

Teenagers' Guide to Family Separation

New Zealand Family Courts



What happens to us when our parents separate?



send?





So, your parents have broken up.
It can be a tough time.
There's no way of getting around that.

There are some things that you
should know from the start though.
Basic things that might help :)

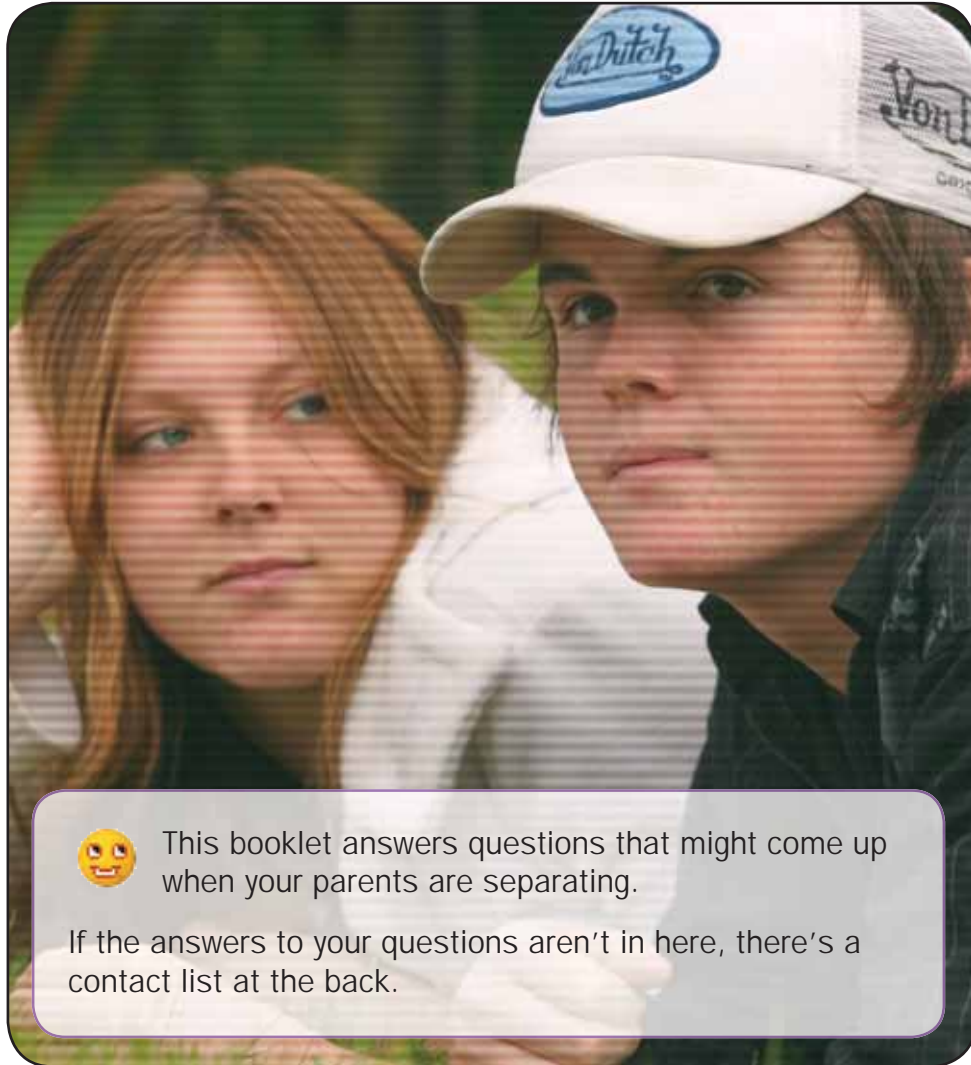
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yes



🤔 For Instance:

Did you know that separation is really common? And you'll find that things get way easier as time goes on? :)



😊 This booklet answers questions that might come up when your parents are separating.

If the answers to your questions aren't in here, there's a contact list at the back.

IS ANYONE ELSE GOING THROUGH THIS?

Breaking up happens a lot, even to families that have been together for years. Ask around. You'll be surprised. Several thousand families in New Zealand split up each year. That means thousands of children belong to a family or whānau where the parents live apart.



WILL IT GET ANY BETTER?

For some people life gets easier as soon as their parents split up. Others find it takes a while for things to settle down. For nearly everyone things get better as time goes on.

"I really like spending time with my mum, she's a lot more relaxed now she's on her own."
Rachel

WHY AM I FEELING SO CONFUSED NOW?

