

SEPARATION SUPPORT GUIDE



Researched and written by Justine Field and Vanessa Gonzalez

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Introduction

Like the other Rainbow Families guides, the *Separation Support Guide* was developed in response to a need that we identified in our community. Separation is a difficult and sometimes traumatic time for families and those in the LGBTIQ+ community experience unique challenges. We saw that there were few resources that focused on guiding LGBTIQ+ parents through their separation journey. However, we know that there are parents who have separated in a positive way that ends up being the best thing for all members of their families.

Navigating the post-separation world of services such as legal assistance, mediation, counselling and government can be overwhelming. Newly separated LGBTIQ+ parents encounter barriers in accessing mainstream services that are largely based on a heteronormative model and not always sensitive or responsive to the needs of rainbow families. The perception that this generates among the LGBTIQ+ community can prevent people from seeking support. Understandably, newly separated parents may be reluctant to interact with someone who they fear may only add to their suffering. Rainbow Families hopes to work more closely with providers of post-separation services to ensure that the diverse experiences of LGBTIQ+ families are represented and accommodated. We hope that the guide will also be of assistance to those who deliver services to the LGBTIQ+ families.

The *Separation Support Guide* is not intended to replace individual legal advice or be a detailed reference for family law and procedure. There are already resources of that type that cater very well to LGBTIQ+ parents. Rather, we hope that the guide will provide parents with practical suggestions and a sense that they are not alone in their separation journey and that

there is a way forward. We have asked parents who have been through the process of separation to share their experiences. We are so grateful for their generosity and trust in telling their stories.

Whilst we have strived to be inclusive, we acknowledge that everyone's separation journey is different and that we cannot possibly capture all the issues that may arise for people. This does not mean that those experiences are not valid or important. We hope that everyone can find something in the guide that helps them, even if that just means being pointed to the right service through our resources chapter. If you feel that your experiences are not covered by this guide, please get in touch with us and we will do what we can to assist you through this stage of your family's journey.

About us

Rainbow Families is a volunteer-led organisation that provides support to children and families within the NSW LGBTIQ+ community. We run playgroups, parent education sessions, discussion forums, movie nights, picnics and a whole range of other social activities. Our events are designed to bring together lesbian mums, gay dads, trans parents, adoptive parents, foster parents and all types of rainbow families to connect, learn, support, make friends and help build resilient families.

Rainbow Families also works to address discrimination and other social disadvantage faced by LGBTIQ families and to promote the affirmation and celebration of rainbow families. We do this by working with parents, their children, government, businesses, schools, the broader community, and other not for profit organisations.

Rainbow Families is led by a committee of passionate LGBTIQ+ community members and supported by parent volunteers located all over NSW. Together, we are focused on making Australia a better place for all rainbow families.

Head to **rainbowfamilies.com.au** to learn more, and subscribe to our newsletter to stay informed about events and programs that support our families.

Acknowledgements

Justine Field is a lawyer and mediator working in the area of family law. She lives in Sydney with her daughter who she co-parents in what has turned out to be a successful shared care arrangement. She realised early on that co-parenting after separation doesn't have to be a negative experience and could instead be based on mutual respect, friendship, good communication and above all, a shared commitment to put her child's needs first. She wondered about how other separating parents in the LGBTIQ+ community navigated the process and to what extent they had tried to do things differently. Thanks to the support and encouragement of Vanessa Gonzalez, she realised that there was value in producing a guide in which the experiences and insights of separated parents could be shared for the benefit of the community.

Vanessa Gonzalez is a Social Worker with experience in working with children and families. She lives in Sydney's inner west with her partner, her two children that she co-parents between two homes, a teenage niece who has joined the family during her uni study years, a family dog and a bunny. She navigated separation with a deep desire to keep her children at the centre of her decisions, to hold onto a friendship with an ex-partner she values and respects, to manage big feeling and changes, but without the wisdom of a guidebook like this. The motivation for being part of this project was to offer different possibilities and share the real lived lives of families in our diverse community.

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So you've separated

What you may be feeling

People will have a range of emotions following a separation. It can be a stressful and emotional experience in a person's life. Whatever the reason for the separation – and whether you wanted it or not – it can trigger painful feelings.

Even if the separation has been a positive step for you, it can be extremely painful because it represents the loss, not just of the

partnership, but also of the dreams and commitments you shared for yourself, your children and family.

Parents say ...

I was in shock and turmoil. It was traumatic. It felt like everything was all over the place and my thinking was clouded. It affects you physically – your eating and sleeping. After a while I found ways of managing. I kept telling myself that this won't last forever and focused on looking after my health – basic things like keeping my fluids up. What seemed to work was exhausting myself by doing something really physical such as cleaning the house.

I found things that I could control and focused on those. Work was a good focus and a really supportive environment. There were some friends I could rely on although I didn't rely much on family.

Supporting your children through the separation

Even if you separate amicably, your children will need help navigating the process. You can support your children by being available to talk to them honestly, providing reassurance, being positive and keeping familiar routines in place.

When parents choose to live in different homes post separation, the move from having one to two homes is a huge change for children. During this time they need a lot of reassurance: that they are loved and will be safe; that the separation is not their fault and that they do not have to take sides. Younger children need to know that although you will take their views into account, it is not up to them to make a decision about where they will live. If you can involve your child in small day-to-day decisions like how to arrange their room or what to have for dinner, it may help them feel like they have some control. Older children will probably have a view about the time they'd like to spend with you or their other parent. It's important to listen carefully and let children know that their opinions matter. Most parents

agree that taking the time to listen to their child, acknowledging what they are feeling and responding honestly is valuable in supporting them through separation.

How much to tell your child and when to tell them depends on the age and needs of your child. A favoured approach is giving an honest and simple explanation that lets children understand what is happening but doesn't burden them with the detail of the separation.¹ Some parents think in terms of developing a 'narrative' to help children tell their story in a way that makes sense to them.

LGBTIQ+ parents have often worked hard to develop resilience in their children and this can help in dealing with the challenges children face when parents separate. Your child will learn from how you express and process your feelings. Accessing support and practicing self-care is vital so that you are able to model resilience and maintain a calm and stable environment for your children. Parents also talk about the importance of maintaining a positive outlook for their children and speaking positively about the other parent.

1 raisingchildren.net.au provides practical information about talking to children about separation.

If it is managed well by the adults, separation doesn't have to be harmful for children. Research shows that what children need after their parents separate is a secure base with parents they trust and feel comforted by.² Parents are better able to help their children adapt to family separation when they can make room for thinking about their children's needs apart from their own.

