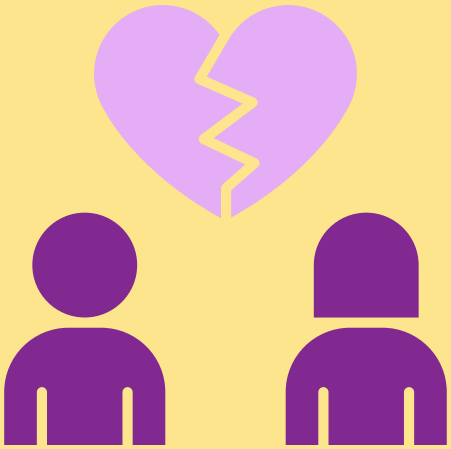
How to use the Different Paths cards

- When you organize a Different Paths event, you can use the cards to help you — for example, by picking a few topics that might interest the participants. The cards can serve as “reminder notes” when you’re guiding the group — at least these are things that would be good to mention.
- You can print the cards double-sided on A4 paper and then cut them in half. This way you’ll have discussion cards that you can also use in your group in whatever ways you come up with — for instance, by handing them out to participants to support discussion.
- The yellow and purple cards are information cards, which briefly present topics related to different types of separation.
- The turquoise cards are discussion starters for the group. These questions don’t have a single correct answer.

Divorce



Division of Property

Applying for a Divorce in Finland

- In Finland, divorce is handled by the district court (käräjäoikeus).
- You can apply for a divorce without giving any reasons and without assigning blame.
- The application must be submitted in writing to the district court. You can deliver it in person, by post, or by email.
- When the application is submitted, a six-month reflection period begins.
- After this period, you must submit a second application if you still wish to finalize the divorce.
- If the spouses have lived at different addresses for at least two years, there is no reflection period.
- If the application is not made jointly, the district court will notify the other spouse of the application.
- The fee for the first application is €200, and the fee for the second application is €100.
- When applying for a divorce, spouses may also deal with or agree on the following matters: Division of property, Children's residence arrangements, Custody, Visitation rights, Child maintenance (support)
- These issues can be agreed upon during the divorce process or later on.
- If a couple is not married, there is no formal divorce process — they can simply separate by moving apart.
- If necessary, they may apply for an official decision to end cohabitation.

Division of Property After Divorce

- Married spouses have marital rights to each other's property.
- When the marriage ends, the division of property (ositus) is carried out.
- In general, the couple's property is divided equally.

If one spouse owns significantly more, they may have to transfer part of their assets to the other.
(Source: Suomi.fi)

If the spouses agree on the division: A written division agreement (osituskirja) is prepared.

- It must include the date, signatures, a calculation of the division, and details of how it will be carried out in practice.
- The document must be witnessed by two impartial people.

If the spouses cannot reach an agreement:

- The court can, upon request, appoint an estate distributor (usually a lawyer).
- This is a paid service.
- You may be entitled to compensation for legal costs through your legal expenses insurance (often included in home insurance) or state legal aid, depending on your income.

If there is a registered prenuptial agreement, the division is carried out according to its terms.

- Help with the division process is available from:
- Private lawyers (paid services)
- Public legal aid offices, if your income is limited.

Coping with Separation and Emotions

Child Custody Case

Coping with Separation

- Divorce is a serious life crisis that brings many emotions.
- Everyone processes separation in their own way and at their own pace.
- Spouses may be at different stages of accepting the divorce.
- It's important to recognize and work through your feelings.
- Seek help if difficult emotions last a long time or feel overwhelming.
- Support can come from:
- Peer groups, friends, or family
- Therapy or counseling
- Writing, creative activities, or exercise
- When emotions are processed, cooperation with an ex-partner about children becomes easier.

Court Proceedings About Children After Divorce

- If parents cannot agree on issues concerning the children after divorce, they can apply for a decision from the district court.
- The court can decide on custody, residence, and child support.
- The application must be submitted in writing to the district court.
- Legal assistance is usually needed during the process.
- Parents can hire private lawyers or apply for help from a public legal aid office if their income is low.
- The court process is often long and expensive.
- Mediation is recommended before going to court.
- The judge makes the final decision.
- The judge may request a social welfare report, which examines:
- each parent's ability to care for the child,
- the child's living conditions in both homes, and
- the child's own wishes.
- Read more: ensijaturvakotienliitto.fi – What Is a Custody Dispute?

Children's Rights in a Divorce

Custody and Visitation Rights

A Child Has the Right To...

- Maintain a close relationship with both parents and other important people.
- Be safe, cared for, and protected.
- Continue their daily life with as few changes as possible.
- Have their own opinions and feelings, without taking responsibility for adult matters.

When Parents Divorce, It Means That...

- The child has the right to meet and stay in contact with the other parent.
- It's good to also think about other important people in the child's life, and how the separation affects those relationships.
- The child's living environment — home, school, daycare, and place of residence — should be kept as stable as possible.
- If there is violence, mistreatment, or a threat of harm, the parent's duty is to protect the child.
- The child should be encouraged to talk about the divorce, for example with a parent, another trusted adult, or at a family counseling center.

