

The CAFCASS Parenting Plan



Please follow this link for additional information:

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/divorce-and-separation/parenting-together/parenting-plan/>

The Parenting Plan is a written plan worked out between parents after they separate, and it covers the practical issues of parenting.

The Plan can help clarify the arrangements you need to put in place to care for your children after separation, without having to go to court. It can help you in dealings with your children's other parent or carer, and it asks parents to put the best interests of their children first. There are many benefits of making a Parenting Plan:

- it will help everyone involved know what is expected of them;
- it acts as a valuable reference to go back to; and
- it sets out practical decisions about the children, such as living arrangements, education and health care.

If you do go to court in the future, it is likely that judges will expect you to have started a Parenting Plan.

You can use the *Parenting Plan: summary of progress* to write down which areas you have agreed on, and which areas you might need help with from a court. This can be the time to think again about whether court is the best route or whether there are other better options to make child arrangements.

Download a Parenting Plan here:

Parenting Plan Guidance – English - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4375> (PDF)

Parenting Plan – English - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4365> (PDF)

Parenting Plan – English – <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4371> (Word - printer friendly)

Parenting Plan Summary of Progress – English - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4361> (PDF)

Parenting Plan – Urdu - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4917/> (PDF)

Parenting Plan – Polish - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4931/> (PDF)

Updated February 2022

Separated Parents Information Programme

Please follow this link for additional information:

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/divorce-and-separation/parenting-together/separated-parents-information-programme/>

The Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) is a course which helps you understand how to put your children first while you are separating, even though you may be in dispute with your child's other parent or carer. The course helps parents learn the fundamental principles of how to manage conflict and difficulties – including how to put this in practice.

You will not attend the same session as your ex-partner. In some areas it is free to attend – you can contact your **local provider** for more information.

The Separated Parents Information Programme encourages you to take steps for yourselves; this may include developing agreements that do not need court intervention.

The Programme will give you ideas and signpost ways in which you can get help outside court. The majority of parents that go on the course find it very helpful.

If you wish to attend SPIP in Wales (where the equivalent is Working Together for Children) you should contact Cafcass Cymru: cafcasscymrucontactactivities@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

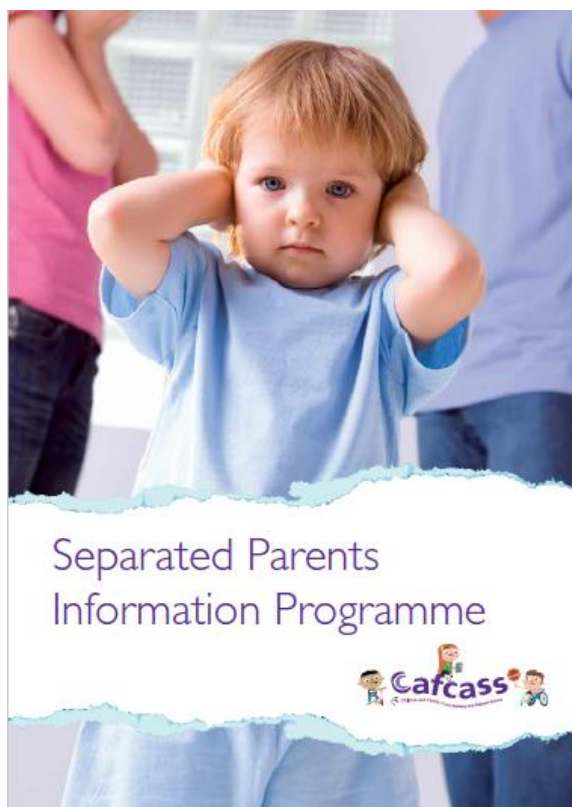
There's more information about the course on the **SPIP factsheet** and the **SPIP handbook**.

Useful Weblinks and Downloads:

SPIP Factsheet - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/4890/> (PDF)

SPIP Handbook - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/7037> (PDF)

Find a local Provider - <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/directory-of-providers/>



Introduction**Your separated parenting journey**

- A 'highway code'
- The divorce or separation process

Your parenting divorce or separation – children

- Parenting questionnaire
- What children say
- Listening and hearing the voices of children
- What most children want to say to their parents
- What children need
- What children don't need
- Talking to your children
- Listening to your child after separation
- Typical reactions of children and young people
- How children adjust
- How children react to separation and how to help them
- What your children could be feeling

Your parenting separation – communication

- Imagining a future conversation
- Having difficult conversations
- Tips for contact
- Further tips for contact
- Tips for dealing with difficult conversations
- If you can't be with your children
- New partners
- Domestic abuse
- If children talk about harming themselves

