food that you particularly like.

- When you feel and look good, people respond more positively to you.

- If you have trouble sleeping try to establish a pre-sleep routine, e.g. washing your face and cleaning your teeth, having a warm drink or listening to soft music.

- Try to slowly cut down on stimulants like caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes.

- Stretch. Being tense affects your muscles and breathing. Try rolling your shoulders up and back then relax. Inhale deeply as you roll up and exhale as you relax. Repeat this a few times.
Pressures

As a separated parent, surviving day-to-day becomes your priority. You have to deal with a number of new and sometimes competing tasks.

What pressures are you feeling following your separation?

USE A PENCIL AND TICK YOUR SURVIVAL NEEDS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Tick</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning to cook</td>
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<td>Doing the laundry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining the car</td>
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<td>Budgeting with less money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
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<td>Paying the bills</td>
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<td>Looking for new accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining the house</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting the demands of your children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting enough sleep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting time off work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking for work</td>
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<td>Writing a resume</td>
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<td>Learning how to apply for a job</td>
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<td>Learning interviewing skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with government departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organising transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping for groceries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding the children’s routines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding what to do when kids get sick</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organising care for the kids</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do-It-Yourself tips for managing pressures

**Dealing with government departments**

- Ask for the name of the person that you are dealing with for future reference.
- Keep copies of documents provided to each department (record the date, person and section they are sent to).

**Getting time off work**

- Speak to your superiors and colleagues, and explain your situation. Suggest a possible compromise — Friday afternoons off for an extra 35 minutes a day. Set a period of time for this then review it.
- Know your limitations and let others know them too.

**Smaller social network**

- Consider volunteering where the work is done on a group basis e.g. fire rescue service, life saving, your child’s school Parents and Friends network.

**Learning to cook**

- Ask a friend to teach you to cook in exchange for doing some handy work, mowing their lawn, baby sitting or help with some other project they might have on.
- Borrow a book from the library on cooking basic meals.

**Maintaining the car**

- Look on the web for information on your brand of car.
- Get road service membership such as NRMA, RACV etc for when you lock your keys in the car, have a flat tyre, your battery suddenly goes dead, or your car breaks down in an inconvenient location.
- Take a course in car maintenance.
Shopping for groceries

• Look on the web for home shopping grocery sites such as Coles or Woolworths. Browse through each section and make a list of what you need — use this as a prompter each time you shop. It also gives you an idea of the costs involved.

• Generic food brands are often cheaper and just as good as the label brands.

Less money

• Contact your local utility service company to arrange instalment payments for your electricity, telephone, insurance, rates etc.

• Join a group that buys groceries in bulk — this can be cheaper. These are usually co-ops or local community groups.

Managing relationships

• Ensure that the important people in your children’s lives are invited to school plays, religious ceremonies, music recitals, sports events etc.

Understanding your children’s routine

• Have a calendar or notebook with important dates highlighted, e.g. sports carnival, swimming carnival, parent reading at school, doctors appointments, weekend sports locations, etc.

A comprehensive list is provided in Me and My Kids on page 35. To order a copy, see the inside cover of this book.

Organising care for the kids

• Talk to your child’s school and see what school care programs you can access e.g. before and after-school care, and holiday programs.

• Place a notice for parents in the school newsletter requesting child minding after school. In return, offer something that you can do for the other parent.

• Enquire with your local community service provider about available child care programs.
**Action Plan**

*Feel good about taking care of yourself.*

**USE A PENCIL AND LIST YOUR TOP FIVE PRIORITIES.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My survival needs</th>
<th>What I have to do to meet each need</th>
<th>What resources will help me do this?</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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*Take it one step at a time and one day at a time.*
WHAT ARE STRESS, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION?

We’re not weak because we’re stressed — we’re stressed because we’re human.

Stress is a normal reaction to what is happening in your life, and it can be caused by good, as well as bad events. A little bit of stress isn’t always a bad thing; but being over-stressed may cause a range of health problems, including headaches, upset stomach, high blood pressure — even strokes or heart disease.

Stress grows!
Stress after separation

The changes that commonly follow separation can affect your emotional wellbeing and your ability to cope. Listed below are some types of stress that affect families during and after separation.