Parents Make Decisions So That the Child's Rights Are Respected!
Children's rights are protected by Finnish law.

Custody

- Custodians make important decisions about the child's life, such as: Daycare and education, Language and citizenship, Religion, Upbringing and hobbies

Joint Custody

- Both parents remain custodians after the divorce.
- They make decisions together about the child's life.
- In joint custody, specific responsibilities can also be divided by a court order.

Sole Custody

- Only one parent is the child's custodian.
- That parent makes all major decisions alone.

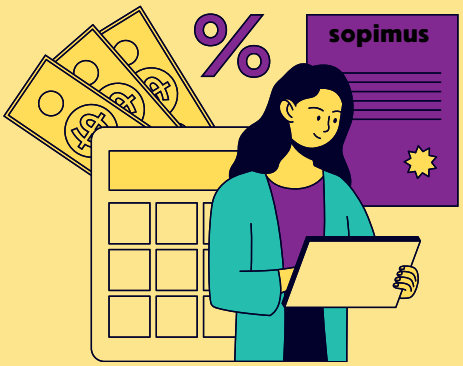
Responsibilities of a Custodian

- Ensure the child's growth and well-being.
- Protect the child from neglect or abuse.
- Support the child's close relationships with important people.

A child has the right to meet the parent they don't live with.

- Visitation Rights does not depend on custody arrangements.
- Even if one parent has sole custody, the child still has the right to see and stay in contact with the other parent.
- The child has the right to financial support from both parents, even if only one is the custodian.

Child support



Child welfare officer

Child Support (Elatusapu)

- Both parents are responsible for supporting their child according to their ability. (Legal reference)
- A parent's ability to pay depends on their income, reasonable expenses, and the number of children they support.

Child Support After Divorce

- Usually, the parent who does not live with the child pays child support to the parent the child lives with. This parent is called the liable parent.
- The parent the child lives with must ensure the child support is used for the child's needs.
- The amount of child support is calculated based on:
- The child's needs, and Each parent's financial capacity.

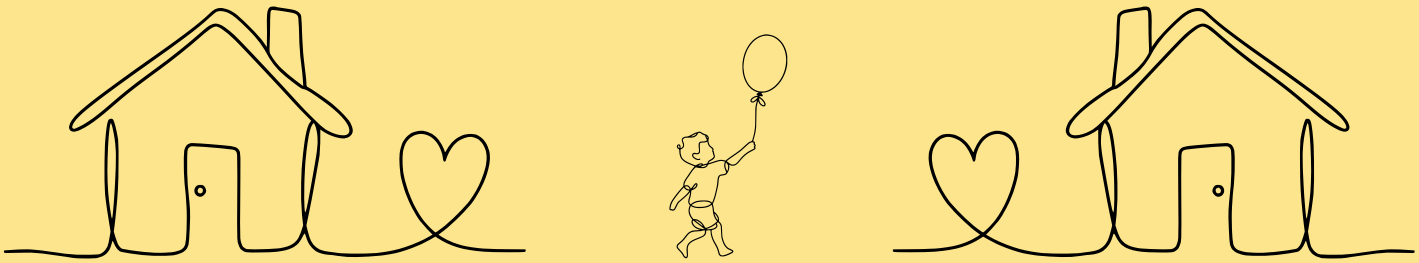
Child Maintenance Allowance from Kela

- If a parent has low income and cannot afford to pay child support, Kela may grant a child maintenance allowance.
- The allowance is granted when a child welfare officer or court has confirmed that the parent lacks the financial ability to pay child support.

Child Welfare Officer (Lastenvalvoja)

- Helps parents agree on matters concerning the child after separation.
- Confirms agreements made by the parents.
  - Child support – how much is paid
  - Visitation – how often the child meets the parent they don't live with
  - Custody – joint or sole custody
  - Residence – which parent the child lives with, or shared residence
- The officer cannot confirm an agreement if it:
  - Is against the child's best interests, or
  - Is too unclear or open to interpretation, meaning it cannot be legally enforced.
- The Officer Does Not Decide for the Parents - Parents negotiate together during the meeting.
  - The child welfare officer supports the discussion and formally confirms the agreement.
  - The officer asks parents about the child's views on the agreement.
  - Sometimes, the officer may meet the child to hear their opinion directly.
- The child welfare officer also handles parenthood determination if the child is born outside of marriage.

Alternating residence



Visitation agreement

Alternating Residence (Vuoroasuminen)

- Alternating residence means the child lives equally (50–50%) or almost equally (40–60%) with both parents.
- The child can have only one official address, which determines their municipality of residence.
- Alternating residence helps the child maintain a close relationship with both parents.Moving between two homes can also be emotionally or physically tiring for the child.
- It works best when parents have good or at least respectful communication and are willing to cooperate.

