

Parental Separation, Your Child and School – How to help them to thrive



Parental difference is normal; Parental conflict is harmful

When parents separate, differences of view can feel particularly hard. There's a risk that they can turn into a longer-term conflict between the parents. Separated parents also have extra things to agree on, for example the arrangements for a child to spend time with each parent. It is easy to have different views about what's best, and it's easy to blur the lines between what a parent wants and what is best for a child.

When these differences of opinion arise, it's important to get help to manage them well.

The good news is that there is a wide range of help available to manage parental differences, following a separation.

The Parents' Promise

[The Parents' Promise](#) is a simple commitment parents can make to each other upon separation to treat each other with compassion and to genuinely put their children first. The Promise is downloadable from the website and can be printed by both parents and signed. By doing this, parents promise to do the best for their child by setting out some key tenets of a child friendly separation: ensuring that the child spends lots of time with both parents and wider families, that both parents will be kind and respectful to each other and that they will work together to create the right conditions for a child to thrive.

Co-Parenting Apps to Help Communication

A co-parenting app is a digital platform to help separated parents communicate safely and constructively about their child. Typically, they offer a secure messaging service and a shared calendar, plus some have other shared systems for expenses, documents, calls, videos, language monitor etc. Many parents find them helpful to reduce conflict and streamline communication.

Costs vary, as does the users' data protection. The higher cost tends to reflect greater data protection.



[AMICABLE](#)



[OUR FAMILY WIZARD](#)



[SEPARATING BETTER](#)



[TALKING PARENTS](#)

Attend a 'Separated Parent Programme'

A 'Separated Parent Programme' is designed for a parent to find out more about how to manage issues well for their child following a separation from the other parent. They provide practical tools and guidance, and information about what their child needs from them.

Here is a [directory of Separated Parent Programmes](#), where you can choose one which suits you best.

New Ways for Families

Self-guided online course run by Shared Parenting Scotland

Triple P Transitions

Run as a self-guided online resource.

The Co-Parenting Method

Co-parenting programme by Marcie Shaoul.

Work Together on a Parenting Plan

A parenting plan is a voluntary written agreement between parents that sets out arrangements for the care and upbringing of children following a separation or divorce. It will typically cover issues including where children will live and how time is managed with both parents, arrangements for school, healthcare, special occasions, how parents will make important decisions together, and how parents will communicate and resolve issues well about their child.

Some example Parenting Plans are:

- [CAFCASS Parenting Plan](#)
- [NACCC and Our Family Wizard Parenting Plan](#)

Attend Mediation for Help to Agree Differences

Family mediation is a process where an independent, trained mediator helps individuals to resolve issues following the end of a relationship. The issues may be practical issues such as

arrangements for their child, or general parenting issues or issues about finances and agreeing terms of a financial settlement.

Mediation is voluntary and confidential. Before any mediation starts, both individuals will have separate confidential meetings with a mediator, to talk about their situation and for the mediator to assess if mediation is suitable.

Mediation is free for anyone who is financially eligible for legal aid. Separate to that, where parents want to talk about a child in mediation, there is a free £500 mediation voucher from the government.

The Family Mediation Council

The Family Mediation Council is the governing body which sets standards for quality-assured mediation. It's wise to find a mediator on the [Family Mediation Council register](#), to ensure they meet acceptable standards for mediation. The website also contains lots of information about family mediation.

Try and Avoid Family Court

The family court exists to offer protection to families with particular vulnerabilities; it is not there to act as a referee between parents who cannot agree what's best for their child. Outside of safety concerns, then despite what we see in films and popular culture the worst place to end up is family court. The family court isn't designed to deliver 'justice' to an aggrieved party and no judge will be able to agree arrangements as well as two parents working together. Its very expensive and time consuming and is likely to increase conflict between two parents which of course is in turn harmful for any children caught in the middle.

There are a number of alternative ways to resolve differences called Alternative Dispute Resolution or ADR. These include mediation, collaborative law, arbitration and other methods.

We highly recommend this book – [Almost Anything But Family Court](#) – which gives more detail on each and other ways to stay out of court.

We also recommend [Separate Space](#), an online portal for tailored legal and practical support at a fraction of the advice of legal advice.