When your parents break up it's completely okay to have really strong emotions about what's going on.

You might be feeling angry, or scared, or sad, or relieved. Maybe you're feeling ashamed, or guilty, or worried. You might even be feeling happy, or a mixture of any of these. You could feel numb for a while until it all comes at you from out of nowhere – in class or during sports or at night in bed.

"I kept wondering if it was my fault. One day Mum just told me what had happened. I felt okay then."
Tane

Lots of people have gone through it and most of them would have felt a lot like you do.

HOW CAN I DEAL WITH WHAT I FEEL?

First of all, work out what you feel.



ANGRY...

"I like to be on my own sometimes so I can think."
Matthew

Then talk to someone else about it. Maybe your parents or other family or whānau members like a brother or sister, or an adult you trust. There might be a teacher you can talk to or a school counsellor. If you know someone else whose parents have broken up, talk to them.



ASHAMED...

And it's a really good idea to talk to people who are used to helping teenagers in your situation. Look at the back for phone numbers.

Talking is one thing that really helps.

"I'd been bottling it all up for weeks, then I was with my auntie in the holidays and I told her all about it and cried. Afterwards I could talk to my mum as well and I started to feel better."
Grace



EMBARRASSED...



SHOCKED...

Another thing that helps is doing something you enjoy. Try kicking a ball, listening to music, dancing, drawing or watching a movie. Take your mind off it for a while.

WHAT IF I GET TOO STRESSED OUT?

That happens sometimes. You're trying to deal with your feelings and get on with everything else in your life. If it's all getting too much, don't try to deal with it on your own. Talk to someone – your parents or whānau to start with. Or ring "What's up" (0800 WHATSUP), "Kidsline" (0800 KIDSLINE) or "Youthline" (0800 376 633). They're there to give free help and they understand what you're going through. Give them a call – especially if it's hard to talk with someone face-to-face, or you don't want to talk with family or whānau or friends.

IS IT MY FAULT?

No way! You are never to blame when your parents split up. Your parents separated because things went wrong for them. So, even if they're upset, they shouldn't take it out on you and you shouldn't see it as your fault.

WILL THINGS GET BACK TO NORMAL?

It might take some time. There's so much to get used to. You'll probably have two homes and new routines.

There might not be much chance of your parents getting back together again. You can't change that. But, chances are, there'll be less fighting. Eventually, your parents will probably be able to get along fine.



WHO'S GOING TO LOOK AFTER ME NOW?

It's still both your parents' job to make sure you're looked after. The details of how you live will probably change a lot. There's more on that later.

WILL I BE SAFE?

You have the right to be safe and protected from any kind of physical, emotional or sexual abuse. This applies no matter who is looking after you.

If you're not safe with one of your parents then you can be protected from them. You might need a Protection Order to be made.

If you have any worries about your safety, tell an adult you can trust or contact any of the organisations listed on page 22.

If it's an emergency, **Dial 111**.

It's your right to be safe **all the time**.

WILL MY RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE?

It's really important to continue to see both your parents and your family and whānau. Keep up with your friends too – let them know what's going on.

Sometimes you might enjoy being with one parent more than another, but keep on seeing them both if you can. It's best in the long run.



📩 Abc "At first I wanted to get away from my Mum and Dad, I hated the fighting - but it's good with both of them now, I'm really glad I hung around through all that time" 😊

send ?

yes 📧

ALONE



TALK...

- > to a friend
- > to your brother/sister
- > to your teacher
- > to a special adult you trust
- > to your mum or to your dad
- > to your pets

WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE



ABOUT...

- > being poor
- > losing friends
- > where you are going to live
- > being abandoned
- > you or your parents being judged

TALK...

- > to your mum or to your dad
- Say exactly what's worrying you, if you can:
- > write things down
 - > look back to when you first found out your parents were separating and think about the things that are getting better

FRIGHTENED



TALK...

- > to What's Up (0800 942 8787)
- > to Youthline (0800 376 633)
- > to Kidsline (0800 543 754)
- > to an adult you trust

PRESSURED TO TAKE ONE PARENT'S SIDE



SAY YOU DON'T WANT TO CHOOSE BETWEEN YOUR PARENTS – IT'S OK TO LOVE THEM BOTH

GUILTY



REMEMBER IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT THAT YOUR PARENTS HAVE SEPARATED

- > You can't get them back together

EMBARRASSED



TALK...