Acting out and challenging behaviour is common when children feel unsettled. Communicating with day

care and school means they can keep an eye on any changes in behaviour and let you know if they have any concerns. It may be helpful for your child to talk to another trusted adult such as a family friend. If the circumstances of your separation have been particularly challenging, there are LGBTIQ+ sensitive counselling services that can assist in supporting you and your children. See our resources chapter later in the guide for more information.

Parents Say ...

Telling your children you are separating is a process.

Going from one home to two homes is a challenge for kids.

My son was three and it was very difficult. He was an anxious kid but actually adapted incredibly well. I talked and talked and talked more. Open and honest communication, answering questions honestly when they arose, giving him time and safety to process this and continual reinforcement that it wasn't his fault and he was safe. That no matter where we lived I would keep him safe. We made a bit of an adventure out of it and he has adapted well. I believe it helped with his resilience.

I have continually reinforced that he lives in two happy homes and remind him how fortunate we are. We continually celebrate our fortunes and our amazing lives. I never speak ill of his mother and always try to find something positive to say even when it's a battle, e.g. your mum is the best lawn mower; your mum was always awesome at climbing trees.

2 Anja Steinbach (2018) *Children's and Parents' Well-Being in Joint Physical Custody: A Literature Review*.

Told her we were separating because we couldn't stop fighting. It was the truth. Try very hard to be honest and allow her to talk with others and other trusted adults. She's been okay but a little clingy. Just allow her to feel things.

The kids will be okay if you're okay!

Grace's story

I tried to keep things as normal as possible for the kids – keeping their routines and activities such as sport and dancing. I also didn't let them see my cry. I made the most of my time with the kids and was ready to engaging in discussion with them about what was happening.

It's hard when the kids get upset and I feel bad that they are feeling pain as a result of my actions. I felt lousy when they would say that they wish they didn't have to go to two houses. I responded by trying to reinforce the positives – they have two mums that love them and the good things about each home.

There were issues for the kids at day care. Although the other kids knew they had two mums, they seemed to become more aware after we separated. I just reinforced that there are different types of families.

Emotional and social support

Going from being a family to 'just me'

The transition from being an 'intact' family unit to being a single parent is tough. The times of heightened

responsibility when children are in your care can alternate with periods of freedom or intense loneliness when the children are with their other parent. For some parents, either heightened responsibility or intense loneliness is the primary experience. Following separation, the focus tends to be on survival: getting through each day and making

sure the children are okay. Self-care is vital but can easily be overlooked. The impact of the change brought by separation can be profound, affecting your sense of identity as

a member of a family unit and the lifestyle that goes along with it. There may be feelings of failure or guilt in not being able to hold it together.

Parents say ...

I shouldered the responsibilities of primary care, work and running the household.

When you're just trying just to keep afloat day to day your social life suffers.

I moved out and was living out of a suitcase. I thought of her for many years and then after separation I decided to be me. I started transition.

I went from a family car, a home. Lost all that.

I was devastated. Sitting in an empty room crying all by myself.

I found it hard to be with the kids on my own at first.

The first few "off" days (when you don't have the kids) can be really rough – plan to spend time with friends.

I was able to get professional help from a social worker. She was there whenever I needed to get things off my chest or work through things I couldn't work through myself or with others and helped me have a good outlook.

Coming out: telling people about your sexual orientation or gender identity

Some parents may be separating from a heterosexual relationship and identity, and may be transitioning or exploring their gender identity or sexuality. Separation will usually involve having to tell a partner, children, family and friends about a

new identity or relationship. Whether you've come to terms with your sexual orientation or gender identity, or you're still thinking about it, it can be difficult dealing with that on your own. There are many parents in our community who have walked this journey and reached out for social connection and support within the Rainbow Families network.

Steve's story

I met and fell in love with Ellen at university. We married and moved to Australia from Canada. We had just bought our home and had a baby. I had always wanted to be a father. We knew lots of gay people; my boss was gay, lots of gay friends in our circle. I just never thought that applied to me.

Ellen was very keen to have another baby. I just couldn't get comfortable with it and could not work out why. My background was so traditional, I was not aware of my sexuality. It wasn't like I was concealing anything, it felt hidden from me.

At work I developed a friendship with a gay man and started hanging out with him. It was him who asked me, "You're gay, aren't you?" Once that was out, I felt I had to face it.

My son Archie was 18 months old. I worried I was going to lose my family, I worried about hurting her. I drank a bottle of wine, sat Ellen down and asked her, "What if I am gay?" She reacted very kindly and lovingly. She could see that I was struggling and that there was no need to punish me.

She didn't let me live a pretend life. She didn't want that for our family. Sometime later she told me she knew all along, to which I said, "I wish you'd told me!"

I moved out and I started to explore, dating men and going to gay bars. I rented a flat around the corner. I used to arrive early and give Archie breakfast, get him to daycare while Ellen got ready and left

for work. We tried to maintain normality for him, and support each other as parents.

We've never really talked about what that time was like for her. She had her life set out for her. We'd bought a house, had a baby, had the fairytale. Then to have the rug pulled from underneath her like that. I felt I ruined her life. I felt so guilty, took me years to shake that.

We waited a year to get divorced and did all our financial settlement between us. We decided my earning capacity was so much higher so she should have the house. I felt I could start again. A year or so later she entered a new relationship, and ended up loaning me a deposit so I could buy our house back. It's always been financially amicable like that.

I think I've also felt gratitude that she didn't ruin my life. She could have gone back to Canada to be near her family, she could have not accepted me. I appreciate that she has shared a strong sense of our family and has wanted me have a relationship with Archie as his dad, and that she values our relationships as parents.

About six months after our separation I started a relationship with a man. I was happy but at the same time felt so worried about her. I felt I had broken her dreams. She has since remarried, inherited a step child, and had another baby with her new husband. I really like him. I actually dropped her off to her first date with him. Archie was in the back of the car, we waved her off.

Archie is now at school, one of three kids and that's lovely for him. Ellen will always be family to me. We still make an effort to hang. For Archie, we are his parents and we make time to spend time as a family unit with his baby sister as well.

Being a dad is the best part of my identity, more so than being gay. This year would have been Ellen and my 10 year wedding anniversary. It's not where we would have thought we'd be, but it's good.