**USE A PENCIL AND TICK THE STRESS FACTORS THAT YOU ARE DEALING WITH NOW.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of stress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s problems and needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moving house</td>
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<td>Low self esteem</td>
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<td>Involvement with the ‘system’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with the ex-partner</td>
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<td>Future dreams changed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loss of control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balancing demands of work and parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of guilt or failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extra responsibilities — task overload</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced contact with children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living apart from your children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less personal time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role changes in parenting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smaller social network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work/life changes — loss of social support</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If stress is disrupting your life in a bad way, it may be time to learn new skills or get extra help. Refer to the back pages for contact numbers and websites.
Do-It-Yourself tips for managing stress

Learn to relax

• Take time out just for you, even if it’s only 20 minutes a day.
• Read, listen to music or simply be still.

Be positive

• Give yourself a pat on the back when you do something well.
• Look for the good even in difficult situations.

Be realistic

• Learn to look at what you can change and let go of what you can’t.
• Recognise there are only so many hours in the day.

Set goals and meet them

• Write down your goals.
• Break each goal into small steps.

Look after your body

• Exercise regularly — walk to the shops, play sport.
• Eat meals that include: fruit, vegies, grains (refer to the Heart Foundation website: www.heartfoundation.com.au)
• Try not to overuse alcohol or medications.
• Cut down or slowly give up smoking — talk to your chemist or doctor for advice.

We are not born with these coping skills — we need to learn and practice them.
Anxiety is a normal feeling that everyone experiences in day-to-day life. It can develop more strongly when faced with something uncertain, difficult, embarrassing or stressful. Anxiety feelings can range from being mild or moderate to severe, and can bring on extreme physical symptoms.

It can be controlled.

A test for general anxiety: The Goldberg Anxiety Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past month:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you felt keyed up or on edge?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been worrying a lot?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been irritable?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had any difficulty relaxing?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been sleeping poorly?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had headaches or neck aches?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had any of the following:</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trembling, tingling, dizzy spells, sweating, urinary frequency, diarrhoea?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been worried about your health?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had difficulty falling asleep?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What do my answers mean?

Score one point for each ‘Yes’. Most people have some of these symptoms. The average number of symptoms experienced by Australian adults is four. The higher the score, the more likely a person will experience disruption in their daily life. About 8% of adults get a score of 8 or more on this scale. A person with a high score of 8 or more may have a more severe form of anxiety — called an anxiety disorder. If this is the case, seek extra help.

Extra help can be found at the end of this book listed under Useful Contacts.
How to reduce anxiety

Each time I collect the children, my ex-partner meets me at the door and tells me what I should and shouldn’t be doing. Usually this leads to fighting in front of the kids. I feel sick in the stomach now each time I collect them and wonder what new drama will come up?

• Arrange a regular time to discuss the needs of your children other than at changeover time — this could be by phone, email or in a meeting without the kids.
• Use another place for the pick-up and drop-off of the children for contact visits — e.g. park, school, sporting venues.
• Call your local Child Contact Centre (locations found at http://famnet2.facs.gov.au/quicksearch.asp) to discuss using their facilities for changeover.

My ex-partner just hangs up the phone if I try to discuss anything about the children.

• Set a regular and neutral meeting place and time to talk about arrangements for the children.
• Establish a parenting agreement.
• Communicate initially by email.
• Use a mediation service provided by a local community service provider or government agency.

Where the relationship between separated parents is difficult, contact a community service provider in your area to help you develop a business-like relationship.

For a list of your local Community Services visit www.csa.gov.au or call CSA on 13 1272.
The first time the children went to stay with my ex-partner I felt uptight that they weren’t in my care.

Will my children meet my ex’s new partner before they are ready?

Will the kids get enough sleep?

Will takeaway be eaten all weekend?

Will they do their homework?

Will they take their medication?

- Appreciate that the children are in the care of their other parent, not a stranger.
- Plan to do things you like doing when the kids are away.
- It is reasonable for the other parent to organise their time with the children as they want.

TIP: Things to consider

How will you arrange special events, pick-ups and drop-offs, contact with other family members? Who will pay for different child costs and how will you share information about the children?

For more tips, see the ‘Parenting decision-making checklist’ on pages 25–26 of the book Me and My Kids. To order, see the inside front cover of this book or visit www.csa.gov.au to view the checklist.
Depression

The good news is that there are treatments that work.

Depression does not mean that you are weak or lazy. Depression is a common illness like diabetes or arthritis. At any one time, about 1 in 10 Australians will experience some kind of depression in a year and it can occur at any age.

