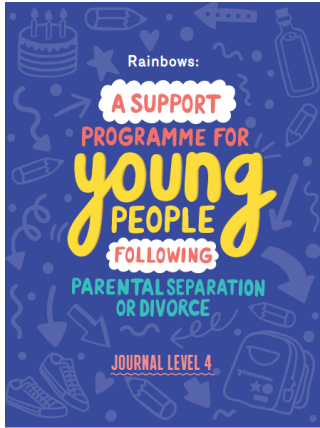


A Guide to the Rainbows Separation and Divorce Programme for Young people & Teenagers



Young people often grow up in a world assuming that their family will always stay the same.

When something significant happens in a family, everyone is affected. Divorce and Separation can have an impact.

People often assume that young people and teenagers are not as deeply affected as adults by change in the family.

While young people and teenagers generally have a more mature understanding of parental separation and divorce, the teenage world can be shattered by a separation or divorce. Young people and teenagers are still developing in transition from childhood to young adulthood, – so feelings of upset, confusion, sadness, anger, anxiety, fear, isolation, loneliness and rejection are all very normal and common.

Participating in a support group with others who are experiencing the same emotions and feelings can be very helpful – meeting others in a similar situation can be helpful.

An average of 3,000 young people and teenagers attend a Rainbows programme every year.

What Rainbows offers:

- Support in a safe place where young people and teenagers can share their experience of change and loss.
- Support to be able to name and share and express their feelings
- Support to make sense and a new meaning of their family life that has changed
- Support to help rebuild self-esteem, trust, and self-identity
- Support to begin to adjust to the changes in their life in a positive and healthy way.

What Rainbows cannot offer:

- Professional counselling or therapy.
- Does not give advice or attempt to solve problems.
- Does not give opinions, pass comment, make judgements, take sides or criticise.
- Does not give reports, take notes.

Note: It is not permitted that any young person/teenager attending another service can attend the Rainbows programme at the same time. Attending two services at the same time can hinder the effectiveness of each service.

Groups:

- Groups are formed with others of a similar age.
- There are usually 4 – 8 in a group.
- If only two are present in any session, the session will be cancelled for that week.
- Siblings are not in the same group

The boundary of the group:

- Group members are encouraged to share with parents or guardians what they themselves have talked about and what the Facilitators have said to them, but not to talk about others by name or share what they have said.
- If there is any indication in the course of the programme that a group member is at risk, being harmed, harming themselves or others, Young Person Protection procedures, as laid down under Children First Guidelines (Department of Health and Children, 2017) will be followed.
- It is only natural to want to ask lots of questions after the Rainbows sessions. It is probably best not to ask questions immediately after the session but to leave it until a more suitable quiet time to check how they are getting on.
- It is normal that young people/teenagers may not want to talk about being in the group or what is discussed in the group

Facilitators:

- These are trained volunteers who have completed a recruitment process and undertaken a 4-day training, in order to facilitate the groups each week (they are not trained counsellors or therapists).
- There are two Facilitators with each group.

The Rainbows programme:

- A nine-week programme.
- Each session lasts for one hour.
- Groups are formed with no group member being more than two years older than the youngest group member.

The programme is delivered using a variety of resources:

- Programme Journal
- Scenarios
- Discussion Questions
- Drawing, writing

- Relaxation activities

Key themes/topics in the programme:

Feelings: Young people and teenagers very often do not have the words or understanding to name or recognise their feelings, particularly at a time of change. Being supported through the programme to recognise, name and express feelings in a safe space can reduce possible confusion, worries and isolation. Recognising that others in a similar situation have the same feelings can be very comforting to a child.

Family: Young people and teenagers can think, following a parental separation or divorce, that they are no longer a family. Through the programme, group members are guided to understand that they are still part of a family, even though their family may have changed.

Change: Young people and teenagers can assume that their family will always stay the same. When something significant happens in a family, everyone is affected. The change following a divorce and separation can be overwhelming. Through the programme, group members are supported to begin to make sense of what has happened and the changes that have occurred.

Anger: Anger is a normal, healthy emotion. It is very common that young people and teenagers can be angry and frustrated following a separation and divorce. The programme focuses on the anger that they may be experiencing and how they may express anger in a safe and healthy way.

Difficult feelings: Young people and teenagers regularly blame themselves and feel guilty when parents separate or divorce. Feelings of confusion, worry, fear, loneliness, sadness and rejection can be common at times.

Coping and adjusting: Simple coping techniques are introduced in the programme to help young people to begin to manage and cope with their feelings when things do not work out as they hoped or planned.

Note: It is important to remember that all children and young people are different. Young people and teenagers within the same family will respond differently.

Details Parents need to know:

The Rainbows programme is a free service funded by Tusla.

Every programme has a Coordinator who manages the programme and the groups. It is important that it is the Coordinator you contact with any questions before or during the programme.

- A Rainbows Separation Enrolment Form is required to be completed for everyone attending the programme. Forms are available from the Rainbows Coordinator at the programme centre
- In relation to Parental Separation/Divorce, the signature of both parents/guardians is required for a young person/teenager to attend Rainbows. Waivers apply.
- Rainbows does not enter into any dispute between parents concerning participation in the programme.
- **It is important to be aware that group support is not always suitable for everyone. It can happen at times that a group member may leave the programme. This will be discussed with parents if this situation arises and every effort will be made to signpost you to another support service.**

Programme materials:

The programme materials are kept in a secure place by the Coordinators for the duration of the programme. No one has access to the materials.

The programme material is not a diagnostic or analytical resource to form any analysis on a young person coping.

The programme material is designed for the group context only. Young people and teenagers may take their journal home or they may leave it to be shredded.

It is important that the journal remains the property of the young person. When taken out of the format of the group context in the particular programme, the programme material can or may be interpreted in a way that was not intended.

We would ask that you respect your son's/daughter's wishes regarding the sensitive nature of this process.

Feedback:

The Rainbows programme provides a space for young people and teenagers to be supported to begin to understand, talk about and adapt to the changes in their life.

The support provided by Facilitators in the group is not a diagnostic or therapeutic process.

The policy of Rainbows Ireland is not to give specific feedback on any group member taking part in the programme.

As parents and guardians, it is generally you that will observe and notice any positive impact that the programme may have had on your son/daughter, on a day to day basis and over time.

Parents generally identify outcomes such as: reduced conflict among siblings, improved sleeping patterns, improved communication with parents, feelings of being more adjusted to the situation, more able and willing to talk to parents, smiling a bit more, being more relaxed.

Introducing the programme to a young person/teenager:

- It is important to talk to your son/daughter about attending the programme in advance and that he/she agrees to take part.
- It would help to give an outline of the programme, including the number of weeks, how the groups are formed and some of the topics that are covered.
- It can be helpful to say that others in a similar situation will be in the group.
- Give reassurance that there is no pressure put on them to have to talk in the group.

We deeply acknowledge the large number of parents and guardians who recognise the need to allow young people and teenagers the space to talk openly without fear of upsetting family members.

Being in a group process, with others of a shared experience of loss, can begin to support young people to come to terms and adjust in a positive way to the significant change in their life.