



***RAINBOWS
PARENT
INFORMATION***



***SUPPORTING PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE
THROUGH LIFES STORMS***



Rainbows is a peer support program for children who have suffered a significant loss in their life. When a change takes place in a family whether it is a death, divorce, separation or loss, it has a profound effect on the whole family. This specialist program offered within the school provides the guidance children need to work through their grief and move on to the healing process. It helps them to sort through their confusion, deal with their feelings, regain self-esteem and get on with being a child.

The program runs for 12 weeks during term 3 and term 4. The groups are students with their year group. We work through special booklets each session covering the program. There is a 'celebrate me day' at the end of the program in which all the students come together to undertake creative activities, stories and workshops. In the afternoon we have a liturgy in the church in which parents, legal guardians and grandparents may wish to attend.

If you feel that your child would benefit from this program please contact Andrea or complete the enrollment forms attached to this pack.

When parents separate

Bella's mum was worried that her 10-year-old daughter was not coping well with her parents' divorce. Bella had been a great support for her mum when her dad first left, helping around the house and with the younger children. Now that her mum is feeling better, Bella spends more time in her room and doesn't want to talk so much. She goes to her dad's for visits on the weekends but, lately, she is very grumpy when she comes home. If Bella's mum asks how the weekend was she just shrugs.

When she asked, "What's wrong?" Bella said, "Nothing." But she didn't look happy. This time Bella's mum asked again: "Bella, are you sure there's nothing wrong? You don't look happy. What's up?" Bella sighed, "Dad's got a new girlfriend," she said. "Now he'll hardly have any time left for me."

When parents separate it is stressful for everybody, but it affects parents and children differently. For parents, separation signals the end of the relationship with their primary partner and a change in the parenting role. For most children relationships with both parents continue, but there are often big changes and strong feelings.

Though distress is unavoidable when families break up, most children recover without long-term negative effects. You can help children cope by reassuring and supporting them while they adjust to the separation.

How children react

Sometimes children talk about their strong feelings, but often the way they feel comes out in their behaviour. They may become anxious and want to stay close to their parents. They may be angry or get into conflicts with others more than usual. These are reactions to the sense of loss and powerlessness that most children feel when their parents separate and their family changes.

Some children try really hard to be good. They may be concerned about a parent's distress, or worry that if they misbehave the parent who has care of them will leave them too. Sometimes children become protective of one parent and blame and reject the other. Children from the same family may respond differently. Their feelings and reactions are likely to become more complicated when one or both parents start a new relationship.



How parents and carers can help

Children are affected by the ways their parents respond to the separation. Getting support for yourself to help you manage the stress of separation is very important. If you are coping, it helps your children to manage the changes better. If there is ongoing conflict and hostility between parents, it makes it much more difficult for children. When this occurs, children's wellbeing suffers and they are more likely to experience emotional or behavioural problems.

Helping children maintain relationships

- Respect children's need to continue their relationship with the other parent (unless it is unsafe), as well as with extended family such as grandparents, and support them to do so.
- Try to ensure that visits to the other parent are regular and predictable.
- Help children to see the positives (eg two homes, adults not fighting) and to look forward to spending time with the other parent.
- Avoid criticising the other parent to your children. Sort out issues with the other parent rather than involving the children in your disputes. Seek mediation if conflict persists.

Helping children cope

- Reassure children that even though you will no longer live all together as a family, they will not lose your love and care. Offer this kind of reassurance often and back it up with action.
- Explain what is happening as it relates to the child (eg where they will be living, how they will get to school). Let them know clearly what and how things will change, and what will stay the same.
- Try to maintain children's normal routines as far as possible. This helps children feel safer.
- Understand that children find it hard, and acknowledge and encourage them when they are coping well.
- Provide extra support before and after contact visits to help children settle.
- Recognise that it is likely to be difficult for children when you start a new relationship. Counselling can help you learn ways to make this transition easier for children and for yourselves.

Managing your own stress

- Strong feelings and mood swings are part of a normal reaction when you separate.
- Allow time to come to terms with feelings of loss and grief.
- Don't be surprised if the demands of parenting seem much more difficult when you are under stress. Make allowances for yourself and develop strategies to help you cope.
- Look for support from family and friends. Professional counselling support can be especially helpful for dealing with difficult feelings and finding ways to cope better.



This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

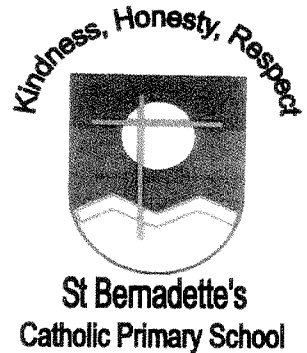


Principals
Australia
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Learning. Leading.

St. Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

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Dear Parents,

Re: Rainbows Program –

The loss of a parent, close family member, a separation in the family, a serious illness or accident, moving state/country or any other significant change can be a crushing event in a child's life; the impact can be overwhelming. These situations affect children socially, spiritually, behaviourally and academically. In order to support our student's wellbeing here at St. Bernadette's we will be commencing the annual Rainbows Peer Support Program in Term 3.

Through **Rainbows**, children are helped to verbalise their feelings, build a stronger sense of self-esteem and dispel their guilt and anger over the changes in their family. They no longer feel alone when they gather with other children who are facing the same or similar situations.

If you feel your child could benefit from being a part of the Rainbows Program, please complete the expression of interest form below and return it to the school. If you would like to discuss further please contact the school office.

Yours truly

Andrea Groom
Rainbows Coordinator

.....
NAME OF CHILD/REN.....AGE.....GRADE.....

Please circle: My parent has died, my parents are divorced, my parents are separated, if so for how long?..... Or my loss is:

.....
.....
.....

Your name and relationship to the child: Mobile number.....

Have they undertaken Rainbows before? Y/N. Are there any court proceedings? Y/N

We/I give consent for my son/daughter.....
to participate in The Rainbows Program.

We/I understand that we/I have the right to withdraw this permission at any time by contacting the Mrs Groom. Within the Celebrate Me Day I give my consent for photo/video image to be taken for training and information sessions only.

Signed.....

Date.....

Print name.....

Email.....

Kindness

Honesty

Respect

Rainbows Further Information Request

I understand that the following questions may bring up some hurtful memories and experiences. I would appreciate if you could answer the following questions to give me an insight into how the loss has affected your child, also to best place your child in the best grouping possible and to enable them to get the most out of the Rainbows Program.

Name of child _____

Please describe your child's loss and indicate the month/year it was experienced. There may be more than 1 loss.

How has it affected your child eg. Sleeping/anxieties/food/behaviours

Are there any other professionals involved e.g. psychologists/paediatrician etc (please detail)

Has your child been on a Rainbows Course previously, if so when and where

Thankyou for providing this information it will remain strictly confidential. Thank you Andrea.