Coping with feelings of isolation

Separation can have a significant impact on the level of social support parents have available to them. You may have sacrificed mutual friends or it might be necessary to move away from the area where your social supports are located. If your relationship resulted in you being socially isolated, you may find yourself having to make the first tentative steps to build new friendships after separation. Making new friends takes energy and commitment which may be hard to summon at an already emotionally demanding time.

There are additional challenges for newly separated LGBTIQ+ parents moving to an area where there is not a large or visible LGBTIQ+ presence. Even where there is a local LGBTIQ+ community, it can be difficult to engage as a single parent among partnered families. Many separating parents seek out the opportunity to make new connections with LGBTIQ+ social and support groups such as Rainbow Families in a space that is safe, supportive and welcoming.

“Parents say ...

Making new friends as a grown up is hard. People aren't recruiting at our age.

It was hard after separating as I didn't know any single gay parents. Most of my friends left Sydney. The scene is full of happy couples.

Because I was with a man prior, people assumed that I ended the relationship to come out. That's not the case, I was bisexual before. I've always been queer.

I felt quite isolated after separation and ended up moving to a new area.

Groups were really supportive and, unlike friends, were less hassle to organise.

All my friends are in relationships/have intact families – I don't know any other single parents.

It was really difficult being confronted by a narrative of 'happy families'.

There is such potential for support groups for separating parents with an LGBTIQA+ focus.

There needs to be more social events for single parents, especially child-free events.

What do I do now?

First steps – financial checklist, Centrelink, Medicare

At an emotionally difficult time, you will find yourself having to deal with a range of practical matters that arise from the separation. Some separating parents will be accessing services such as Centrelink for the first time. There are a number of checklists that can guide you through the important steps (see our resources chapter). Not all steps will be relevant and how you approach them will depend on the circumstances of your separation. Below is a list of the most common steps taken.

Finances

- Contact Centrelink to check your eligibility for any benefits such as Parenting Payment and Family Tax Benefit, child care benefit and health care cards – crisis payments are available in some circumstances.
- Apply for child support or make a private arrangement with the other parent.
- Decide whether to close joint bank accounts and credit cards or whether to keep open for payment of shared expenses for the children – if you don't already

have a joint account, you might consider opening one for children's expenses where you agree on contributions and sharing costs.

- Make arrangements for mortgage payments to be covered in the immediate term and remove redraw facilities or freeze offset accounts if you are concerned.
- Arrange how payments for any other joint loans will be covered in the immediate term and contact the lender if you need to.
- See a financial counsellor if you are having difficulty in adjusting to post-separation finances.

Health

- Arrange to have your child's name added to your Medicare card if it's not on there already - if you're not on your child's birth certificate, you will need to complete a form and provide documentation to prove that they are in your care.
- Check where Medicare rebates are paid into to ensure that the parent incurring the cost is reimbursed the rebate.
- If you have private health insurance consider whether your children be on the policy of one parent or continue to have a joint family cover and how you will manage this.
- Obtain or copy key documents such as your child's birth certificate, immunisation record or any medical tests or reports.

Legal

- Update wills, life insurance policies, superannuation, any powers of attorney.
- Start gathering documents such as statements for bank accounts, mortgages and superannuation if you think you will be seeking a property settlement.
- If moving out of your rental accommodation, arrange to have your name removed from the lease and from any utilities accounts.

Communication and IT

- Change PINs and passwords if concerned about unauthorised access.
- Check social media privacy setting, and other share arrangements (eg iCloud) to avoid your texts or photos streaming to your ex partner's device.

School

- Advise the school or childcare service of the separation and update contact details.
- Ask the school to send key documents such as school reports to both parents.

Finding information and support and accessing services

Looking for help with your separation can be daunting. It is quite likely that you will start your search online and there are websites that will give you a good overview of family law as well as links to services and resources. There are many organisations providing services such as counselling, mediation, legal advice, courses and information resources to separated parents. It is important to be able to approach service providers with the confidence that you will be treated in a way that is sensitive to the needs of your family. In ordinary circumstances you might be happy to explain your family structure, seeing it as an opportunity to educate. However, it's quite understandable that you might not feel like doing this at a time when you are most likely feeling vulnerable and anxious. Some parents have expressed frustration about resources, promotional material and language that isn't inclusive of rainbow families.

There are some providers of post-separation services that have a more inclusive approach and have specifically addressed the needs of LGBTIQ+ parents. You can check whether services are likely to be a good fit for you from the provider's website or picking up some brochures and talking to representatives at events like Fair

Day. In addition, services based in areas where there is a higher LGBTIQ+ population tend to have more experience with and therefore better understand the needs of LGBTIQ+ parents. See our resources chapter in this guide for more information.

Legal Advice

Obtaining legal advice will help you to know where you stand legally and to gain an understanding of the legal framework. An advice session may be enough to equip you to negotiate arrangements with the other parent and you may never need to go down the court pathway. For some people, legal advice is part of the mediation process (see below). It can be challenging to find free or low cost legal advice, particularly if you don't live in a metropolitan area. (See resources chapter for some ideas.)

Mediation

Mediation is a process where an impartial third party helps two or more people reach an agreement. Family law mediators must be qualified and accredited and are known as Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners (FDRPs). They usually have a background as family lawyers, social workers or psychologists. A number of organisations provide mediation that is low cost or means tested on a sliding scale. There are also private mediators who are generally more expensive. Some mediation is lawyer-assisted so that lawyers can advise

parties throughout the process and draft the agreement as a parenting plan or consent orders. (See our resources chapter for LGBTIQ+ inclusive mediation providers.)

The mediation provider will contact the other parent and complete an intake process with both parents to assess whether mediation is suitable. It might be assessed as unsuitable if one person would have difficulty negotiating due to factors

such as a history of family violence. It may still be possible for mediation to be done in a safe way, for example by telephone or shuttle or if both parents have legal representation. If mediation cannot go ahead because it is unsuitable or one parent refuses to attend or doesn't respond, you will receive what is known as a 60I certificate. This is necessary if you want to apply to the court for parenting orders.

Parents say ...

It was hard to find information.

I encountered a lot of assumptions about what each parent's role was.

Family Law mediation was horrendous, useless. They gave me a pamphlet for my child called "My Mummy and Daddy aren't friends any more".

All I could find were books like "Mummy and daddy are sad". Apart from the gender, this wasn't us anyway. I was happy we separated. It was for the best for us.

Mediation providers need more outreach to regional areas with resources that are inclusive not based on hetero model.

Just the usual misgendering despite repeated reinforcement of the other parent being female.

