

Providing better support for fathers during marital separation – A WINNING STRATEGY for the well-being of children, fathers, mothers, and the whole family

What is the state of scientific knowledge about fathers' experience of marital separation?



What is the Comité de travail national sur les pères et la séparation conjugale (CTNPSC)?

Set up by **Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité (RVP)**, the committee's mandate is to examine the issues specific to the needs of fathers during marital separation and to formulate recommendations for the advancement of public policies and the practices of various stakeholders with a view to better meeting these needs. The committee comprises legal experts, researchers, and community groups providing services for vulnerable or separated fathers.

Why focus on the situation of fathers during marital separation?

Mothers and fathers do not always react to marital separation and its aftermath in the same way. They use different strategies to deal with the consequences of the separation. This situation often gives rise to **different support needs**.

Many fathers have reported being misunderstood by the legal system after they go through a marital separation. While the impartiality of the system is not called into question, since the law gives fathers and mothers the same rights and obligations, **the differentiated trajectories** of fathers and mothers need to be **better taken into account** in the practices of the various stakeholders (legal, psychosocial) and in **the public policies** that influence the type of guidance and support offered to them.

What are the underlying principles of the CTNPSC's approach?

In the **best interests of the child**, the guidance and support offered to fathers during marital separation must take into account their specific realities in order to help **maintain the father-child bond** and establish **positive coparenting relationships**.

FINDING 1 Marital separation is not a trivial phenomenon

- Around 50% of couples will experience a separation (40% of couples with children)
- Separation occurs on average five years after the first signs of marital dissatisfaction. For couples with children, the primary reason for this delay is concern about the impact on their children
- There has been an increase in the number of separations among couples with children aged 0 to 2

FINDING 2 Separation is not always conflictual

- For around 70% of couples, the separation goes well
- 20% to 35% of couples experience high levels of conflict in the two to three years following separation
- For 10% of couples, the situation is highly conflictual

FINDING 3 Fathers are increasingly losing daily contact with their children

- In the majority of cases, the separation is officially announced by female partners
- They are more often the ones who apply for and obtain custody of the children
- Fathers leave the marital home more often

What does the Enquête québécoise sur la parentalité (ISQ) tell us about coparenting among separated fathers?

59 % of fathers living with a partner and **19 %** of separated fathers feel that **they are always or often supported** by the other parent in their parenting role, and this applies to all the forms of support examined (agreeing on how to interact with the children, giving advice, encouragement, and reassurance)

53 % of fathers living with a partner and **55 %** of separated fathers feel they are **rarely or never criticized** by the other parent

62 % of fathers living with a partner and **64 %** of separated fathers say they **share parenting responsibilities equally** or almost equally with the other parent, for all the responsibilities examined (discussing problems with the children, taking care of discipline, playing or doing activities, driving the children home, helping with schoolwork, attending information meetings, making appointments, looking after daily routines)

Whether with a partner or separated, fathers who perceive **low support and frequent criticism** from the other parent experience higher parental stress, report more difficulty managing parenting challenges, and put more pressure on themselves in their parenting role

Whether living with a partner or separated, **a good coparenting relationship is linked to a better parenting experience for fathers**, which is essential if they are to parent well; this promotes the well-being and healthy development of their children, and promotes the well-being of the fathers themselves, as well as of mothers and the whole family

FINDING 4 Fathers experience the process of mourning the relationship differently

- Shock, multiple emotions at the time of the announcement
- Major, rapid reorganization of daily life
- Fathers and mothers use different strategies to cope in this time of upheaval
 - **Mothers:** verbalization and social network support
 - **Fathers:** investment in physical and professional activities, increase in consumption patterns

FINDING 5 Custody arrangements are changing

- There has been a gradual decline in sole maternal custody, and an increase in shared custody and sole paternal custody
- We are also witnessing a diversification of shared custody arrangements

FINDING 6 Mothers are more active than fathers in getting custody

- When only one parent applies for custody, in 69% of cases, it is mothers; they are granted sole custody in 82% of cases
- When both parents apply, shared custody is more often granted
- In only a minority of cases (8%) two separate requests are made

HIGHLIGHTS of the exclusive Leger survey of 574 fathers who have experienced a marital separation in the past 10 years

12 CONCRETE STRATEGIES

to enable fathers to be more present with their children and to have a better coparenting experience during marital separation