Many people use the word ‘depression’ to describe feelings of sadness and loss. These feelings often pass within a few hours or a few days. During this time, people are able to carry on much as usual. However, if you feel sad much more intensely and for longer and your feelings start to interfere with your work, social and family life, you may want to seek extra help.

Depression can be turned around! Start by letting yourself know that it’s not your fault.

Trying to force unpleasant feelings to go away is like trying to put an oil fire out with water — it just makes things worse.
When I separated, everyone told me that in time it would get better — I felt that I just didn’t have the time to wait and hope for this. Losing my job then my family was a nightmare. I felt totally worthless. Everyone had advice but all I wanted to do was disappear. The situation did get better and now I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Simon, 34, separated 18 months

When I was depressed, I just couldn’t be bothered — it was like I was under a scrum with 50 blokes above me. I would go to work, come home, call the kids and sit in front of the box with a pie and a beer or two — I couldn’t sleep and was tired all the time. I slowly started to get into some exercise and watching what I ate and gradually I could feel the depression lifting.

Michael, 45 separated 2 years

After I separated, I was so depressed. I would get up in the morning to get the kids ready for school and then go back to bed for the rest of the day. If somebody knocked on the door or called me on the telephone, I just didn’t answer it. I didn’t cook, and didn’t really have an appetite — nothing was very appetising. Everything was just blah — really flat. Thankfully, things have improved and I have got my energy and focus back. I am learning to adjust to the changes.

Sarah, separated 9 months
Signs of depression

There are a number of symptoms of depression and it’s very rare for all symptoms to occur in one person all at once. You might feel it come on slowly, from sometimes feeling blue to more deep feelings more often. It is hard to accept that symptoms like sleeping badly and feeling worthless are depression. After all, don’t we all feel that way sometimes? That’s the key — sometimes. It’s not normal to feel that way for a long time.

USE A PENCIL AND TICK SYMPTOMS YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED FOR AT LEAST TWO WEEKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severe changes of mood over the day</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbed sleep, usually waking early in the morning and being unable to get back to sleep</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A general slowing down of thought, speech and movement</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of anxiety</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tearfulness for no reason</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short temper</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of energy and constant exhaustion</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to enjoy things</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of concentration</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty making decisions</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that you are forgetful</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative thoughts about the future</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness, even when amongst people</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued overleaf…
Do-It-Yourself guide to managing depression

Sometimes when you’re depressed it’s hard to get any enjoyment out of things. You may have stopped doing things you used to enjoy, which keeps the depression going.

It may help to get back into a routine but take it slowly. Try to do more of the things you enjoy. Your doctor, counsellor, church leader or friend may be able to help you.

Are you overloaded?

- Set realistic goals and assume a reasonable amount of responsibility.
- Break large tasks into small steps and do what you can when and as you can.

Prioritise tasks into:
- Have to do
- Need to do
- Leave for another time

Symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of guilt</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of hopelessness and despair</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealistic sense of failure</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming pre-occupied with illness</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of appetite and, as a result, loss of weight</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced desire for sex</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight loss or gain</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest in one’s physical appearance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurring thoughts of harming one’s self</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do my answers mean?

Score one point for each ‘Yes’. A person with a high score of 7 or more may have a deeper form of depression.

If this is the case, seek EXTRA HELP as soon as possible.
Get involved

Try to be with other people. It is usually better than being alone and secretive. If you shut yourself off for too long it can be hard to break the habit. Participate in activities that make you feel better.

Are you running on empty?

Exercise makes you fitter, think clearer and be stronger. Fit people deal with problems better and are healthier. Food and sleep helps to re-charge your batteries.

Decisions

Leave really important decisions until you feel better. Before deciding to change jobs, get married or get divorced — talk it over with someone independent who might have a clearer view of your situation. Sometimes talking to someone is a good way to hear your thoughts.

Treat yourself

Give yourself a treat now and then. Separation can bring some unusual demands and fewer opportunities to have fun. It doesn’t have to cost a lot.

Consider:

- Renting a movie.
- Reading the newspaper — find free events and activities.
- Going for a swim.
- Watching your local sports team.
Types of treatments available

There are a variety of treatments for stress, anxiety and depression available to assist you in getting through the physical and emotional issues. Here are some common options. Not all are scientifically proven, however they may still help to lighten your mood and feelings.