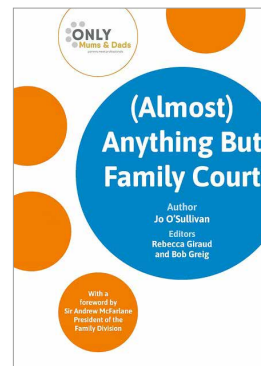
They have [a free interactive book for children](#) called 'My Parents are Divorcing' to learn ways to understand and manage their emotions around separation too.

This is Important Stuff

It should be reiterated that separating as amicably as you can is of critical importance to the short-, medium- and long-term life and health outcomes for your children. No matter what you think of your ex-partner, and however hard it may be, if you want your child(ren) to thrive you simply must act like the responsible caring parents you are and put your children's needs first. That never involves badmouthing, or, as long as there are no safeguarding concerns, restricting your child's time with the other parent. They love you both and any arguing or conflict will be harmful for them. And don't think they don't know what's going on, children notice everything.

- Place2Be's [Parenting Smart](#) platform is a brilliant collection of resources which includes advice on how to co-parent well upon separation.

- A short film to highlight the importance of co-parenting and the effect it can have on your child [is here](#).
- [seeitdifferently.org](#) is a collection of videos and animations helps parents see family arguments from their children's point of view and offers alternative ways of handling disagreements.
- For older children, [Restored Lives](#) run free six-part workshops for 12-17 and 18-30 year-olds called [Your Direction](#). It is a safe space to meet other young people in similar situations. Built on real-life experiences of young people and expertise from counsellors and specialists. It's not counselling but is an ideal complement to it.



My teacher was really nice. She asked me how I was and said I could talk to her any time. I felt better because she was there for me and she wasn't really stressed about it all. She was really nice to my mum and dad too"

JAMALA, 9

Understanding what it's like for children

It is easy to be told that you need to put your children first, but what exactly does that mean? Aim to be responsive to your child and try to understand how they are feeling whilst accepting that their feelings and needs will change rapidly. Look for a balance between what you require to get yourself through and what they need. Listen, watch and communicate with openness.

Remember that your child needs to know that you're OK, needs to have quality time with both parents, wherever safe to do so, and needs to be free of parental acrimony or conflict between you. The more you can work on your own wellbeing and constructive communications with the other parent, the easier it will be for your child.

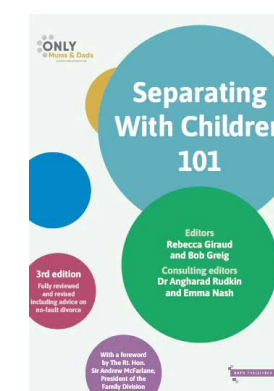
- Here's a helpful page on the CAFCASS website: [Supporting your child through divorce and separation](#).
- '[What About Aruna](#)' – A series of four videos delivered by Child Clinical Psychologist Dr Angharad Rudkin looking at the impact of separation and divorce on children.
- [Separating with Children 101](#) – A book answering your common separation questions

- [Practical Strategies to Help Children Cope with Moving Between Two Homes](#) – from Family Separation Support Hub.

- [Voice of the Child](#) – A short film from Amicable where adults give their perspective their parents separation when they were children.

Some resources for children and young people:

- [Your Direction Workshops for Teenagers and Young People](#) – These are carefully facilitated workshops for teenagers and young people to get support with their parents' separation.
- [SplitHappens](#) is a carefully-resourced chatbot for young people to use. It has been developed by Amicable in conjunction with two children's charities, Your Direction and Voices in the Middle.



What your child needs from you at school

Sadly, many separating parents take their differences to the school environment. This is both damaging for the children involved and stressful and time consuming for teachers who find themselves caught in the middle.

In creating this guide, we asked teachers what they are seeing on the ground. Here's what we found:



School was a refuge for me during that time of my life. I could escape the problems at home and I had a wonderful form tutor I could confide in and share my worries.”

IMOGEN, NOW 22

40%

of teachers aren't told about parents' decisions to separate for several weeks or months after the decision have been made.

58%

of teachers had seen school becoming a source of, or location for, conflict between separated parents.

16%

of teachers surveyed felt that they found it always easy to communicate with separated parents with 27% saying they found it difficult half of the time.

Data from The Parents' Promise Separation and Education, survey for educational professionals, 2025



At the start I liked being at school because it took my mind off everything that was going on at home. But then it got harder to pretend everything was OK. I wish someone at school had helped me out by just little things, just asking how I was or giving me a chance to talk about things”

AARON, 15

Common, and problematic parental behaviours reported were:

61%

of teachers have experienced one parent trying to exclude the other from school communication.

