

## Children's Rights When Parents Separate

Year: 3/4

Curriculum: PSHE

Topic: Relationships and Family

PA Codes: R5 R7 R8 L2 L3 L4

Not Eligible for Opt Out ▾

### Learning objectives

- To know that when family relationships are making them unhappy due to divorce and separation, there are ways to seek help and support;
- To recognise that there are rights to protect them; UNCRC Article 12
- To understand that it does get better, in time.

### What should pupils already know

- about the roles different people (e.g. acquaintances, friends and relatives) play in our lives;
- how to identify the people who love and care for them and what they do to help them feel cared for;
- about different types of families including those that may be different to their own;
- to identify common features of family life;
- that it is important to tell someone (such as their teacher) if something about their family makes them unhappy or worried.

### Tackling Separation and Divorce in Your Classroom

The statutory RSHE guidance does not specifically refer to “divorce”, although there are references to children’s rights, home circumstances and family breakdown. Much of the focus of the guidance is on forming healthy relationships, but there is nothing on what ‘healthy’ might look like in the context of parental separation. The parents of approximately 280,000 children separate each year, and around 3.5 million children now live in families where the parents are no longer together.

LifeWise has been working with Dr Jan Ewing, a Research Fellow at the University of Exeter, and two leading charities working with separated families, the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) and the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). Jan Ewing argues that statistics like the ones above make it clear that teaching children about their rights when parents separate is crucial. “Too often, children don’t have a voice in the separation process. And actually, children cope better when they are consulted about arrangements for them,” she

says. "This is where PSHE can come in: normalising the range of emotions that children might feel at this time, outlining the support available to them and equipping children with knowledge of their rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC when parents separate, ensures they feel more confident in making their voice heard, leading to mental health and wellbeing benefits for these children. Explicitly teaching children about their rights when parents separate would be a massive step forward. More and more young people have parents who have separated, more live in blended families."

Research by Jan Ewing and her colleague Professor Anne Barlow, funded by the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health ('The HearT Project'), found that while there is a strong appetite for teaching - in primary and secondary schools - about children's rights and the support available to children if parents separate, up until now there has been an absence of appropriate resources. The issue is incredibly sensitive, and while many teachers are already skilled at handling difficult topics, when it comes to parental separation, there is an observed "gap in teaching". These lessons intend to address this gap and the changes in teaching resources required.

## Introduction

Start this lesson by explaining that there are other children within your school/class who have experienced this. Research has found that children cope better if they are given opportunities to have their voices heard, for example, through child-inclusive mediation following parental separation. The difficult feelings around divorce and separation are compounded by the complicated laws and terminology around the process.

Explain that this lesson intends to equip them with an understanding of how, when parents separate, under Article 12, children have the right to information and support to help them. While the adults decide, children can say what they would like to happen if their parents go to mediation or court.

## Scenario or Dilemma

Charlie has been told he is going to meet his Dad in a contact centre next Tuesday. He wants to know what you can do there and if his Mum will be there too.

Can Poppy help him to prepare for visiting the contact centre by using some of her own experiences?

Pupils will be able to put forward suggestions for this after watching the video and

reading the slides describing the contact centres.

## Development

The Poppy video allows children to consider the sensitive topic of separation from the distanced perspective of Poppy and Joe. Following this, the first slides are a gentle introduction to how pupils can develop greater knowledge about the vocabulary of the separation process so that they can understand their rights and be in a stronger position to understand and process their feelings. When parents separate, they can get lost in their own feelings and may seem distracted.

Children can appreciate that even though the grown-ups make the decisions about what should happen when they separate, children have a right for their voices to be heard. Besides being able to talk to a trusted adult in schools and being encouraged to express themselves to parents, children should know where to get support and help so that they can see a brighter future. Pupils can share what they think happens when parents cannot agree. They have the right to see both parents, as long as it is safe for everyone to do so, even if one of them disagrees and tries to stop that from happening. The lesson explains the three options available in this instance.

1. Contact centres;
2. Family mediation;
3. Orders from the Family Court;

Information is shared about the organisations that can help. The National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) and National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) have lots of helpful information for children on their websites. Children can also contact ChildLine by phoning 0800 1111 or have a 1-2-1 chat online.

Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
<b>Poppy's Story</b>	<b>New Vocabulary Challenge</b>	<b>Black Box Questions</b>
Pupils will discuss the feelings and experiences that Poppy went through with a partner.  Pupils will use the questions and picture prompts to help to structure their discussion. It may	Pupils will explore the new vocabulary discussed and introduced in the lesson. Pupils will match the definitions of each word.  You can find worksheets to accompany this challenge in the	Allow pupils to anonymously submit questions about separation and their rights on paper.  Teachers can refer to Safeguarding leads or SLT to

also be useful to print The Grief Cycle to help with the discussion.  You can find worksheets in the Teacher's Notes.	Teacher's Notes.	be able to handle any more difficult questions - but others can be genuinely responded to within a class discussion setting.
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### Plenary

Can pupils remember the names of the organisations that can help? Reiterate that families change sometimes but that children have the right to spend time with both parents when it is safe to do so.

Article 12 of the UNCRC gives children whose parents separate the right to:

- information on what could happen
- be asked about what they would like to happen
- be represented in the family court if needed.

### Key vocabulary

children's rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), contact centre, mediation, family court, child-inclusive mediation

### Next steps

- to learn about the different ways in which people care for one another;
- to revisit the recognition of different types of family structure (including single parents, same-sex parents, step-parents, blended families, foster parents);
- that families of all types can give family members love, security and stability.

### Supporting resources

You may find these resources helpful when preparing for the lesson, especially if this isn't a topic you know very well.

- [8 Rights Every Child Deserves After a Divorce | OurFamilyWizard](#)
- [Helping Your Child Cope with Your Divorce or Separation | NSPCC](#)
- [UNICEF - Children's Rights](#)