



Q. My wife and I are talking about getting separated but don't know how to tell our 4 children. They know things have not been good between their mum and I, but we have always said we will work it out and for them not worry about it. What is the best way to tell them?

A.No parent wants to give their children upsetting news, however your children need to hear that you are separating and that both mummy and daddy will be there for them after the separation.

Don't tell your children you are separating unless the decision is absolutely final, as uncertainty can cause children to feel insecure about the future. Discuss with your wife how you are going to tell the children and come to an agreement about what information you will be sharing. It is important to agree to not argue in front of your children when telling them, as this will heighten their anxiety. Pick a time when the whole family has time to talk and listen without having to rush away. Try to tell your children that you are separating prior to the actual separation, as this will give them a few days or weeks to adjust to the news.

It is important when talking to children about separation that you do not blame or criticise the other parent as this puts children under pressure to take sides.

When explaining that mummy and daddy no longer love each other also explain that there is different types of love, and the love between a parent and child is one that will never change. Help your children to understand that even though you will no longer be husband and wife you will always be mummy and daddy. Make it clear that the decision to separate is because of changes within your marital relationship and nothing to do with them. Most importantly, children need to know how the separation will change their family life and they don't need to know the details of their parent's problems. After you have told your children try to speak to each one of them individually, this will allow them to talk in more depth about how they feel.

The Parenting NI helpline offers a freephone helpline and appointment services throughout Northern Ireland. If you would like to talk through a family problem or make an appointment, contact freephone on 0808 8010 722 or e-mail help@parentingni.org

For further information on the range of services which Parenting NI offers, including parenting courses, log onto: www.parentingni.org