

# Separation

## anxieties



**Jo Baranek,**  
Lead Early  
Years Adviser  
at NDNA,  
looks at some

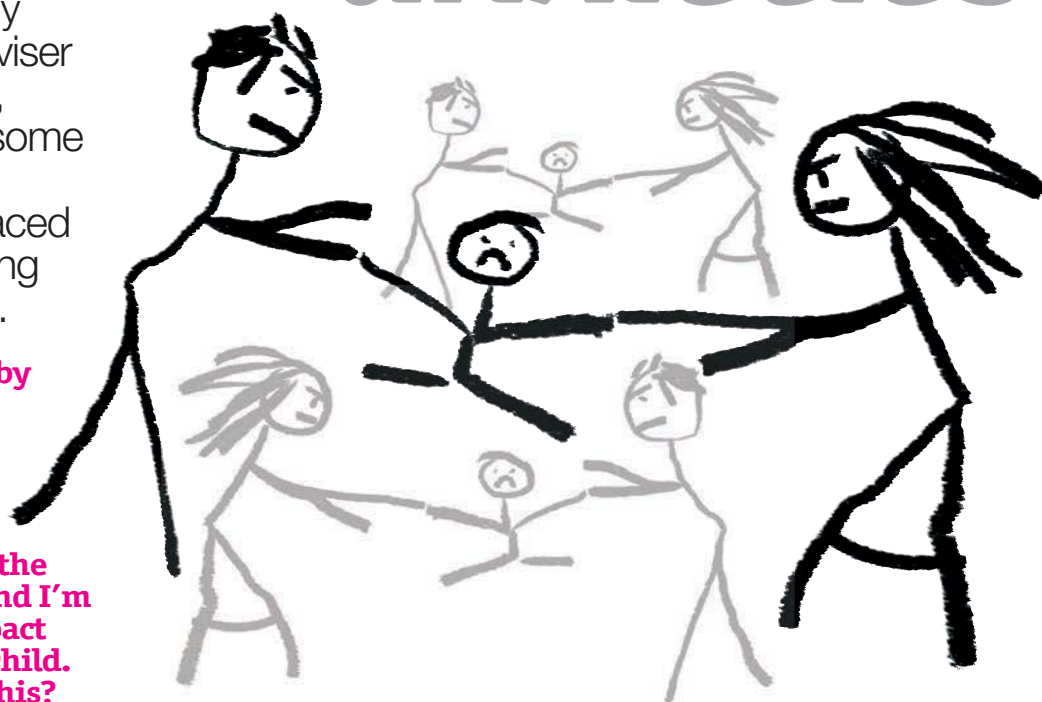
of the difficulties  
nurseries may be faced  
with when supporting  
separated families...

**Q I'm concerned by comments a parent is making to staff about their ex-partner. Staff are struggling to manage the anger of the parent, and I'm worried about the impact this may have on the child. How should I handle this?**

**A** It's important to manage such a situation carefully; it's not fair on your staff or the child. The difficulty is that as you offer a caring environment, parents may feel you can offer them support or are willing to sympathise. Staff must be able to ask the parent to stop, and make it clear that the interests of the child are your first priority. Unless the information relates to the welfare of the child, staff should make it clear they are unable to get involved, and help the parent to understand the difficult situation such comments put them in. If staff are not confident doing this, you may have to step in when you hear such conversations, and discuss training needs. Of course, you do want the parent concerned to feel that you care, so having some contact details for counselling or mediation services that can support professionally may help too.

### findoutmore

NDNA is the national charity and membership association for children's nurseries across the UK, supporting settings across all sectors to deliver the best possible care and early learning for children whilst ensuring they are sustainable businesses. If you have a question, or want to know how NDNA can support you, visit [ndna.org.uk](http://ndna.org.uk)



**Q The parents of one of our children are undergoing what seems to be a very acrimonious split. One is insisting that the other does not pick the child up. What can I do?**

**A** This is a highly sensitive situation, but it's important that you consider the legal implications of agreeing to a parent's wishes and the impact there will be on the child. Where there is parental responsibility for a child then you legally cannot stop said child being picked up unless there is an injunction or other such legal requirement in place which prevents a parent

from doing so. If a parent says that such an injunction exists then you must ensure you have a copy of this. A clear policy, explained at induction regardless of the relationship status of parents, can help outline your approach.

It may also help to talk with the parent and explain that despite their wishes their request may not necessarily be in the best interests of the child, who will benefit from continued access to both parents. You can help avoid difficult situations by agreeing with both parents a timetable of access at nursery so that they can avoid bumping into each other. If you face a more complex situation then specific legal advice might be necessary – NDNA has a free legal helpline which can help with this.

**Q Many of our parents are separated but we are aware children have contact with the other parent. How can we involve them in nursery life?**

**A** Having both parents involved in nursery life can be hugely beneficial for children, and as a provider you have a duty to involve both parents as far as possible. A good approach is to ensure that you collect the details of both parents when a child registers. You should have a clear policy that demonstrates to a parent why this is in the best interests of their child. This will enable you to ensure both receive the same information and opportunities to participate. In the majority of cases, parents will understand the positives of this, but if you face resistance when obtaining details it is important that you uncover the reasons why. For example, if a parent fears they will bump into the other at a nursery event, you could discuss the possibility of taking turns to attend events or agreeing different times of arrival. It's great that you recognise the importance of involving both parents, and with a little work this will soon hopefully become the norm in your nursery.