Centrelink and Medicare have the same rules as for hetero parents but treatment is different.

Particular issues that arise from being an LGBTIQ+ family

Because of the diversity of ways in which rainbow families are formed, a more complex set of issues needs to be addressed when parents separate. It is important for service providers to avoid making assumptions about the family structure and relationships. For example, children may have been born from a previous heterosexual relationship and one of the separating parents is a step parent.

A number of LGBTIQ+ parents are not biologically related to their children. This can be a source of misunderstanding in the broader community. For some mainstream service providers there can be a tendency to privilege biological relationships, in turn devaluing the relationship between non-biological parents and their children. As a non-biological parent you may feel quite vulnerable, particularly when the other parent is attempting to use their biological status as leverage, or as a basis to restrict your time with the children. For parents in this situation, gaining an understanding of their legal status is crucial.

Some separating parents will have co-parented their children, for example a lesbian couple with a male known donor (and possibly his partner). This means that the impact of the separation on the child's

relationships with other significant people needs to be taken into account. Parenting arrangements can have an added level of complexity and require a high level of commitment to make them work.

Roles of parents in LGBTIQ+ families tend to depart from the traditional heterosexual parenting model, with parenting responsibilities more likely to be shared equally. Understandably, many LGBTIQ+ parents expect that parenting will continue to be equally shared following separation. However, this does not always sit comfortably within a family law framework that prioritises 'the best interests of the children'. Equal care arrangements may not be in the best interests of your children, particularly where the children are very young, there is high conflict and poor communication between the parents or significant practical barriers such as geographical distance between parents' households. It is important to try and think what is best for the children when making arrangement as this is ultimately the approach the court will take if you're not able to resolve things yourselves.

Unfortunately, some trans and gender diverse (TGD) parents accessing family law services have experienced transphobia, vilification and hostility which makes this process even more confronting and difficult. If you experience any of these issues, please reach out to Rainbow Families for guidance and assistance.

Parents say ...

Kids shouldn't be separated just because they have different bio mums.

I know some bio mums are concerned, especially if they are not on the birth certificate.

There is no guidance around for non-bio mums.

Constant false allegations, vilification from police, ex partners, solicitors, barristers, fighting every step of the way in the Family Court (though hoping it will be a positive outcome) ... it's been a huge learning experience to see the immense prejudice transgender women receive.

I'm a trans woman ... I'm very lucky ... I'm petite and very feminine ... children look more like me ... the biggest challenge is when some people find out you're the father ... I've learnt now to never mention I'm trans.

Donors and embryo storage

Having an LGBTIQ+ friendly solicitor was a godsend. We used anonymous donor sperm through a clinic and I have no idea what happened to the sperm we had stored. The already horrendous Family Court experience is greatly exacerbated by being outside the norm.

My ex tried to block me from using the embryos. It's really not clear what happens when you split. Clinic protocols based are based on hetero relationships. I got to keep them but it had to go to an ethics committee.

What will work best for the children?

Many LGBTIQ+ parents feel that the heterosexual models of separation don't fit, particularly those which are more adversarial. If you and your children's other parent have had a co-operative approach to parenting, it makes sense that this is reflected in the way in which things are worked out after separation. However, you shouldn't feel pressure to have a 50/50 arrangement because it is 'equal' if you don't believe that's what's best for the children. It's perfectly okay to do things in the way that works for your family, even if you haven't seen it done before.

Many parents opt for some kind of a written record of their parenting agreement but others may never have the need to write anything down. It depends on the circumstances and the relationship between the parents. The main options for formalising parenting arrangements are Parenting Plans and Consent Orders. The requirements for parenting plans are set out under the *Family Law Act* and although they are not legally binding, they are relevant if you later go to court. Consent orders are an agreement that is approved by the court and becomes legally binding. Where parents can't agree, they can apply to the court to decide what the orders will be (see below). In having any sort of parenting

agreement, the key is in striking a balance between predictability and the flexibility to respond to changes and unexpected events. You may need to revisit the agreement as your child gets older or if there is a significant change in circumstances.

There are no hard and fast rules about what a parenting agreement should contain and you can tailor an agreement to suit your family, for example to include when children spend time with other parent figures or how community events such as Mardi Gras are shared. Some things commonly dealt with in parenting agreements are:

- Who the children will live with and spend time with
- The times that children spend with each parent: weekends, school holidays, special occasions (eg Christmas, birthdays)
- How the parents make decisions (Equal Shared Parental Responsibility or Sole Parental Responsibility)
- How the parents obtain and exchange information about things such as school and medical treatment
- How the parents communicate – by phone, text message, email, communication apps
- What the parents can't do, for example restrictions of drug and alcohol use, denigrating the other parent

- How expenses such as education, extra curricular activities, medical care will be shared
- How any future disagreements will be resolved, for example by attending family dispute resolution.

Parents say ...

We wanted to work things out to suit our family.

We didn't know how to 'do' separation so we just did it our own way.

You have to do what works for your family – we have an arrangement where the kids stay in the same house and the parents move between the two.

We stayed living together. Took a while to get the logistics of the children.

Heterosexual model of separation is dominant. LGBTIQ community needs models of how to separate.

Model of one primary carer that characterises many heterosexual relationships doesn't fit many LGBTIQ families.

Kids have rights, Parents have responsibilities.

50/50 is never recommended for really young children (under five years) where parents don't live close to each other.

I felt like I was making stuff up. I kept googling for ideas of what to do.

We have shared care, almost 50/50 shared school holidays and special arrangements during birthdays, mothers day etc. I would advise to put a lot of thought into this from the beginning and plan for the future.

Co-parenting – challenges and practical solutions

Whether you decide to share the care of your children 50/50 or one parent has the children mostly on weekends, you will have a co-parenting relationship. A good co-parenting relationship takes time and effort to develop. Focusing on what's best for the children might mean putting aside other issues arising from the relationship. There is an

abundance of research that says that exposure to conflict between parents can be one of the most damaging things for children.

In a successful co-parenting relationship, open communication is key, as is the ability to be flexible and practical. Mainly, it's about being willing to work with the other parent to meet your children's needs.

Grace's story

Since we went to court a few years ago, things have gotten easier. For quite a while there hasn't been anything more significant than the odd minor squabble. I think we're at a good point now.

We follow the orders but we can also agree on other things such as making different arrangements for the school holidays. I just focus on what's best for my child. If changing something isn't going to affect my life, I just go with it. Sometimes it means going with the flow even if it has a negative impact on me because I don't want my child to miss out. The way I see it, if I make the effort to do things in a positive way, my child's other parent will eventually see things in a better way. I want to avoid disagreeing and fighting. It's just not a nice experience.