Check with your health professional before making any changes to your medications or lifestyle.

**Lifestyle**
- Yoga classes
- Aerobic classes
- Weight training
- Going for a walk
- Running
- Learning to meditate
- Reducing alcohol and caffeine

**Alternative**
- Massage
- Acupuncture
- Naturopathy
- Homeopathy
- Natural remedy
- Breathing exercises
- St. John's Wort
- Vitamins

**Psychological**
- Counselling
- Self-help books

**Medical**
- Antidepressant medication
- Anti-anxiety medication

When Do-It-Yourself DOESN’T do it — go for Extra Help listed at the back of this book.
BUILDING YOUR SELF-CONFIDENCE

When we are depressed or sad it’s easy to be very hard on ourselves. During tough times, we need to be a bit kinder to ourselves.

Developing self-confidence is something only you can do. Relying on other people’s praise means you never learn to praise yourself. It is you who best decides how you think and feel.

Quick tips

Try to be aware of the bad thoughts and change them through:

Self-talk — separate ‘what I am’ from ‘what I do’.

**Examples:** Change —

‘I am stupid’ to ‘what I did was stupid’.
‘I am a failure’ to ‘I failed at this’.
‘I am tactless’ to ‘what I said was tactless’.
‘I am a loser’ to ‘I have accomplished things like…’
(make a list of what you feel good about today).
‘I always get it wrong’ to ‘I’m always learning’.

Self-praise — praise yourself when you do something, even if you didn’t do it well.

**Examples:**

‘I didn’t do so well, but it was a good try’.
‘I did the best I could’.
‘I did that well’.
‘I’m pleased with the way I did that’.
Self-encouragement — brag about yourself every now and then

Change negatives into positives.

Examples: Change —

‘I’ll never be able to manage that’ to ‘I’ll give it a go and see what happens’.
‘I am a lousy parent’ to ‘I love my children and am learning new things as a parent every day’.

It takes time to build confidence — one step leads to another, and another.

The process is like learning any new skill. At first you feel awkward and uncomfortable. You make silly mistakes, clumsy attempts. But the more you practice, the easier it becomes and the more natural you feel. Before long you don’t even think about it — you just do it.

Hints to help build self-confidence

• Greet people you meet with a smile.
• Say ‘Thank you’ when you are paid any compliment, by anyone, for any reason.
• Mistakes are a learning experience.
• Picture yourself acting confidently, seeing and feeling every detail in your imagination.
• Listen to your voice and practice speaking clearly.
• Plan and prepare for any situation where you might feel nervous.

With a little bit of practice, you CAN develop the confidence you need.
Conflict is like a knot in a rope — emotionally binding two people together. Ending the conflict is getting rid of the knot. Some knots are simple and take very little effort to untie. Others are very complicated and may be very difficult. Others may seem impossible, but remember:

**If the knot was tied, it can be untied!**

It’s easier to untie a knot if you stop pulling on it. It’s even easier if both stop pulling, and both start untying. One or both of you may decide to stop pulling the rope and just drop it. The knot will remain, but it will no longer be a force in your lives.

In conflict, we usually know what we *don’t want*, rather than what we *do want*.

The most common types of issues that can create conflict between both parents following separation include:

- Parenting arrangements.
- Relationship issues.
- Financial arrangements.
- Legal issues.

Get to know what triggers set you off. You and only you can control how you behave.

Try to develop a positive business-like relationship with the other parent. By doing this it will reduce any conflict or tension, and lead to better quality time spent with your children.

For more tips on changing the way you relate to the other parent, see *Me and My Kids* pages 21–24.

To order a copy of the book see the inside front cover of this book or visit www.csa.gov.au
Dealing with conflict one step at a time

Follow these steps to reach a win-win situation for both parents.

**Step 1  Describe the conflict:**
Why is this an issue?
Has it gone on for a long time?
Who is involved?
What's really the problem?
When does this usually happen?

**Step 2  What happens if:**
It's never sorted out?
One of us gives in?

Don’t assume you know what the other person is thinking.

Is it the person or the problem? Keep the person separate from the problem.

**Step 3  Describe and rank the options to resolve this conflict:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
<th>Likely to happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1 = highest, 5 = lowest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4 Prioritise and decide:

Is this the best solution?
Is there something else we need to consider?
Will this reduce the number of conflicts?

