

Putting Children First During Divorce

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Each year Resolution, an organisation of 6,500 family lawyers and other professionals in England and Wales, who believe in a constructive, non-confrontational approach to family law matters, runs a campaign during the last week of November titled Family Dispute Resolution Week. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness that there are better ways to resolve family disputes.

In 2015, the campaign focused on putting children first. Resolution commissioned polling among 500 children and young people about their experience of parental divorce. The results revealed fresh insights from children which many parents may have found uncomfortable to read. The research shows that children and young people want greater involvement in decision making during the divorce process. 50% of young people agreed that their parents put their needs first during their separation or divorce. Around half (47%) said that they didn't understand what was happening during their parents' separation or divorce. Sadly, two in ten agree that they sometimes felt like the separation or divorce was their fault. When asked what they would most like to have changed about their parent's divorce, 30% said that they would have liked their parents to understand what it felt like to be in the middle of the process.

I know that parents who are going through a divorce will want to put their children first. There are many divorces happening locally each year, which means that there are many local children who might be facing the family issues raised by this research. Divorce is an

incredibly upsetting and stressful thing to go through but it is crucially important that you find the best way forward for you and your family. Choosing a way of managing your divorce or separation in a way that minimises conflict, focuses on the needs of children and helps separating couples to avoid court is important. You can do this by choosing a process such as mediation or collaborative law. Each of these help parents to maintain control over the divorce and ensure that the children remain the central focus.

The Collaborative Law process involves couples and their solicitors working together in the same room to resolve their divorce or separation through meetings on the basis that they seek and commit to reach agreement without going to Court. Mediation involves me working as a neutral to help couples resolve their disputes. During mediation, children can also become involved in the mediation process if both parents agree and are prepared to listen to what their children want and take on board their views.

There is a wealth of information available at www.resolution.org.uk if you are going through a divorce, including how to take care of yourself as this is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and your children on divorce.

Written by Clare Kitteridge, Family Lawyer and Mediator at Kingsley David Solicitors. Clare has been practising family law for over 15 years and is committed to helping you achieve the best possible outcome for you and your family.

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