Co-parenting tips

Relationship with the other parent

- Model positive interactions with the other parent in the presence of your child, particularly in the transition from one home to another.
- Always be mindful about the affect of exposing the children to conflict between you and the other parent.
- Be positive about your child's time with the other parent and encourage them to communicate when they are with you.
- Be flexible and willing to accommodate changes in plans – ideally both parents will help each other out at different times, for example swapping nights or picking up from childcare if one parent is running late or a child is unwell.
- Be supportive of the other parent's work arrangements as this will ultimately contribute to financial stability for your child.

Home

- Think about how you manage the transitions between homes – if your child is unsettled when they arrive at one home, establishing a simple routine or activity might help.
- Keep basic items in both homes and avoid putting pressure on children to remember everything each time they move between homes.
- Don't get stressed about your different parenting styles or

routines as children can cope with this, providing they are clear about what happens in each house.

- Bearing in mind that you will always do some things differently, co-operate as much as possible in relation to your child's routine (particularly if young), diet, internet use/screen time, discipline and parenting strategies – if something works, share it.

School

- Ask the school to send school reports and other important documents to each parent.
- Keep each other informed about school events, activities and other information.
- Sign up to newsletters, apps Facebook groups and whatever other means of communication the school has if you haven't already.
- Decide how school costs will be covered, for example, one parent might buy uniforms and the other one be responsible for excursions and resources payments.
- When your child brings home a note or invitation to a child's party, take a photo and send it to the other parent.
- Check with the other parent if you are considering signing your child up for extra-curricular and other activities, particularly if they take place during their scheduled time.
- Let the other parent know if you

become aware of any issues that arise for your child at school.

- Attend school appointments together if possible or fill each other in afterwards.
- When choosing a school, make your own enquiries as a basis for discussion with the other parent – it will probably be an ongoing discussion so allow plenty of time.

Medical

- Let the other parent know as soon as possible of any urgent medical treatment and also let them know

if you've taken the child to the doctor and medication has been prescribed or other follow up action is required.

- Where possible, take your child to the same doctor as the other parent so that treatment is consistent and there is a central source of information.
- Get information directly from specialists, attending appointments together where possible and obtaining copies of any reports so that the burden of providing information is not on one parent.

Parents say ...

One family, two homes

We always say we are one family that lives in two homes. Didn't want my five year old to have to do two drawings. I noticed my six year old just draws us all in on one page.

I didn't want other parents to not have to navigate our separateness, or exclude my children because it's too hard. Even with parents that are couples that's a pain! You end up talking to one or texting both. I get people to text us both, or if they ask me I make sure Amanda gets the message. I never say "they're not with them, talk to my ex".

Having two sets of rules can be challenging especially when there's things they can do at the other house that they can't do at mine. I just explain that they are different and usually they get it.

It's helpful to talk about things such as screen time with their other parent so we can work out what is best for them and so there is some consistency.

Arranging children's social and school life

Early on a school mum said, "I was going to invite Ella but I didn't know who she was with". So early on we didn't want that to be a barrier. Same with our own friends not inviting either of us in fear of hurting the other. I just say, "invite us both. We can decide who wants to go, or might both attend. You don't need to navigate our feelings".

We make sure that we explain our family to teachers and their friends parents. I always stress how we are friends and try to model good communication.

How you talk about your co-parented family

As queers we've had to define and find new language. We correct people when they ask "who's the real mother?" or terms like "housewife", and have found new words to include a two-mum family. So in separation we don't have to follow some old fashion dichotomy.

I didn't want to define Amanda by what she isn't to me. Heard others call their previous partners "his father or his other mother" and I say that sometimes, but I wonder what it's like for my children. If a friend says "her friends" I do hear that as "not mine" and I know my mother is cranky with my dad when she says, "your father".

I started introducing her as "my co-parent" rather than "my ex". It's intentional as I hope my children feel they have cooperative parents and one family.

There's also what you call the two homes that they live in. It's easy to say "mummy's house" or "mama's house". I wanted them to know that it's their house and they are not just visiting. So at first it was "the Ashfield house" and now we have chosen a house name, "Lavender Hill".

"Handover" is also a weird word. My children are not a hospital shift to attend to, or property to pass around. It paints a certain picture to other school parents.

Communicating with your children's other parent

Communication is likely to be a challenge for most separated parents at some point but often becomes easier as the circumstances of separation are less raw. This process is a lot more difficult where the conflict is entrenched, if a parent is abusive or there are power imbalances in the relationship. Some parents have trouble putting the history of the relationship behind them to focus on building a co-parenting relationship. Where there are court proceedings, the adversarial system works against co-operating as parents.

Where it is challenging to communicate, it can be helpful to put boundaries around communication in the early stages, relaxing the rules as the emotions settle and trust rebuilds. This can mean committing to only talking about issues to do with the children rather than issues

arising from your relationship with the other parent. Avoid using children as a means of carrying messages or involving them in discussions about adult issues.

If your child reports something that concerns you about the other parent's household, make further inquiries before jumping to conclusions - sometimes you might be able to check with a third party, other times calmly initiating a discussion with the other parent may clear up misunderstandings and prevent the situation escalating.

You may find it helpful to set aside regular times to communicate in a safe, low-stress environment rather than at changeover where the children could be exposed to conflict. Communication between parents is crucial where both parents have substantial care of the children as there is usually a great deal of information to be shared in order to meet the children's needs. Some parents manage to do this effectively

with the odd practical hiccup of school uniforms left in the other house.

Parents choose from a variety of methods of communication including face to face, telephone, text email and apps. It is a matter of what works best for you at different times for different purposes. Some parents find it helpful to limit communication to writing (email or text message) in the initial stages if there is conflict. However, care needs to be taken that your written communication doesn't become inflammatory. Again, focusing on

the children's needs is the best rule of thumb. Parental communication apps are an increasingly means of communication post-separation. They can help minimise conflict as well as being a practical way of exchanging and storing information including documents. For some parents it is a way of scaffolding the process of developing healthy communication. Caution should be when using social media so that it doesn't become a forum for airing grievances about the other parent or triggering resentment, whether intentional or not.

Parents say ...

If issues arise with the children, it's much better to pick up the phone and talk to my ex. We are usually able to work towards an agreement.