Step 5 Action plan:

Agree on a timeframe for action.
Agree to check it is working.

**Action plan Agreement**

Joel and Pippa agree to:
1. (Joel) __________________________
   __________________________
2. (Pippa) __________________________
   __________________________

by __________ (date) and review our progress on __________ (date) to decide if further changes are needed.

Signed:

Focus on interests, not positions; consider the other party's situation.
Although you are no longer partners, you will always be parents.

Listen to what your children are saying. This will help you understand where they are coming from.

**TIP**

Understanding your child will help you make better parenting decisions. Find out what is happening in the rest of their lives and remember to give them lots of hugs.

*It’s not the separation but ongoing conflict that hurts children in the long term. The way children behave is usually a sign of what they are feeling and aren’t able to tell you in words.*
Recognising the signals

The following table provides examples of what children may be experiencing following separation. Children are all different and may display similar behaviours to those of an older or younger child. A lot of this depends on the child’s maturity and own sense of well being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0–3 years</th>
<th>3–8 years</th>
<th>9–12 years</th>
<th>13–17 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afraid to leave either parent</td>
<td>Changes in school performance</td>
<td>Inability to cope with problems and daily activities</td>
<td>Confused thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra clingy</td>
<td>Poor grades despite strong efforts</td>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>Long periods of sadness or irritability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frets for the other parent</td>
<td>Refusing to go to bed or school and refusing to play with other children</td>
<td>Change in sleeping and/or eating habits</td>
<td>Feelings of extreme highs and lows with growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no sense of time — hours seem like an eternity</td>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Excessive complaints of physical ailments</td>
<td>Excessive fears, worries and anxieties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranky and unsettled more often</td>
<td>Long term nightmares, waking during the night or crying or clinging</td>
<td>Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism</td>
<td>Social withdrawal or substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying more often</td>
<td>Long term disobedience or aggression or frequent temper tantrums</td>
<td>Intense fear of weight gain</td>
<td>Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits and numerous unexplained physical ailments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatised by long periods of separation from the principal carer parent</td>
<td>Bed-wetting, loss of toilet training (toddlers)</td>
<td>Long periods of negative moods, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death</td>
<td>Strong feelings of anger and denial about obvious problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental problems</td>
<td>A return to baby talk or loss of language skills (toddler)</td>
<td>Frequent outbursts of anger</td>
<td>Suicidal talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If some of these signs last a long time or interfere with your child’s life, you should seek extra help. Many local community service organisations provide information for separated parents dealing with children’s issues. Services can include counselling, family therapy, adolescent mediation, anger management and other relationship courses.

**Suggestions from parents to help you and your kids to really talk**

- I don’t turn the radio on in the car — that way we have to talk.
- My teenager isn’t into talking that much, but when we walk the dog together he really opens up.
- We have tea with the TV off.
- We do tea time topics like:
  - If you could be an animal, what would you be and why?
  - If you went to a desert island, what three things would you take?
  - What’s the best thing that happened to you this week?
  - If you could be a famous sportsperson who would it be?
  - What was the best part of the day?
  - What was the worst part and why?

**The best gift you can give your children is your time.**

Separation is a highly emotional experience. Like you, children need time to work through it.

Talk to your kids. They need to know that both parents still love them.

To contact a community service provider in your area visit www.csa.gov.au and look at the Community Services Directory or see the list at the back of this book.
How to help a friend

**Myth:** Why don’t they just snap out of it?

It doesn’t help to say things like:

‘Don’t worry so much’, or

‘You don’t have to be perfect’.

In recovering from a stressful event, such as separation, it is good to have the support of friends, family, and other groups. The following are some ideas on how to support someone who is separating.

- **Listen**
- **Respect their privacy**
- **Allow periods of silence**
- **Don’t devalue their feelings**
- **Allow tears and laughter**
- **Be honest and constructive**
- **Provide a place of safety**
- **Encourage physical activity**
- **Understand that their reactions are normal**
- **Ask questions respectfully**
- **Avoid saying ‘I know how you feel’**
- **Do not assume that another’s beliefs are like your own**
- **Spend time together doing something enjoyable**
- **Don’t try to fix it**
- **Be patient**
- **Give them space**
- **Support the use of professional services**

Encourage your friend to accept that their feelings are normal and that they have a right to find help that suits them — just as they would for other physical problems such as asthma or a broken bone.
Your plan

To live your life as you want, and be able to give to your children, family, friends and work — it’s important that you look after yourself!