- > to your parents about how their behaviour makes you feel
- > to your brother/sister
- > to someone else whose parents have separated. Chances are there will be several just in your class

ANGRY



DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON PEOPLE AROUND YOU

DO SOMETHING ACTIVE

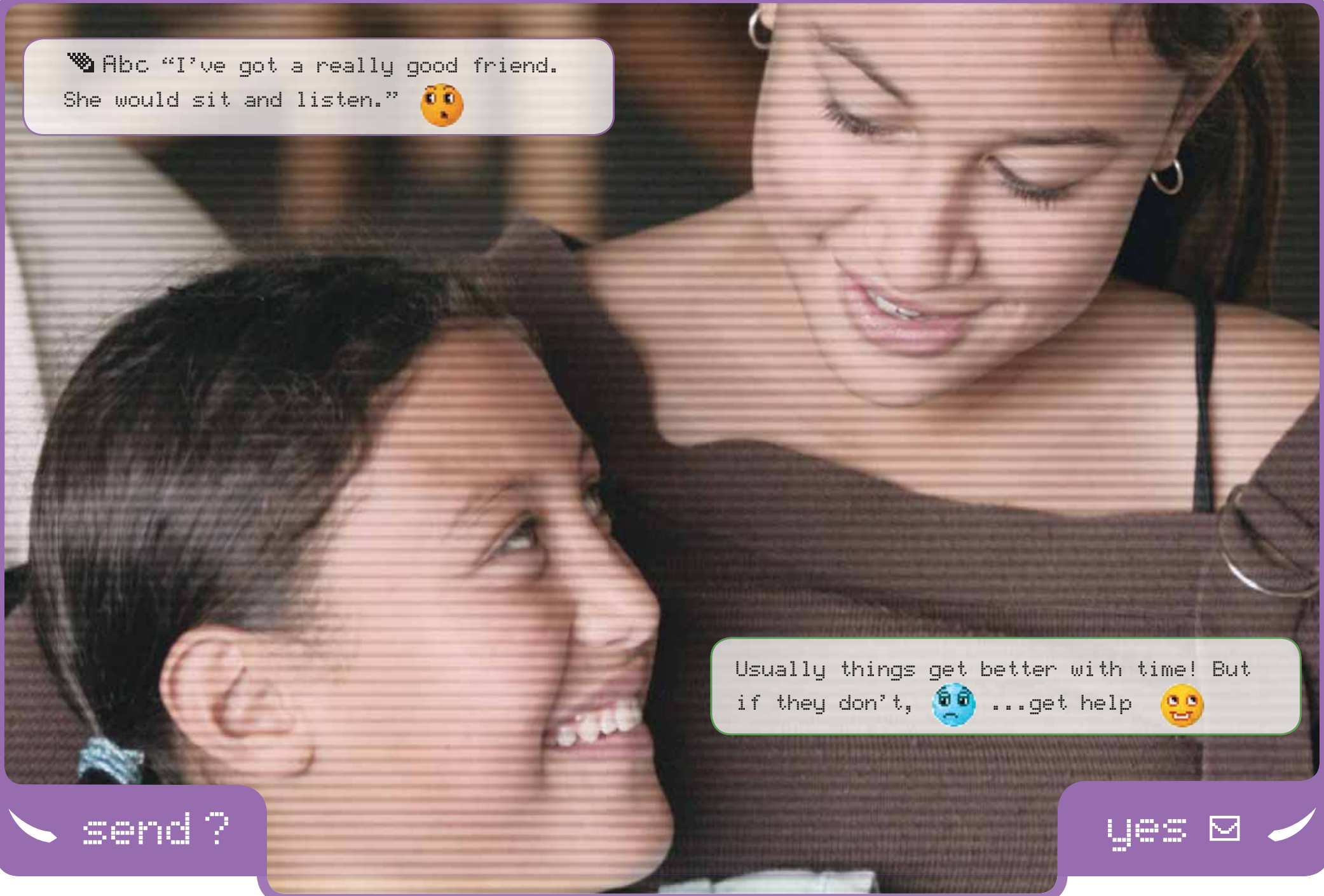
- > Run or dance or kick a ball

SAD



REMEMBER...

- > your parents have just split up
- IT'S OK TO CRY



📧 Abc "I've got a really good friend. She would sit and listen." 😮

Usually things get better with time! But if they don't, 😞 ...get help 😊

send ?

yes ✉



WHO WILL I LIVE WITH NOW?