The last conversation I had with my ex wife was 23 May 2015 in an attempt to create a parenting plan. She immediately stopped all contact and I was required to seek court intervention.

Awful. Family Court was a horrific experience. My ex is emotionally, financially and socially abusive and said a lot of awful things about my family during the family court proceedings and there is a lot of baggage. I don't communicate with her except by email about our son when required. It was horrendous at the beginning and I set boundaries for myself and it has gotten more easy to manage as I got stronger and with time.

Not great. She texts all the time about things not related to the child. She communicates anger via text all the time.

I cannot help here ... sadly we have no communication and she has refused all attempts.

It's challenging when the other parent can't separate the relationship ending from the child's needs.

Property and financial

At some stage you will probably want to finalise property and financial matters between you and your ex partner: a 'property settlement'. There is no rule about whether you do this before, after or at the same time as working out the parenting arrangements – you can do what fits best for your family's situation. However, you should bear in mind that there are time limits if you want to formalise your property financial agreement through consent orders. If you were married, you must file your application for orders within 12 months after the divorce becomes final. If you were in a de facto relationship, the time limit is two years after you separated. Although the object of a property settlement is to finalise the financial relationship between the two of you, in reality there will probably still be some links, such as sharing expenses for the children.

As with parenting matters, many people are able to reach agreement about property. Often, the amount

they would pay in legal fees (not to mention the emotional and other costs) is not worth any advantage they might gain from going to court. As with parenting matters, there will be some cases where it's not safe to resolve property outside of court (see "Going to Court" in Chapter 3). If the relationship has involved financial abuse, this may mean that one person's ability to negotiate a fair settlement is very limited because they don't have a full picture of the financial circumstances.

Unfortunately, low cost options for resolving property matters are quite limited. Mediation can be an effective and relatively low cost option and may be delivered safely where there has been domestic violence if appropriate arrangements are in place. The discussion during mediation will be along the lines of the 'four-step process' that the court follows in making a decision under the *Family Law Act*:

1. Confirming the property that is part of the 'asset pool', including

superannuation. This is not always straightforward as it depends on each person making 'full and frank disclosure' of their financial circumstances. Although this is an obligation under the *Family Law Act*, it is difficult to force someone to do it outside the court system.

2. Determining the financial and non-financial contributions that each person has made to the property of the relationship. Contributions can be direct and indirect.
3. Determining whether an adjustment should be made in favour of one person because they have higher future needs, for example because their earning capacity is reduced due to disability or illness or having the primary care of young children
4. Whether the proposed outcome is 'just and equitable'.

It is important to note that there is no presumption about property being divided 50/50 although this will often be the outcome, unless there is an adjustment due to future needs. However, approaches to property division have tended to be influenced by a notion of a traditional heterosexual relationship where the non-childbearing parent is the primary earner. Don't feel that your property settlement needs conform to any pre-determined model. The right outcome is the one that best takes into account your family's circumstances, particularly the needs of your children.

When it's not possible to work it out

When you have concerns about your children being with the other parent

There may be reasons it is not safe or feasible for the other parent to have a substantial amount of time with your child. If there are issues with substance abuse, unmanaged mental health, and violence and abuse (see below) the need for your child to maintain a relationship with a parent needs to be balanced against the need to be safe for the child (as well as for parents). It could be that the issues that parents are experiencing have been exacerbated by the separation and they might settle after they have had time to adjust.

The starting point is thinking about what needs to happen to reassure you that your child is safe. What do you need to see from the other

parent, for example a clean drug test, a letter from their treating medical practitioner? If this type of reassurance is not readily available,

what are the ways that your child can spend time with the other parent that are safe? Depending on the level of concern, short amounts of day time rather than overnight time might be appropriate. Where the concern is greater, supervised time might be needed. Supervision can be provided informally for example by family members. Where this is not an option, contact centres or private supervision services can facilitate supervised visits for limited amounts for short amounts of time. See our resources chapter under 'mediation and counselling'. Where you and the other party are not able to agree on the level of risk involved, you may need the assistance of the court to resolve the dispute.

Domestic and family violence and abuse

Working out an informal arrangement with your children's other parent may not be an option where there is domestic and family violence and abuse. Safety takes priority and a parent may need to take steps to ensure that they and their children are protected. This is not an easy process and most people need support. It's important to know that if you are experiencing violence or abuse from your partner or ex partner, there are services that you can contact who will be understanding and responsive to your needs as an LGBTIQ+ parent. The first step is always to contact the police if you are concerned for the

immediate safety of you and your children. You can also contact the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer (DVLO) or in some cases, the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO) at your local police station to talk about what assistance they may be able to provide. (See our resources chapter for domestic violence and counselling support.)

LGBTIQ+ parents experiencing family violence and abuse face additional barriers in accessing support. There can be misunderstanding about the nature of domestic and family violence in LGBTIQ+ relationships, for example that it is mutual or 'equal' rather than about power and control or that it just doesn't exist. This plays out in the LGBTIQ+ community where people may not identify that they are experiencing domestic and family violence and therefore be less likely to report or seek assistance. For some people, seeking assistance at the time of separation may be compounded by fears associated with coming out or transitioning. A general perception that seeking services will be met with prejudice and discrimination acts as an additional barrier. Discrimination may be compounded for people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other cultural backgrounds. Barriers are even more pronounced in regional areas due to isolation, low availability, concerns about privacy and confidentiality and fear of discrimination.

Domestic and family violence can include a broad range of behaviour that is used to control another person. It can include the following:

- Physical, psychological and sexual abuse
- Threats to harm self or others
- Monitoring movements or using recording or surveillance devices
- Undermining the relationship between a parent and their child
- Social abuse – isolating a person from their family and friends, preventing them from attending LGBTIQ+ venues or events
- Using contact with children as a means of controlling or undermining a parent (see below)
- Exposure of children to violence against a parent

- Financial abuse – controlling all decisions about finance, withdrawing financial support, preventing someone from working

Some parents may experience the other parent using the children as a means of attempting to manipulate and control them. This can include devaluing and undermining a parent's relationship with the children. Non-biological parents can be particularly vulnerable if a biological parent tries to use this as a basis of restricting contact with the children. If you are in this situation it is important that you seek legal advice so you understand your legal status as a parent, and the implications for the arrangements for your children post-separation.

Parents say ...

She kept disappearing. My ex was difficult, she got violent. It was hard because she was the only person I knew in the area.

My ex was going through difficult personal emotions and she took it out on me.