The bucket of water

If you start with a bucket of water and give a jug to each of your...

- Children — taking them to after school activities, helping them with homework, listening to their stories about their day, dealing with their upsets.
- Friends — helping them with a domestic job.
- Elderly parents — helping them with their shopping, visiting the doctors.
- Co-workers — assisting them with their work whilst trying to complete your tasks.

At the end of the day when you come home and don’t fill that bucket up — the next day you will have no water to give out.

It’s important to take the time to fill the bucket of water up so that you can do what you need to do the following day.

TIP

Take some time for yourself to build up your energy stores so that you can fulfil your obligations. It can be as simple as some of the Do-It-Yourself tips in this book.
**Your worksheet**

Use this worksheet to help you plan the life you want. List the changes you want to make. Keep asking yourself:

- Is it do-able?
- Is it affordable?

Change doesn’t happen overnight — it takes time. Don’t be hard on yourself; allow time for you to experience the difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Step 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Step 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Step 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Step 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where can I find extra help?

Don’t be frightened to ask for help if you need it.

*We all need someone to talk to at some stage of our life and it’s often good if they are outside our situation.*

There may be a time when your family and friends don’t have the expertise necessary to help with your problems, even with the best of intentions. At this point you might wonder where to turn next.

*Take it one day at a time, one step at a time.*

You can get extra help from:

**Counsellors**

Counselling is generally the first port of call. You can have consultations by telephone (like help lines) or face-to-face (with community service providers).

You are encouraged to talk about feelings concerning yourself and your situation. The counsellor will listen to you in a supportive and non-judgemental way and offer some suggestions in ways of dealing with your particular situation.

**Psychologists**

Psychologists aim to help their clients change their behaviours and thoughts and to develop appropriate strategies for dealing with life’s challenges.
**Psychiatrists**

A psychiatrist is a physician who specialises in the more severe mental health and emotional disorder problems. Psychiatrists are trained in the medical, psychological, and social components of mental, emotional, and behavioural disorders. They order diagnostic tests, prescribe medications, practice psychotherapy, and help patients and their families cope with stress and crises.

**GP — your local doctor**

A local family doctor or General Practitioner is the referring doctor for psychiatrists. Your local family doctor can also assist you with other referrals or prescribe appropriate medications.

**Church leader or community elder**

Speaking to a person you trust within your community can help.

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The important thing is to find someone you feel comfortable with, so that you can confide in them and work out ways to get through this.
USEFUL CONTACTS

Disclaimer

This list of resources is provided for your information and convenience only. The Child Support Agency does not accept responsibility for, endorse, monitor or control external resources and is not responsible for their content, services or your access or use of them.

Please note: Extra charges apply to calls from mobiles and public phones.

Phone numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centacare</td>
<td>1300 138 070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Services Australia</td>
<td>1300 365 859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Helpline</td>
<td>1800 551 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeline</td>
<td>131 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mensline Australia</td>
<td>1300 789 978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships Australia</td>
<td>1300 364 277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Interpreting Service</td>
<td>131 450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TIP

State, territory and local governments and community organisations also fund financial and other counselling, support and information services in Australia. Check the phone book for services in your area. For website links to state governments and local councils visit www.gov.au.

Need a service in your area?

The Community Service Directory is a list of community service providers located across Australia. Details of services in your area can be accessed by calling 131 272 or visit the CSA website www.csa.gov.au.
Government Agencies

**Centrelink**  
Phone 136 150  
www.centrelink.gov.au  
Information on all government benefits

**Child Support Agency**  
Phone 131 272  
Teletypewriter (TTY) 1800 631 187  
www.csa.gov.au  
Includes calculators, budgeting guides, and contact information for community services in your local area

**Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**  
Phone 1300 653 227  
www.facsia.gov.au  
Includes parenting website resources

**Department of Human Services**  
Phone 1300 554 479  
www.humanservices.gov.au

**Family Assistance Office**  
Phone 136 150  
www.familyassist.gov.au

**Family Court of Australia**  
Phone 1300 352 000  
www.familylawcourts.gov.au  
Information to assist in the resolution of family disputes

