



Top 6 things to consider for child handover when co-parenting after separation

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After separation from your partner, one area that can often be filled with stress and emotion is child handover or changeover time. In this article, we provide six key things to consider when working through your parenting arrangements, specifically related to handover, including:

- choosing appropriate handover locations;
- respectful communication;
- the need for flexibility; and
- ensuring the best interests of the children are paramount in any decision.

Working out parenting arrangements for your children can be difficult, especially when the idea of being separated from them feels so enormous. Ultimately, sharing children with your ex-partner means that they will likely be in your life for a long time, and successful co-parenting often requires effort, flexibility and compromise.

Child's best interests are paramount in any parenting matters

It's important to remember that your children's best interests should always be at the forefront of your mind during changeovers. You can read more about this in our earlier article, ["Understanding the best interests of the children in family law matters"](#).

Focusing on your children and what they need in these moments will help them to feel safe and comfortable, and hopefully transition into the other parent's care with relative ease. While this may seem easier said than done, the following information and

tips will help your family to navigate these issues and avoid conflict.

1. Getting the location of child handover right - what works best for the children?

In most cases, where it is safe to do so, it is usually most practical for children to be dropped off and picked up at their homes – the place where they feel the most comfortable.

To make things fair between parents, try to share the driving – for example, one parent can collect the children when they are due to be with them, and the other parent can collect the children when it's time for changeover.

Be respectful of boundaries and space. Ensure the children arrive and leave safely. You should not enter your ex-partner's home without invitation. Arrangements will always depend on the ages of the children, with younger children needing more assistance.

If handover at your respective homes is not possible for practical or safety reasons, try to agree on a mid-way point and choose a location that is comfortable and familiar for the children. Avoid police stations – this is only going to cause more stress and anxiety for children.

1. Be polite and respectful – your children are watching

As hard as it may feel, a simple, friendly greeting at pickup and drop-off may help to ease any tension.

Try to avoid involving your children in discussions or exposing them to conflict or tension between you and your ex-partner during handovers. Avoid using inflammatory language, and be respectful and mindful of your body language. Your children will be watching and taking their cues from you.

1. Avoid bringing new partners to changeover (at least in the early days following separation)

New partners can often be a source of pain for separated couples, especially in the early days following separation. If you know it's going to upset your partner (and in turn, your children) try to attend child handover alone to avoid any awkwardness.

1. Be punctual and communicate if you're running late

While it's not always possible to be on time, try to plan ahead by leaving enough time to get everyone ready and leave enough time for traffic, especially peak hour and weekend traffic. If it looks like you might be late, a simple advance text with an apology will assist the other parent to manage their own time.

1. Be flexible where possible

Being flexible and open to a change of routine is important when parents are separated. Life is unpredictable, and sometimes hiccups or unplanned events arise. For example, one parent may be caught in traffic and late to pickup, or there may be a cousin's birthday party that runs late.

While children thrive on routine, it is crucial that they feel safe and secure in the knowledge that, should something unexpected occur, their parents can respectfully and appropriately coordinate alternate arrangements together. Research suggests that shared parenting arrangements work best when parents are flexible and cooperative.

You can read more about sharing parenting in our earlier article, ["6 steps when negotiating parenting arrangements with your ex"](#).

1. Make sure bags are packed and belongings are returned

Is the iPad charged and packed? Are clothes, school uniforms, sports gear and shoes being returned? Drink bottles? Favourite teddy bears and comfort toys?

While it's common to forget these things every now and again, intentionally leaving these things behind is only going to create conflict and distress for children. To avoid these situations and the angst that often follows, many families find it easier to have duplicate items across households, especially things like school uniforms.

At the end of the day, a little bit of kindness and consideration can go a long way and help your children feel at ease during handovers.

Cases involving family violence

The above tips may not be appropriate or possible in cases involving [family violence](#).

Dropping off and picking up children at scheduled times can be particularly fraught in these cases, where one party may feel particularly exposed by being forced to have contact with an abusive former partner. These cases need to be approached cautiously, with risk being carefully assessed and plans put in place to ensure safety.

Examples of things to consider:

- Is there someone else who can facilitate child handover?
- Does the changeover location have CCTV footage?
- Is it appropriate to have a support person present?
- Does there need to be a supervised changeover location?

Getting help from a family lawyer

If you're unsure about what arrangements will work best for your children or what your specific options are in relation to child handover, or you have any other family law queries, please contact us to schedule a free initial meeting.

This blog is of a general nature and should not be relied upon as legal advice. If you require further information, advice or assistance for your specific circumstances, please contact us.