You'll have to talk over the options with your parents. Probably you'll spend time with each of your parents separately, wherever they're living now.



If you usually stay with other family and whānau and friends some of the time, you should be able to keep doing this if you want to.

HAVING YOUR SAY

DO I GET TO MAKE CHOICES ABOUT WHO I LIVE WITH?

When you're 16 – yes. When you're younger than 16 you have the right to have your say but your parents make the final decision.

They'll make a better decision if they know what you think. So, tell them your views.

Ask them what they think of your views. They might have got it wrong and you may have to explain. Or, you might find out something that you didn't know before, which makes you change your mind.

Ask your parents to explain the reasons for their decisions.

If your parents can't agree, they may go to the Family Court to help them sort out what's best for you.

DO I HAVE TO CHOOSE WHO I LIVE WITH?

Definitely not. You have the right not to choose.

You can leave it up to your parents to make the decisions for you. But you can still let them know how you feel and what's important to you.

Don't let your parents, or anyone else, pressure you to make choices if you don't want to. You don't just have to say what you think your parents want to hear.



WHY SHOULD I TALK TO MY PARENTS ABOUT THIS?

They're the ones responsible for looking after you. They will try and do what they think is best for you, but they might not be aware of what you're thinking or feeling. The best way to make sure is to talk to them.

WHAT IF IT'S HARD TO TALK TO THEM?

If it's hard to get them to listen, try some different approaches. Your feelings are important to them.

Try when it's just the two of you, like in the car. If they're always busy, make an appointment to see them.

If it's too hard to talk face to face, ring them, leave them a note on their pillow or on the fridge. Send them a text.



WHAT IF IT'S HARD TO FIND THE RIGHT WORDS?

Start by telling them how you feel:

“ I feel...”

“ I like it when...”

“ I don't like it when...”

This will make it easier for your parents to listen to you and take what you say seriously.

Don't use blaming statements like:

“ You always...”

“ Why do you always...”

“ You never...”

This will put them on the defensive.



SORTING OUT THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS

WHAT KIND OF ARRANGEMENTS WORK?

You can come to all sorts of different arrangements that work best for you and your family. Here are some typical ones:



✉ "Things are better now for me because I get involved in planning the week, and write it all down in my diary."

Rachel

✉ "My older brother and I live with Mum during the week and see Dad every other weekend and for half the school holidays. We would both like to spend more time with Dad. We're going to talk to both Mum and Dad about a change."



Sevi



HOW DO WE SORT OUT THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR ME?

Your parents will usually work something out that they think is best for you. They'll do this after finding out what you want and taking it into account.

If they don't ask, let them know if you want to have a say.

Sometimes parents need an independent person like a friend or counsellor to help them agree on arrangements.

In a small number of cases, parents end up having to get a Judge to make the decision because they can't agree.

If this happens to your parents, there is a separate booklet explaining how the Family Court works. It's also available online at www.courts.govt.nz/family.

HOW CAN I HELP MAKE THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS WORK?

Ask your parents to let you know the details of the plans for you and put them on a calendar. Mark down "days with dad, days with mum", times, arrangements for holidays and arrangements for birthdays.

Be really organised. Ask for a specific place to keep your things at the different houses you stay in.

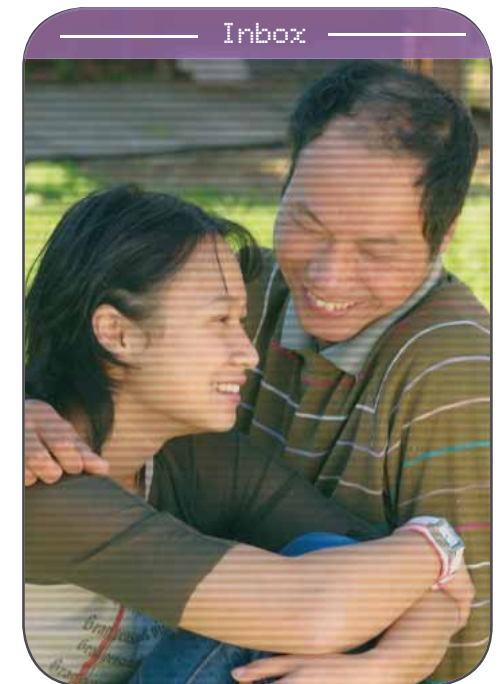
Keep a toothbrush, some clothes and important stuff that you always need at both parents' houses.

