

Bloke chat helps pain

Like death and taxes, marital breakdown and separation are facts of life.

Men and women tend to cope differently with separation. Often women are the initiators of separation, usually after they have tried repeatedly to save the relationship. But men may not hear the message, so separation tends to be something of a bombshell for the blokes, and they are often left floundering as their world is turned upside down.

This is a generalisation, of course, because there are always exceptions to the rule.

A common effect of separation for men is that while wives lose a partner, men lose a family, as they often no longer live in the family home with the children.

Traditionally women tend to have better support networks because they have put time into developing them, whereas many men lose their best friends and their social contacts because it all happened through their spouse.

Add to this the fact that men are not renowned for opening their hearts and expressing eloquently their inner confusion and misery to their mates at the footy club; they need a safe space where they can do this.

That's where separated men's groups, such as those run by Relationships Australia, can provide a lifeline for men who feel cut adrift after separation.

These groups run for four weeks, and are designed to help men form a support network, and it's often a surprise for the participants to find out how many men are going through the same process in their lives.

Men are encouraged to talk about what's going on for them, and they are assisted with strategies to help them survive this difficult period.

They share their own stories with others, and though there is often initial reluctance, once they start talking the floodgates open. It's a safe and supportive environment, and there's great comfort from finding that others are in the same boat.

And the groups are achieving their purpose, because after the initial four-week program finishes, many men continue to meet as a networking group – a healthy development that helps to combat isolation.

Getting back on track after separation is tough, but there is help out there if you know where to look for it.

Survival tips

- **Don't be isolated and depressed after separation. Find a short-term separated men's group.**
- **Talking through issues with others going through the same process is enormously helpful.**
- **Services such as MensLine ph. 1300 789 978 (24-hour service) and DadsLink ph: 9403 5000 can help you rebuild your life.**