Your emotional separation

- The loss of a relationship
- Emotions
- The stages of loss
- Taking care of yourself
- Support network
- Extended family
- Your children's friends and family
- Counselling
- Mediation

Your separated parenting journey revisited

- Making choices
- Further information

Main Author Denise Ingamells,
with Janet Reibstein for Cafcass

YOUR JOURNEY

CHILDREN

COMMUNICATION

EMOTIONS

YOUR JOURNEY REVISITED

Introduction

In this handbook you'll find information on the process of becoming a separated parent, how it can affect you and your children, and how to change things for the better. It may seem like a lot to ask, but doing only one thing differently could lead to a whole range of possibilities that you never imagined could happen.

This handbook can be read alongside the 'Separated Parents Information Programme' or alongside one-to-one parent information meetings. The information is taken from a wide range of research into parenting after divorce or separation. It is divided into different parts that follow the legal, financial, parenting and emotional aspects of your divorce or separation. Each section has a different colour scheme so you can easily find the one you want.

When you go through separation as a parent, it's a little like starting a journey that you never intended to go on. When you're in a relationship, you have hopes for the future. Separating from your partner means that there is a loss of those hopes and expectations and you don't know the direction your life will go in.

Your children will be shaped very much by how their parents behave towards them about the loss and how they behave towards each other. Important decisions such as where your child or children will live, and how often they see each parent will of course affect them, and so will the level of conflict between you and your ex-partner. You may not think or feel as if you have any influence over the level of conflict and that it just happens. However, as you read this book, we hope that you'll see that each parent, regardless of who is felt to be provoking conflict or not, can manage it so it is less harmful to their children. This book and the course it is part of is designed to give some ideas for how to manage disagreements and high emotions that happen between separated parents. Similarly they point out ways to help children manage their feelings and reactions to being children of separation.

Although the process of adjusting to being a separated parent will at some point come to an end, your journey through life with your children does not. The main change that has happened for you as a parent is in the relationship with your ex-partner. The change from being intimate partners to being parents with a businesslike relationship might feel like an uphill struggle, but you can use this handbook to point you in the right direction.

Though there may be parts of the process that you can't influence or change, you may take comfort in the fact that in the end you will have received some ideas for coping with the difficulties you face. For, if you can take even small steps now, you are at the beginning of the new voyage for yourself and your children.

Two things that can really help you:

- **The Parenting Plan:** to help you plan a structure for the children - www.cafcass.gov.uk/parentingplan
- **Getting it Right for Children:** to help with skills you need to parent after a separation - search "Getting it Right for Children - the Parent Connection"

4

You can dip into the book whenever you need to, and there are worksheets for you to fill in as you go through the book. Some parts of the book will be relevant to your situation and some won't.

You can pick out the parts that are important to you.

YOUR JOURNEY

5

Your separated parenting journey

During your separation, it might sometimes feel like events just happen and that you don't have a choice over which road you take. However, even though it might not be easy, you can make some decisions that will have a positive effect on how your children experience the break-up.

If you think of your divorce or separation as a journey, is it on a winding road that has sharp bends and is difficult to travel or is it on a straight road that is easier to travel?

Look at the table on the following page and tick the boxes that most apply to you. Then add up the number of ticks for each type of journey.

Try to be as honest as possible when you do it as this information is for you. Nobody will judge you and you won't be asked to share what you write with anyone else.

Some blank rows have been added for you to write down anything you think of that isn't on the list.



Which road would you like to be on?

6

Top Tips for Separated Parents

Download the Top Tip Sheet here: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/download/9535/> (PDF)



Top Tips

for parents who are separated



The FJYPB members are children and young people with experience of family law proceedings. They have devised these top tips for parents to help them think about matters from their child's perspective.

'Listen to your child'

You can find out more about the FJYPB at [Cafcass.gov.uk](https://www.cafcass.gov.uk)

1

• Remember I have the right to see both of my parents as long as it is safe for me.

2

• I can have a relationship with the partner of my other parent without this changing my love for you.

3

• Try to have good communication with my other parent because it will help me. Speak to them nicely.

4

• Keep my other parent updated about my needs and what is happening for me. I might need their help to.

5

• Don't say bad things about my other parent, especially if I can hear. Remember I can often overhear your conversations or see your social media comments.

6

• Remember it is ok for me to love and have a relationship with my other parent.

7

• Don't make me feel guilty about spending time with my other parent.

