

A Guide to

Children - Advice for Parents

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■ Understand your new role as a single parent.

■ Understand how to best to communicate with you ex-partner.

■ Understand how to ensure your children are happy and well adjusted.

This Guide has been designed to assist you with some of the general issues and to answer questions that you may have. This Guide is only intended to give general advice for parents in relation to children issues on divorce. Legal advice should always be obtained from Leonard Gray in application to a particular case.

Section

1

An overview

Research has shown that after separation or divorce, the happiest and best adjusted children are those who have regular contact with both parents.

You may wonder how you can make arrangements if you feel great bitterness towards your ex-partner. In general, a lot of this bitterness does pass. In any case, continued anger is very exhausting and most people find that in the end it is better to try and put some of these feelings behind them. It is much better if you can try to avoid letting your feelings get in the way of your children's needs.

Try not to run down the other parent in front of the children, or use the children as a means of getting at your ex-partner. Remember that your ex-partner is still the child's other parent and the child should be free to love that parent, regardless of your own personal feelings.

1. The role of the parents in the family

It is important that you and your ex-partner communicate with one another at all times in respect of issues regarding your children. Whilst it will need to be understood by all that there is no prospect of reconciliation between the two of you, you should seek to maintain a united front in your role as parents in the best interests of the children. That requires consultation, honesty and openness in dealings regarding the children.

The parent who does not have the children living with them may still want to know how they are getting on at school, want to look at school reports and attend parents' evenings. This is to be encouraged, as children will benefit from having the continued interest of both parties.



It helps if you send letters and cards to the children who are not with you. Encourage the children who are with you to send letters and cards to the other parent.

Many parents prefer to "share the load" with their ex-partners and encourage that ex-partner to have a say and carry a share of major responsibilities. This can be particularly important during the period of "teenage rebellion" when the back-up and support of the second parent may be particularly beneficial. Don't think that everything that goes wrong in the child's life is all to do with the divorce. These things might have happened anyway.

Do remember that the responsibility for contact belongs to both parents and will require some effort to make it successful.

2. Contact

The law says that it is the right of the children to see the parents, and not the other way round.

You and your ex-partner need to speak regularly to discuss the children's upbringing and their daily/weekly/monthly programmes, so that contact can work as well as is possible.

It is fairly important that you and your ex-partner keep each other generally informed as to where the children and each of you may be contacted. This is particularly important so that if the child(ren) suffers any illness, then the other parent can be informed promptly.

3. Planning the dates

Try to draw up some sort of list of contact dates in advance, or to have a regular arrangement. The parent who has contact will have to bear in mind that children become involved in school activities, local clubs, etc., and may resent having to break these arrangements if they have to see the other parent on a particular day of the week.

4. Co-operating over timing

For the sake of the children, try to be punctual. If the child lives with you try not to insist that he or she is returned at a precise time, but allow some flexibility to provide for traffic hold-ups and other delays. On the other hand, the parent with the child should try to let the other parent know if they are going to be late and why.

5. Different places, different routines

Try not to overreact if during contact the other parent adopts a different routine or has different ideas about discipline. Children learn to accept the rules of the household they are in and occasional variations in patterns won't hurt them. On the other hand, it must be remembered that it is unfair to undermine the usual routine deliberately as this cannot be in the interests of the child.

6. Checking things out

If your child complains about some aspect of the contact and it concerns you, check it out with the other parent. Children's perceptions are frequently different to adults' and your child's account of an incident or event could be misleading.

7. Children cannot be messengers

It is best not to question your children about your ex-partner's personal life, however curious you may be. Avoid using your child to convey messages to the other parent.

8. School requirements

There does need to be flexibility in arrangements so that school requirements are adhered to – homework must be done, and children will want to be able to participate fully in school events. A proper balance needs to be kept as regards the children's right to see each parent and their school requirements.

9. Holiday requirements



You and your ex-partner need to organise and arrange holiday contact with each other, sufficiently in advance. For example, you should not make bookings or arrangements without first having consulted with one another and agreed dates.

10. Wishes of the children

This is an important consideration, but should be kept in proportion with the age and understanding of each child. Plainly, the wishes of your older child will carry greater weight than those of your younger child(ren), because of their age(s) and maturity. Having said that, it is important to establish the children's wishes and listen carefully to them. This does not mean that the children get to dictate the holiday.

11. School events

Where there are one-off school events (such as, for example, sports day) then you might consider it sensible for you to attend together, but where there are events taking place over more than one evening (for example, a school play) you might consider attending separately. This is up to the two of you, but does need to be discussed. This is an area that is all the more delicate if either of you has another partner that you may wish to bring along to a school event. If there are one-off occasions that both of you wish to attend, and one of you objects to the partner of the other attending, then it is probably inappropriate for the third party to be present.

12. Birthdays etc

You and your ex-partner do need to address who is to hold the birthday party for each child, and whether it is right that there should be two separate birthday parties, whether for friends or family. Your child(ren) will no doubt want to be involved in the decision-making in respect of parties, and those parties will need to be planned well in advance. You need to consider, also, whether the other parent should be invited. Similar considerations apply in respect of Christmas and other festivals. Often, parents will alternate festivals so that, for example, one parent has the whole of Christmas Day with the children one year, and the other the next and so on.

13. New partners

It is absolutely vital that any new partner is introduced, intentionally, to the children only after careful consultation with the other parent. It is the introduction of third parties into the equation that, in our experience, is the most frequent area of tension between parents over children, and this is something that you need to avoid.

If you would like to know more about how court orders concerning children are obtained, please refer to our guide: [Children: Children and the Courts](#).

The next Section of this Guide will look at how to make an appointment.

Section 2

Making an Appointment

If you would like to discuss the issues raised in this Guide further then please contact **Sarah Orrell, Louise Minifie, Devon McNamara** or who will be happy to do so.

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We are based in Chelmsford town centre, a two minute walk from Chelmsford Rail Station with car parking and disabled access at the rear of our office for the use of clients.

Open Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:30pm.

Alternative times by arrangement.

Other available Guides from Leonard Gray:

- **A Guide to Divorce – Obtaining a Divorce**
- **A Guide to Divorce – Obtaining Financial Orders**
- **A Guide to Children - Children and the Courts**
- **A Guide to Cohabitation**
- **A Guide to Wills following a Divorce or Separation**