✉ "I like to spend about half my time every week with each parent, but which days



depends on what we all have on. It works better now my parents have stopped arguing."

Ra





👉 **Abc** "At first all I wanted was for things to get back to normal and for them to get back together again. There was quite a long time where things were really bad, lots of fighting... but now everything's settled down, I can see they're much happier, and I'm used to it." 😊

send ?

yes





GETTING ON WITH YOUR PARENTS

WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT HOW ONE OF MY PARENTS IS COPING?

First of all remember that you're the child and they're the adult. It's their job to look after you, not your job to look after them.

Be as kind and considerate as you can, but this doesn't mean you have to turn their problems into your problems.

Talk to your other parent or another adult if you're really worried.



WHAT IF MY PARENTS ARGUE WHEN I'M AROUND?

It's fair enough you don't want to hear your parents' arguments. You don't have to be around to take care of them, they're both adults. Leave the room if you want.

WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE THE WAY THEY'RE BEHAVING?

Tell your parents if you don't like it when they are mean about each other in front of you, when they ask you to give messages to the other parent or when they ask you about the other parent.

Tell your parents that you don't like it when they break the arrangements with you because you feel let down.



NEW PARTNERS

WHAT IF ONE OF MY PARENTS HAS MOVED AWAY?

It's harder to keep your relationship going, but it's worth it. Ask about visits in school holidays and for long weekends. You can keep in touch on the internet or by writing letters.

"My mum's gone away but we often have phone calls and we text each other most days."

Larissa

WHAT IF MY PARENT HAS A NEW PARTNER?

That can be tough. It's best just to be polite. Give them a chance. After all, it's not fair to blame them.

Tell your parent you want them to spend more time with you alone, if that's what you want.

WHAT IF MY PARENT'S NEW PARTNER HAS CHILDREN?

It will definitely take time to get used to that. Remember, you're all in the same boat (they could be feeling the same way you are).

Talk to your parent about any problems.

"My brother and I were uncomfortable for ages about the way that our mum's new partner Dave seemed to favour his own children. In the end we decided we would both tell Dad - he talked with Mum, she talked to Dave ... and everything got sorted out really well."

Anton



Where can I go for more help :)

YOUTH LINE:

Confidential youth help and information. For 12–25 year olds.

Information

FREEPHONE:

0800 376 633

8am – midnight.

Text 027 4 YOUTHS

Email talk@youthline.co.nz

www.urge.co.nz

www.whakamanawa.co.nz

WHAT'S UP:

Free counselling service for everyone up to 18 years old. Counsellors are specially trained to talk to children and teenagers.

KIDSLINE:

Free confidential counselling and support line for all kids (up to 18 years). Phones are staffed by trained adult Counsellors.

Buddy Support – Kids can talk to someone similar to a big brother or sister.

Information

FREEPHONE:

0800 Whats up (0800 942 8787)

Mid-day to midnight

7 days a week

FREEPHONE:

0800 kidsline (0800 543 754)

24 hours, 7 days a week

4pm – 6pm weekdays

www.kidsline.org.nz

CHINESE LIFELINE:

Free counselling available for everyone who speaks Mandarin or Cantonese, including children.

FREEPHONE:

0800 888 880

Monday to Friday 10am – 2pm

Monday to Thursday 7pm – 10pm

FAMILY COURT

Listed under Justice Ministry – District Court in the Blue Pages of the phone book. Ask to speak to the Family Court Co-Ordinator.

Information

www.courts.govt.nz/family

CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY

Government agency with legal powers to protect and help everyone under 18 who's being abused or not cared for properly.

FREEPHONE:

0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)

THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

Advice about your interests, rights and welfare.

FREEPHONE:

0800 A Child (0800 224 453)

YOUTHLAW – TINO RANGATIRATANGA TAITAMARIKI:

Free confidential legal service for children and young People nationwide

Ring the advice line or email your question to:

Information

09 309 6967

You can call collect from anywhere in New Zealand. Dial 010 then follow instructions, and tell the operator that Youthlaw accepts collect calls

Weekdays 10am – 4pm
info@youthlaw.co.nz

www.youthlaw.co.nz

SKYLIGHT

Support for all kids going through family change.

www.skylight.org.nz

click on 'info for you'

Thanks to all the organisations, parents, children and young people who helped put this booklet together



MINISTRY OF
JUSTICE
Tāhū o te Ture

www.justice.govt.nz/family



yes

