

Discussion guide

My personal record

Use this personal record with the information on www.cmoptions.org/discussion

Conversation style (Step two)

How I want to talk

eg. Talking face-to-face at my house over coffee. I would like it to be calm and would also like a friend to be there to stop us arguing and keep us on track.

Make it work (Step four)

Agreeing on our plans

eg. We'll use a family-based arrangement form so it's clear what we've agreed on. It's not legally binding so we'll use the CSA if it breaks down.

Notes

Discussion guide

Step one – What do you want to talk about

Write on your personal record sheet.

Print off your personal record then fill in the first four columns by answering these questions.

Things to think about.

On your personal record, list the issues you want to talk about. This could be anything from paying child maintenance, taking your child on holidays or paying for school uniform.

What are your priorities?

Looking at your list, which issues do you feel are more important to sort out than others? You might both agree on simple issues that are low priorities, so consider starting with these to find some common ground.

What is your ideal outcome?

You probably won't get it, but what do you really want for each issue?

What will you settle for?

Successful discussions are all about compromise. If you and the other parent both have realistic goals with child's interests at heart, you might be able to reach a compromise faster than you expect.

Notes

Discussion guide

Step two – How do you want to talk

Write on your personal record sheet.

In box 2 on your personal record, write a short description of what you want the communications to be like.

If you are communicating with the other parent already, how would you rate it?

Is it usually very good, good, fair, difficult or very difficult?

If you are not communicating now, might you be able to in the future?

Think about the things that get in the way at the moment and how you could change them in the future.

If you don't feel you can communicate at all, then consider using the CSA. If things change you can start to communicate and change your arrangement. Give Options a call on 0800 988 0988 and we'll talk you through your options.

When you talked in the past, what worked best?

Thinking about any things you agreed on in the past. What worked well and what worked less well?

What have you agreed on recently?

Maybe it was just something small like a change to the time your child was dropped off or an arrangement to share the cost of a school trip.

Notes

Discussion guide

Step two – How do you want to talk

Write on your personal record sheet.

In box 2 on your personal record, write a short description of what you want the communications to be like.

What might make your discussion difficult?

Are you still angry with each other? Do either of you find it difficult to say what you want? Try to avoid this happening again and remember you'll be having this discussion for the good of your child.

How would you prefer to communicate?

Would it be best to meet the other parent face-to-face or by letter, email, phone or through friends. Would the other parent want to communicate in a different way?

If you want to talk face-to-face, where would it be best to meet?

You could meet in your house, the other parent's house or at a friend's or relative's home. Would it be better to meet in a public place?

Would it be useful to have someone else at the meeting?

Some people like to have a mediator or friend with them while they discuss. Would this help either of you? Many parents find it easier to write down what they want to say or use the phone.

Notes

Discussion guide

Step three – Putting your ideas forward

Write on your personal record sheet.

What will your proposals be? – Looking at your list of the things you want to agree on, what will you suggest for each item? Write down the words you will use in column five.

How will you tell the other parent about your ideas?

Will you write your proposals down, or just tell them? Will you give all your ideas at the same time, or individually? Will you give alternatives?

What ideas do you think the other parent will suggest?

They will have views on what kind of arrangement they want. Look at the ideas you have written down. How closely do you think they'll match the other parent's plans?

Which ideas do you think will be the hardest to agree on?

Some issues will be more complicated and important than others.

Notes

Discussion guide

Step four – Agreeing on your plans

Write on your personal record sheet

Recording your arrangement – In box number four, write your thoughts on how you want to record what you have agreed on.

How will you know what you have agreed on?

You will both need to know what you have agreed to. How will you be sure? Some parents find it useful to formally record arrangements so you can both refer back to them. Would this be helpful for you?

If you find that you can't reach an arrangement between yourselves, maybe leave that point, and agree to discuss it later with a mediator present.

If you decide to record your arrangements, how will you do it?

Will you write your arrangements down or ask another person to witness your arrangement? Will you each keep a copy of a written arrangement or will you pass it to someone to look after? Why not use the family-based arrangement form from Child Maintenance Options?

Do you want your arrangements to be legally binding?

Family arrangements are not normally legally binding, but the courts could make it more enforceable. Do you think this would be helpful in your situation?

Notes

Discussion guide

Step four – Agreeing on your plans

Write on your personal record sheet

Recording your arrangement – In box number four, write your thoughts on how you want to record what you have agreed on.

How long will your arrangements last for?

Situations and needs change, so most arrangements are only useful for a limited time. Do you think it would be useful to agree on review dates?

How will you know if your arrangements are working?

Write down the key points that will help you decide whether your arrangement is working. If any of your arrangements break down, how will you deal with it? Is there anything that you could agree now that would make it easier to talk about problems in the future?

How will each of you propose any changes that you want to make?

Your children's needs and your own needs will change over time. How will you go about changing your arrangements?

Notes