SEPARATION IS NOT ALWAYS CONFLICTUAL

68%

of fathers say that overall, the separation went very well or rather well

SEVERAL STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

57% went through family mediation

44% had interacted with social service workers

63% undertook legal proceedings

27% had interacted with community workers

THEIR GREATEST CONCERN IS THEIR CHILDREN

At the time of separation:

73% of fathers were concerned about the amount of time spent with their children

73% about the stability of the children's routines

69% about working with the other parent

72% about the quality of their relationship with their children

68% about their financial situation

THE FACE OF MARITAL SEPARATION IS CHANGING

56% of fathers have joint custody, 11% have sole custody

In **65%** of cases, the custody decision was made by mutual agreement

72% of fathers had preschool-aged children at the time of separation

79% of fathers are very or fairly satisfied with the custody decision

CHILD SUPPORT

46% of fathers pay child support

In **38%** of cases, the amount of child support was established by mutual agreement, in 37% of cases, with the help of a mediator, and in 26% of cases, by a court ruling

10% receive child support

68% of fathers think the amount is completely or relatively fair

THE COPARENTING RELATIONSHIP

59% trust the other parent

47% feel listened to by the other parent

54% feel that the other parent recognizes their complementarity

45% receive help from the other parent

THE FEELING OF SUPPORT

70% feel supported in their relationship with their child(ren)

60% feel supported emotionally or psychologically

64% to 66% feel supported in their need for information (depending on the type of information)

55% feel supported economically

RECOGNITION BY THE LEGAL SYSTEM

46% believe that legal system participants are well trained to understand the realities and needs of fathers

36% believe that the legal system is well adapted to the realities and needs of fathers

44% believe that the legal system gives fathers room to express their point of view

METHODOLOGY

Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité commissioned Leger to conduct a survey of Quebec fathers who had separated in the past 10 years, to better understand how the separation unfolded, its repercussions, and how they valued their role as fathers during the process. 574 fathers residing in Quebec were surveyed: 377 fathers who had separated within the last 5 years, and 197 fathers who had separated 6 to 10 years ago. The results were weighted by age, region, mother tongue, and residence status (owner or tenant) to make them representative of the study population.

1 Make family mediation more attractive and efficient

In Quebec, 80% of separated couples who go to family mediation reach an agreement on crucial issues such as sharing financial responsibilities or child custody.

2 Promote collaborative family law

Collaborative law is a promising avenue for offering separated couples a middle ground between mediation and litigation.

3 Improve the accessibility and effectiveness of family justice

For financial reasons, lack of knowledge of their rights, or reasons linked to the way the courts operate, access to justice can be difficult for many fathers when they separate.

4 Train legal professionals on fathers' realities

Legal professionals (judges, lawyers, and notaries public) are often unfamiliar with the realities fathers face and the specifics of the different trajectories of mothers and fathers during periods of marital separation.

5 Implement family law reform for the well-being of mothers, fathers, and children

Implementing family law reform, to ensure that separations go as smoothly as possible, poses a number of challenges for Quebec parents and the people who support them during marital separation.

6 Train, equip, and mobilize psychosocial workers supporting families experiencing a marital separation

Psychosocial and legal issues are intertwined in the challenges fathers face during marital separation. Training for psychosocial workers that integrates these two dimensions would enable better support for fathers at such times.

7 Implement a Quebec-wide community support strategy for fathers experiencing difficulties during marital separation

Community organizations have developed leading-edge expertise in supporting vulnerable fathers experiencing marital separation. Unfortunately, this type of service is far from accessible to all Quebec fathers.

8 Improve living conditions for the most vulnerable fathers during marital separation

A marital breakup can have a ripple effect, weakening the situation of those experiencing it. For fathers whose socio-economic situation is vulnerable, the consequences can be significant.

9 Take into account the specific realities of certain fathers from diverse backgrounds (immigration, sexual and gender diversity, Indigenous populations)

Fathers from diverse backgrounds face particular challenges when dealing with marital separation.

10 Better document fathers' realities during marital separation

While research has made great strides in recent years, there is still a great deal to learn and understand about the realities of fathers in situations of marital separation.

11 Mobilize workplaces to better support fathers during marital separation

Workplaces are key partners in reaching out to men and fathers experiencing difficulties during marital separation.

12 Develop and implement a Quebec-wide campaign to raise awareness of the realities faced by fathers during marital separation

The proposed strategies will be most effective if supported by a Quebec-wide campaign to raise awareness of the needs of fathers during marital separation.

Semaine Québécoise
Paternité

I'LL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU

Before, during and after our separation



Québec