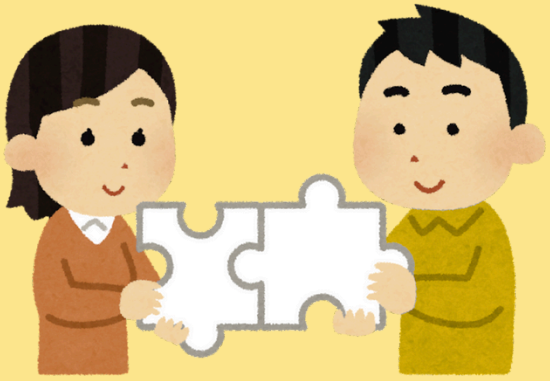
Shared Residence and Child Support

- Sometimes parents agree that no child support is paid when the child lives alternately with both parents.
- However, child support may still be required even in alternating residence situations.
- The child welfare officer helps assess child support in these cases using special calculation guidelines that take alternating residence into account.

Visitation Agreement (Tapaamissopimus)

- A child has the right to maintain contact with the parent they don't live with.
- The other parent must support this relationship. (Act on Child Custody and Right of Access, 2018)
- Parents agree on when and how the child meets the other parent. The child welfare officer confirms the agreement.
- Visits are arranged in a way that suits the child's and parents' everyday lives — for example, daytime, evening, or weekend visits. There is no single correct way to organize visitation.
- The agreement can be valid indefinitely or for a specific time (e.g., one year).
- The visiting parent is responsible for the child's care and safety during the visit. The other parent cannot control what happens during the visit, as long as the child is safe.
- It's also good to consider how the child can stay in contact with other important people after the separation.
- Sometimes visits take place in a designated meeting place — these are called supported or supervised visitations. This is usually arranged when: the parent–child relationship needs support, the parent has little experience caring for the child, or there are concerns about violence, substance use, or child abduction.

Co-parenting



Parental alienation

Co-parenting (Yhteistyövanhemmuus)

- means that parents continue to cooperate after separation and that they are no longer a couple, but can discuss and agree on matters concerning their children.
- can feel difficult at first — it often takes time and effort to make it work.
- Respects the child's right to have a relationship with both parents.
- Focuses on the child's needs during and after the separation.
- Recognizes that the other parent is the child's mother or father, not just an ex-partner.
- Support and guidance for co-parenting are available, for example, from family counseling services.
- In cases involving violence, harassment, or serious conflict, co-parenting may not work. Even then, parents can still ensure that the child's relationship with the other parent is maintained, and the child's needs are respected.
- Communication should be limited to essential matters only, to make sure the child's issues are managed safely.

Parental alienation

- means that one parent tries to interfere with the child's relationship with the other parent, or even separate the child from that parent permanently.
- can include, for example:
  - Speaking badly about the other parent to the child, "badmouthing," or creating an atmosphere where the other parent cannot be mentioned at all.
  - Disrupting the child's visits with the other parent, for example by cancelling without reason or making other plans on visiting days.
  - Convincing people close to the child or authorities that the other parent is a bad parent.
  - The child may become dependent on the alienating parent, and may refuse to meet or start to fear the other parent.
- Parental alienation is continuous, long-term behavior.
- It is also a form of domestic abuse, which harms both the child and the alienated parent, as well as other close family members, such as grandparents.
- Parental alienation is not when a parent protects the child from violence or other danger. If the child is at risk during a visit, the visit must be cancelled.

Stalking

Child abduction

Stalking

- means, for example, that an ex-partner sends too many messages, calls constantly, or follows the ex-partner even though the relationship has ended.
- Stalking causes the victim anxiety and a sense of insecurity. It is a form of domestic violence. Stalking can also include other types of abuse, such as psychological, physical, or financial violence.
- Children and matters related to them can also be used as tools for stalking.
- If friends or members of a community monitor the family's activities at the request of the ex-partner, this is called community-based stalking.
- Stalking can take place partly or entirely online.
- It can also continue after separation, especially when joint custody gives the stalker opportunities to maintain control through issues related to the children.
- Stalking is particularly distressing when the victim cannot completely detach from the stalker, for example because of shared children.
- Stalking is a crime in Finland.

International child abduction is when

- A child is taken abroad from the country where they permanently live, or not returned from a trip, without the guardian's permission. The guardian has been exercising their rights as a parent, for example by meeting the child and taking part in their life.
- The child is under 16 years old.

Child abduction is a crime in Finland.

- Child abduction causes long-term harm to the child. The child may lose contact with family and loved ones, and feel unsafe in a foreign environment. This goes against the child's rights.
- About 80 countries around the world are part of the Hague Convention, which helps children be returned to their country of permanent residence. Finland is also part of this convention. Between the member countries, there are established procedures for returning abducted children. If the country is not part of the Hague Convention, there is no official system for returning the child.
- If a parent fears that the other parent might abduct the child, they can contact the police and child protection services. The authorities are responsible for trying to prevent abductions.
- Kaapatut Lapset ry can help find the right authority or organization to contact if a child abduction happens or there is a threat of one.

What is the hardest part of a divorce?”

What helps you move on after a divorce?

What helps parents work together after a divorce?

How can adults support a child in a separation?

Divorce in Finland – what thoughts come to mind?

What does a good divorce look like for the child?

How can a child feel safe when the family changes?

What helps parents work together after a divorce?

Why is it important for parents to take care of themselves?

How can parents take care of their own wellbeing after a divorce?