My ex was violent and I had to approach the police for assistance. The local police wouldn't help. I had to come to Sydney and contact the domestic violence liaison officer in Newtown. They were great and I started to feel safe.

I felt intimidated at changeovers.

My workplace was very supportive. Gave me DV leave.

Going to Court

It's not always possible to resolve issues about children and property directly with the other parent.

For parents who are unable to negotiate arrangements with each other directly, mediation may help (See 'mediation' in Chapter 2).

Attempting mediation before going to court is generally required for parenting matters. However, if it has been assessed as unsuitable, for example due to domestic violence, the next step will probably be a court application. Mediation may not assist in resolving parenting matters if the relationship is highly toxic or conflictual. It may also be that mediation doesn't work because there is no agreement on the facts, particularly if there are complex issues relating to family violence, illness, substance abuse. In these cases, the court needs to investigate the issues and make a decision about what is in the best interests of your children. (See case study: Theresa.)

If you have to go to court, there are resources to provide support and

help you towards a resolution. You can come to an agreement at any time during the court proceedings (including through mediation). The court may appoint an Independent Children's Lawyer whose role it is to represent the children's best interests. You also may be required to meet with a psychologist or social worker who interviews family members and prepares a report that makes recommendations to the court. Sometimes these recommendations can provide a basis for negotiating a resolution.

Family law proceedings can be emotionally and financially draining and it is important to have good supports in place. A lawyer who is sensitive to your experience as an LGBTIQ+ parent can be a strong advocate for you and your children and help bring about an early resolution of the dispute. Seek out recommendations by talking to others in the community and in the LGBTIQ+ media, particularly social media. See our resource chapter under 'legal services'.

Parents say ...

We went through court because my ex was saying I shouldn't be seeing my child. She created a situation and made allegations about me that weren't true. There were letters back and forth between lawyers. I kept my cool and didn't do anything to inflame the situation.

It's really hard but I had to just focus on what was in my child's best interests and how it would impact on her.

We have no personal arrangements, everything has been through court due to the almost constant allegations of every worst kind. It's limited right now and whilst I cannot disclose court proceedings, currently the recommendation is for the children to live with me almost entirely.

I wanted to avoid family law courts. There was a lot of anger in our house. Everyone was hurt and angry.

Don't listen to others telling you to stick out toxic family relationships for the sake of the kids.

Get advice, arrange mediation as early as possible.

The Legal Aid Early Intervention Unit helped.

I am a non-bio mum of a now 10 year old boy. His bio mum and I separated when he was three. There is a lot of conflict, we had a failed attempt at mediation and ended at the Family Court. I have just re-initiated mediation to attempt to resolve some issues in our family law orders.

Family Court is financially and soul destroying and you never really recover.

At all costs try to make mediation work. You don't really know where you fit in until your life falls apart and I was surprised by the anger and bitterness and lost relationships - seek out positive people, positive relationships and quality time with your kids.

Theresa's Story

I am the birth mum. Both of us are on the birth certificate. We were in a relationship for five years but the problems started after the baby was born. Counselling didn't work and we separated when my child was one year old. I had only just stopped breastfeeding and returned to work. My ex was like "I'm his parent too". She seemed to be using a language of "rights" that had been borrowed from a men's right type narrative. The idea that parents have "rights" leads to expectations of certain types of arrangements that might not be best for the child. I think also that there were no models for birth mothers in this situation.

We couldn't get into mediation straight away. There was a three month waiting list at the Family Relationship Centre. We negotiated a parenting plan which was for a shared care arrangement though not 50/50.

I persevered with the parenting plan for 5 months. Changeover was very difficult due to the conflict between my ex and I. My child was screaming and crying to the point where his health was affected - asthma and vomiting. I even contacted FACS at one stage. Changeover now happens in a public place. It makes parents behave better.

We were back and forth with lawyers for about one year. We did mediation designed for high conflict parents but it was based on a heterosexual model so it didn't help us. My ex filed court proceedings because she wanted more time with our son. We headed towards final hearing and had an interim hearing and two family consultant reports along the way. We attempted negotiation through lawyers a number of times. I feel that lawyers were being

used as a weapon of intimidation. Because we couldn't come to an agreement, the arrangement under the parenting plan stayed in place. We finally settled one week before the final hearing. By then I had spent \$72,000 on legal fees.

I now see how important it is to access a really good mediation service early on. You need to spell out the arrangements really clearly to provide certainty and avoid conflict. The focus should be on the child, not on percentages of care. Don't be afraid to walk out if you feel uncomfortable. I felt pressure to agree to something that I didn't believe was in my child's best interests. It can be intimidating if there is domestic violence in the relationship but mediation can be done in a way that is safer for example through shuttle. It's important for mediators to be able to see the patterns of domestic violence in LGBTIQ+ relationships and not make assumptions based on the signs in heterosexual relationships.

Other support services I accessed were okay – some made adjustments for LGBTIQ+ parents. The parenting after separation course was good as I felt that it applied just as much to me. However, I think services need to fall into a trap of treating all separated parents “equally” because where experiences are different, equal treatment can result in unequal outcomes.

Making it work – looking ahead

Many parents are able to settle into an arrangement for the care of their children that works. Circumstances change – parents repartner, relocate, change jobs and children get older and their needs change. Communication and willingness to be flexible are necessary to respond to these changes in a way that works for everyone, particularly the children.

Parents say ...

It was really important for us that our kids had parents who could be in the same room.

We have a family dinner. I thought this was brilliant for the kids. I've always wanted them to continue to have both of us for birthdays and special occasions, not to have two lives.

No child in our house will have to choose who comes to their special occasion. I worked hard for that. Didn't want our separation to impact on them like that.

There was also each other's extended family to factor in. With birthday parties and other significant events it was important that everyone got along.

Make your own memories and your own special things separate to the other – make a point of difference.

You need to be flexible – children's needs change as they get older and their relationship with you and the other parent changes.

Compromise until it hurts.

Keep in mind what your long term goal is – what do you want things to look like when the kids are older – 21st, wedding, etc.

Where there is conflict, spell out arrangements really clearly to avoid further conflict.

I have always looked at it in a positive way (and it totally is for me, our relationship was AWFUL). I turn up even when it is hard for me personally and my ex is giving daggers. I persisted even when friendships, family relationships etc broke down. Be there for your child – you have to swallow your pride, fears etc and just turn up! Negotiate where you can.

Co-parenting with a difficult ex is sometimes traumatic, always draining and you need to 'be better' ALL THE TIME. But it is worth it. The relationship you will have with your child is the most incredible reward when you put the effort in.