8

• Don't make permanent decisions about my life based on how you feel at the moment. Think about how I feel now and how I might feel in the future. My wishes might change.

9

• Be open to change, be flexible and compromise when agreeing arrangements for me.

10

• It's ok with me if my parents don't do things exactly the same. You are both different and that's alright with me.

| | |
|----|---|
| 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Don't be possessive over me and the things that belong to me. Make it easy for me to take the things I need when I spend time with my other parent, such as school work, PE kits, clothes, books, games, phone etc. Let me choose what I want to take with me. |
| 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Keep me informed about any changes to my arrangements. |
| 13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Try not to feel hurt if I choose to spend time with my friends instead of seeing you. I am growing up! |
| 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Remember that important dates (birthdays, celebrations, parents evening, sports day etc are special to you, me and my other parent. I may want to share my time on those dates with each of you. |
| 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Work out between you and my other parent who is responsible for the extra things I need, such as new school shoes and uniform, school trips, dinner money and the cost of my hobbies or after school activities. I don't want to be involved in this. |
| 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Remember that I don't expect you or my other parent to be perfect, so I don't want you to expect my other parent to be perfect either. Accept mistakes and move on. |
| 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Make sure I am not left out of key family events. Please compromise with my other parent so I can join in. |
| 18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Please don't stop me having contact with extended family members who are important to me. Ask me how I feel about them. Don't assume my feelings are the same as yours. |
| 19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Don't use me as a messenger between you and my other parent. |
| 20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Don't use my relationship with my other parent against me, or them. |
| 21 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Don't ask me to lie to my other parent or other family members. |
| 22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Don't ask me to lie to professionals., or to say what you want me to say. |
| 23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Remember that I might want something different to my brother or sister. |
| 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Don't worry about how others see you or what they think. I am what matters. |

Co-Parenting Apps

Co-parenting with an ex-partner or another carer can be complicated but co-parenting app can help.

Most offer four basic features:

- A shareable calendar and scheduling tools
- A messaging function that keeps a record of all your messages and replies
- An expenses record so that you can collate and share expenses
- A storage function for key documents e.g. medical records and sharing photographs

A number of parents and carers accessing our Child Contact service decide to use the AppClose co-parenting app – <https://appclose.com/> (for Android and iPhone users)



You can read about 6 more co-parenting apps here and check out what might work best for you - <https://www.abingdonfamilymediation.co.uk/seven-recommended-co-parenting-apps-to-make-your-life-easier/>

Note: At the moment most co-parenting apps are developed for the US market. They are still relevant and usable but some have worked harder to adapt their language and functions to suit a UK market.

Additional Information and Resources for Parents and Carers

<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/resources-parents-carers/>

Provides additional and information and links on topics such as:

- Changing a child's name
- Child contact
- Counselling and therapy
- Divorce and separation
- DNA Tests
- Domestic abuse
- Family Mediation services
- Family support
- Parenting
- Legal rights and advice

Examples of child contact and parental conflict in popular media.

The Parent Trap (1998)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8v9QoxFhRw>

The Parent Trap (1998) | Sisters (2:39)

Scene: Where the two Lindsay Lohan characters realise they're separated twins



Twins Annie and Hallie are strangers until they meet at summer camp. The pair discover that they are siblings and that their divorced parents are living on either side of the Atlantic. Each having residency for one of them. The pair then pursue an identity swap plan, hoping to reunite their parents.

The film supports the concept that divorce tears families apart. According to the Twins and Multiple Births Association, families with twins are statistically more likely to separate. Additionally, although their father's new fiancée, Meredith truly is *the worst*, the film gives stepparents a poor representation. A major part of the film's plot is preventing their father from remarrying by playing pranks, swapping identities, and setting traps. Despite what Disney tries to sell audiences, stepparents are often not a threat to a family unit and parents do not always reconcile. Many families are able to communicate and work together and are often happier post separation.

During a child contact/residency case, a court will consider the following:

- Where possible, the views of a child, if the child is deemed old enough/articulate enough to express a view.
- The welfare of the child and what would be in their best interests.
- The stability of both parents and their circumstances and ability to care for their child
- What the care arrangements have been since the child was born.



A 'Parent Trap' situation is rare. In real life Family-Law child contact/residency cases, a court will decide on an outcome that is for the best interests of the children. Keeping siblings together is the ideal solution. Parents can then come to an agreement on shared contact/residency arrangements. However, in the rare occasion that siblings are unable to safely live together, a court could separate them.