**Family Relationship Advice Line**  
Phone 1800 050 321  
www.familyrelationships.gov.au

**Federal Magistrates Court of Australia**  
Phone 1300 352 000  
www.familylawcourts.gov.au

**Legal Aid Offices**  
www.nla.aust.net.au

**Medicare**  
Phone 132 011  
www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

**Regional Law Hotline**  
Phone 1800 050 400  
Access to government legal information and services, including legal aid and mediation

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**CSAonline**  
CSAonline is a secure Internet service which allows all CSA customers access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to:  
- receive various letters and statements online  
- update personal details, and  
- advise CSA of changes affecting child support payments  
It’s easy to register. Go to [www.csa.gov.au](http://www.csa.gov.au) and follow the links.
Websites

**Emotional well-being**

**beyondblue**
www.beyondblue.org.au
Addresses issues associated with depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders.

**Black Dog Institute**
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Fact sheets and information about mood disorders.

**BluePages**
www.bluepages.anu.edu.au
Provides information about depression and anxiety including symptoms, treatments and resources.

**depressionNet**
www.depressionnet.com.au
Help, support and information for people with depression.

**Mental Health Council of Australia**
www.mhca.org.au
Network of organisations and individuals committed to achieving better mental health for everyone. Includes information and fact sheets.

**Mental Health First Aid**
www.mhfa.com.au
Provides help to people developing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis.

**Reach Out!**
www.reachout.com.au
Web-based service that inspires young people to help themselves through tough times.

**CounsellingOnline**
Government funded website where you can communicate with a professional counsellor about an alcohol or drug related concern. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
www.counsellingonline.org.au

**Parenting**

**The Raising Children Network**
Online guide to raising children aged 0-8 including information on behaviour, nutrition, safety, health and daily care.
www.raisingchildren.net.au

**Community.gov.au**
Provides access to online services and information for community organisations, communities and individuals.
www.community.gov.au

**Families.gov.au**
Search for families-related online government information and services.
www.families.gov.au

**Parent LINK, ACT**
Links to parent guides, tips and emergency fact sheets.
www.parentlink.act.gov.au

**NSW Department of Community Services**
Information on child protection and children’s services as well as tips and advice on parenting.
www.community.nsw.gov.au
Northern Territory Families Website
Tips about parenting and living in families.

Department of Communities, Queensland
Parent tip sheets, information for families.
www.communities.qld.gov.au

Parenting SA
Access to Parent Easy Guides – information on a wide range of parenting topics from birth through to adolescence.
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Department of Human Services, Victoria
Information about families and children of all ages. Includes link to Better Health Channel (health information).
www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Community Resources Online, WA
Provides parenting tips and information and details of services for parents.
www.community.wa.gov.au

Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania
A gateway to health and human services in Tasmania.
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

longdistancefamilies.com
US site which contains advice on parenting from a distance as well as links to some Australian sites.
www.longdistancefamilies.com

Single Parent Central
This US site provides advice and information for single parents.
www.singleparentcentral.com

Relationships

Relate
Information on relationships, family, love and life.
www.relate.gov.au

Financial

Commonwealth Financial Counselling Program
Directory of CFCP funded financial counselling services listed by state.

Child Safety

Kidsafe
The child accident prevention foundation.
www.kidsafe.com.au

NAPCAN
Provides information about child abuse and neglect, and promotes child-friendly communities.
www.napcan.org.au
More tips for looking after yourself

- Prepare for the morning the night before so you don’t have to rush.
- Always make copies of important papers.
- Go on a picnic or a barbecue with friends or family.
- Play with your children.
- Say ‘No’ more often – know your limits.
- Schedule activity time into every day.
- Get a stress ball and squeeze it when stressed.
- Make duplicate keys for the car and house for those occasions you’re locked out.
- Write a note or letter to a friend.
- Have quiet time – read the newspaper at your local cafe.
- Get a stress ball and squeeze it when stressed.
How can you find the help you might need?

It lets you know that these things that are happening to you are not unique to you.
John, separated 5 years

I can see myself in there and I can see what I can be and what I can do about it.
Sandra, separated 6 months

I wish I had this little book when I was reeling and I had no idea what was happening to me.
Bob, separated 2 1/2 years

It's got something for everyone — whatever stage on the journey they are.
Helen, separated 3 years

It makes me think there are a lot of me's out there.
John, separated 18 months

I can identify with every single topic.
Alex, separated 8 months

The authors gratefully acknowledge the use of the above quotes from parents who have read this book.