New partners, step parents and blended families

Parents repartnering requires adjustment for everyone as new relationships are established. If your new partner also has children, there will be inevitable challenges that arise as new boundaries and rules are worked out.

Your new partner

- Discuss how you each see their role in your family and what you are each comfortable with, being clear about what the boundaries are – for example you will be responsible for any discipline. This will be an ongoing discussion as their role will evolve with the relationship.
- Be sensitive towards your ex partner, particularly if the separation is recent or you are further along the separation journey. Think about how you are going to manage social events and social media. The need for privacy may be important to you but be open and honest where possible rather than defensive.
- Think about how you are going to introduce your new partner to your child. This will depend on the circumstances but the key is to do it in a conscious way. If your new partner has children, be realistic about the time the children take to adjust.

- Be open to your children expressing a range of emotions and don't dismiss their concerns.
- Maintain regular time one-on-one time and routines with your child
- Encourage activities between your child and new partner to help the relationship develop in a relaxed way.

Their new partner

- Try to separate your feelings about the separation from your feelings towards the new partner. If feelings are complicated, for example if the new partner is a friend or even an ex partner of yours, considering having counselling to work through your feelings.
- Try to be positive about their role in your child's life – they may bring something new that your child will benefit from and could provide practical assistance such as picking the children up.
- Don't interrogate your child or make negative comments about their other parent's new partner.
- If you have any concerns about the other parent's new partner, try to raise it with the other parent in a calm way. You may be met with resistance but at least you have registered your concern.

Parents say ...

It's not easy for the child or the other parent when you have a new partner. You have to work at it.

It's hard when you see your ex with a new partner. You feel on the outer but you just have to accept it. It's also hard when you see your child developing a relationship with them. I had to focus on what was good for my child. If the relationship with the other parent's new partner was positive I wanted to support it.

Resources

Financial and general services

Centrelink, Medicare and the Child Support Agency

humanservices.gov.au

Moneysmart

moneysmart.gov.au

Comprehensive collection of financial information including separation checklists, budgeting and debt management and contact details for financial counselling.

General counselling

Lifeline

13 11 14

Webchat: **lifeline.org.au**

Beyond Blue

1300 224 636

Kid helpline

1800 55 1800

Webchat: kidshelpline.com.au

Qlife

qlife.org.au

1800 184 527 – 3pm to midnight, 7 days

Counselling, peer support and referral provided by and for members of the LGBTIQ community as well as comprehensive referral information and resources.

Australian psychological Society

psychology.org.au

For referrals to private psychologists by location or area of expertise.

Counselling, mediation and post separation courses

Relationships Australia

relationships.org.au

1300 364 277

- LGBTIQ targeted services including individual counselling, seminars and a domestic violence support program 'surviving abuse'.
- Family dispute resolution.
- Counselling for separated parents.
- Courses about separation for parents and children.
- Advice sheets about separation and children and Tip sheets on topics such as blended families.
- Children's Contact Service (for supervision and transition between parents).
- Parenting Orders program for families who have been through the court system.

Uniting

uniting.org

1800 864 846

Doesn't provide LGBTIQ specific services but has an inclusion strategy which is demonstrated by the statement on the website: "If you are a member of an LGBTIQ community, you'll be welcome at Uniting". Uniting was voted one of the top LGBTIQ employers.

- Family Dispute resolution with child inclusive practice.
- Individual counselling for separation and other issues.
- Courses about separation.
- Support groups for children.
- Parenting Orders program for families who have been through the court system.

Domestic and family violence support

NSW Police

In an emergency or crisis, always call **000**.

Police assistance line **131 444**.

To speak to a Domestic Violence Liaison Office (DVLO) about your options, contact your local station. Some stations will also have a Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO) available.

Domestic Violence Line

1800 656 463 – information and referral.

1800 Respect

1800 737 732 – counselling and referral.

Inner City Legal Centre

iclc.org.au

1800 244 481

Specialist legal advice and court support for LGBTIQ people experiencing domestic and family violence.

Another Closet

anothercloset.com.au

Handbook for members of the LGBTIQ community experiencing domestic violence.

ACON

acon.org.au

LGBTIQ counselling and support services; information and referral

Legal Aid NSW Domestic Violence Unit

02 9219 6300

familyviolencelaw.gov.au

A comprehensive source of information about safety, apprehended violence orders, family law and child protection.

Legal services and information

Family Court and Federal Circuit Court

familycourt.gov.au

federalcircuitcourt.gov.au

Both websites provide court forms, information about fees, procedural information and brochures and fact sheets.

National Enquiry Centre: **1300 352 000**

Webchat (link from website)

Find Legal Answers – State Library of NSW

legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au

Comprehensive source of legal information and links.

Legal Aid NSW

legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Free face-to-face advice in most Legal Aid Offices. See website for locations.

The Early Intervention unit **1800 551 589** provides a duty service at the Family Court and outreach service to rural locations. They may assist where the main Legal Aid NSW cannot because of conflict of interest.

Legal Aid also provides specialist legal services such as the Child Support Service and Domestic Violence Unit.

Legal Representation may be available if you satisfy the eligibility criteria for family law matters which includes a means test for income and assets. A Legal Aid inhouse lawyer or a private practitioner can assist you under a grant of legal aid.

Legal Aid provides a large range of legal tool kits, fact sheets and detailed legal information on the website as hard copies of brochures at Legal aid offices and other locations such as courts and community legal centres.

Community Legal Centres

clc.nsw.org.au

CLCs can provide free advice on a range of legal areas, usually including family law. They are in various metropolitan and regional locations. They may provide a higher level of assistance in certain circumstances. They are a good source of fact sheets and can help to refer you to other services.

Links to individual centres for information about services provided. Fact sheets available online.

National Association of Community Legal Centres

naclc.org.au

Fact sheets and other resources.

Inner City Legal Centre

iclc.org.au

1800 244 481

Specialist Transgender and Gay and Lesbian legal advice and specialist legal advice and court support for LGBTIQ people experiencing domestic and family violence.

Community legal education fact sheets and publications.

Aboriginal Legal Service

alsnswact.org.au

Law Access

1300 888 529

lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

A telephone service that can provide legal information, referral details and basic legal advice.

Law Society of NSW community referral service

1800 422713

02 9926 0300

ereferral@lawsoc.com.au

Provides contact information for private solicitors based on specifications such as location and area of law.