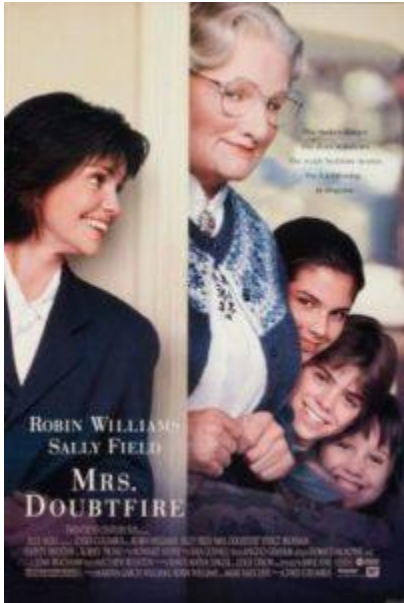
It is not uncommon for one parent to wish to relocate following a divorce. They may wish to have their child with them. Yet, if the other parent objects to their relocation, then a court can decide on the matter.

Source: <https://www.watermanslegal.co.uk/representation-of-custody-in-film/>

Mrs Doubtfire (1993)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNVGswB3pW0>

Conflict Resolution in Mrs. Doubtfire (2:40)



In an attempt to see more of his children after his divorce, Daniel Hillard dresses as an old Scottish woman and is hired by his ex-wife as a nanny. The disguise works, and Mrs Doubtfire wins over the children, allowing Daniel to become a better father.

The film highlights that even though Daniel loses the battle for care of his children, not all fathers are absentees after divorce. Daniel is granted supervised contact with his children once a week. The mother, Miranda allows the courts to believe that her ex-husband is unfit to care for his children.

Although divorce can be challenging on a family, Robin Williams' character takes the drastic step to dress up as the nanny in an attempt to spend more time with his children and hilarity ensues. Of course, in reality we would always advise against identity fraud...and bringing a petting zoo into the house.

Supervised contact often takes place where there is a history of concern over a parent, and therefore their abilities to provide sufficient care is put into question. Although this situation can be difficult and having your contact time supervised by a third party can create a very artificial setting, contact sessions go well, perhaps in time the contact will no longer need to be supervised. If the contact is being supervised in a contact centre, the feedback from the member of staff can be used as evidence for any future amendments to contact agreements and to assess parenting skills.



When clients cannot concur on contact arrangements, lawyers can act as mediators to help separated couples come up with a fair system that works for both parties.

After a separation or divorce, courts view it as beneficial for children to remain in contact with both parents. Families can take time to adjust after a divorce or separation. The end of Mrs Doubtfire demonstrates that it is possible to adapt to the new situation. Families can be happy after divorce.

Source: <https://www.watermanslegal.co.uk/representation-of-custody-in-film/>

Custody (2018) – French (with subtitles)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n65dl2EL4z0>

Custody Trailer 1 (1:06)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdPBsLD2_7E

Custody Trailer 2 (1:45)



“Miriam and Antoine Besson have divorced, and Miriam is seeking sole custody of their son Julien to protect him from a father she claims is violent. Antoine pleads his case as a scorned dad whose children have been turned against him by their vindictive mother. Unsure who is telling the truth, the appointed judge rules in favour of joint custody. A hostage to the escalating conflict between his parents, Julien is pushed to the edge to prevent the worst from happening.”



If you feel you'd want to watch the film or know more about it / are concerned it might be upsetting this review provides more details - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/custody-jusqua-la-garde-xavier-legrand-scintillating-separation-drama>.

Videos about Child Contact Centres, and the Voices of Children.

NACCC Sharing Mum and Dad (March 2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdsfbVU3YTQ>

Tim Lovejoy visits Harpenden Child Contact Centre (2:42)



Children's Voices (1:25)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEvBTsHQIUM>

Children and young people talking about their experience following their parents' separation

I really really know why my daddy left us. I was eating spaghetti Bolognese in my lap and I spilt it all over everywhere and Daddy got really cross with me, that's why he left us. I don't like it when Daddy isn't happy with me. If I'm very good maybe Daddy will come back home.

My mum wants to take me on holiday but my dad doesn't want me to go in case she doesn't bring me back.

I don't want to upset my mum or dad, I want them to listen to what I think but I don't want to have to choose between them.

I know that my mums both love me, I just wish they'd stop asking me who I love more.

What Children Want (1:10)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paYay-61oaM>

Children and young people talking about what they would like to happen after their parents have separated



Birthday Party (3:21)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6khgGmbm448>

Birthday party scenario showing parents trying to hide emotions from their children following separation. Interview at end with mum, dad and their two children.