20%

of teachers have experienced one parent trying to exclude the other, or members of their ex-partner's family from picking up a child from school.

37%

reported being in situations of such high conflict between the parents that school is forced into a time consuming and stressful intermediary role.

Whilst this is difficult for teachers the effect on children is of most importance. At a national level Fegans report that nearly 1 in 5 (18%) children and young people were referred to counselling due to family breakdown or difficulties in home relationships. According to Place2Be 'Ongoing family tensions' is one of the most common presenting issues in primary-age children who are referred for Place2Be's one-to-one counselling (57%) (2025)

And the teachers we surveyed reported some alarming statistics:

79%

have seen separation affecting the academic performance of children.

79%

have seen separation affect the school attendance of children.

94%

have seen separation affect the mental health of children.

“

When my parents separated it was such a difficult time for me, the conflict seemed to be everywhere, school included. There was no safe space and I felt I had no-one to turn to.”

WILLIAM, NOW 24

5 to thrive

There will be a lot going on for you as parents going through separation and it can be hard to know what to prioritise with regards to your child(ren) and making sure that they are OK. Here are five simple principles that you and the school can focus on which we believe will provide the best platform for your child to thrive after separation. We call them the 'Five to Thrive'



Holistic Communication Strategy

Parents and school should agree a joined-up communication strategy in which the parents have a transparent dialogue with the school around all school and home matters. No disagreements should be had at school or around the child(ren).



Friendship Groups

Parents and school should talk with each other about changes or concerns in the way the child's friendship group may be changing or being impacted.



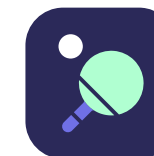
Schoolwork and Attendance

During a time of parental separation, there are additional pressures however schoolwork, homework and attendance will always be important. Parents and school to encourage children in all aspects and have an agreed approach to homework routines between both households.



Mental Health

Parents and school should keep a close eye on the mental health and wellbeing of the child(ren), and the school should ensure that the child(ren) have access to pastoral support with a nominated member of staff at the school.



Sports and Hobbies

Parents and school to ensure the child(ren) continue to participate in school extra extracurricular activities as this is important to their wider wellbeing.

What you can expect from your child's school

As part of this initiative we have created a separation policy guide for schools to work best with separated parents to help ensure that the right frameworks are in place and that parents understand their responsibility towards the child and the school during a separation. Key commitments from parents include sharing of information between all parties, not having disagreements about school around your children and committing to work together in partnership to help create the conditions for your children to flourish.

Your school may already have its own version and if not please feel free to forward this template to the most relevant member of staff.

Best practice includes.

- The school should check that both parents are on the correct mailing lists to receive all emails (and any other correspondence) about your child. It's quite common for one parent to be left off, which can mean they miss out on receiving key information about their child at school. Check that the school has both your details, with up-to-date home addresses and contact details for both of you.
- Ensuring that the administrative system notes that both of you should be contacted in the event of an emergency (unless otherwise explicitly agreed in writing by you both).
- Linked to this, the school should remind you to update the PTA if they maintain a separate database of contact information for families at the school.
- Your school may have a policy for separated parents, which will include whether separate parent consultations are offered as default.

- Your school should be able to inform you of a dedicated member of staff or pastoral support staff, to whom your child can turn to, if they wish. This could be a school counsellor, or a particular tutor or member of staff who has a specific understanding of children's experience of family separation.
- Schools are encouraged to ensure teachers and other staff have had training on appropriate language that is used to talk about parental separation, which reflects a correct understanding of the law.

Of course the more you can both help by communicating with each other and being transparent with the school the easier it will be for all parties. Teachers are extremely busy and any time taken up mediating between parents is not time well spent on your children's education.



The Positive Parenting Alliance is a group of organisations, and individuals, who believe that all children deserve the most positive experience possible during parental separation or divorce.

Our aim is to create a genuinely child-focused society and better systems to ensure the long-term wellbeing of children when parents separate.

In 2021 we launched [The Parents' Promise](#) and in 2025 commissioned our own research regarding parental separation in schools and its effect on children and launched this guide in support of educational professionals.



THE PARENTS PROMISE