


Child Maintenance Options offers a parents deal with common separation



How to order our other leaflets

You can order our free leaflets by calling **0800 988 0988***. They can also be downloaded from our website: **cmoptions.org**





Information for parents with the day-to-day care of their child

- a child maintenance decisions guide
- Understand your child's main residence choices
- Tools to help you set up a child maintenance arrangement



Information for parents living apart from their child

- a child maintenance decisions guide
- Understand your child's main residence choices
- Tools to help you set up a child maintenance arrangement


Helping someone you know

- a child maintenance decisions guide
- Help parents make decisions about child maintenance arrangements
- Understand the role you can play
- Know about the help available to you too

Family-based arrangement form

- a child maintenance decisions guide




Child maintenance and staying safe

- a child maintenance decisions guide




Talking about money

- a child maintenance decisions guide
- Take care of your finances
- Think about the types of financial support your child might need
- Talk or discuss about money with your child's other parent



Thinking about getting in contact

Getting in touch with someone you may not have seen for a long time can seem a very big step. In these situations, it can be very tempting to think that it's better to leave past relationships firmly in the past.

But when children are involved it's not always that simple. Although your old relationship may be over, you will always be 'mum' and 'dad' to them.

Research shows that, in most circumstances, the best thing for children is to have both parents involved in their life in a positive way. Of course, putting this into practice can be difficult.

Whatever the situation, if it is possible for children to have positive contact with both parents, this can make a big difference to their emotional and financial wellbeing.

It's important to remember that getting back in touch can take time, rather than being something that happens overnight. If parents want different things, this can cause conflict, which in turn can have a negative effect on children.

So it's important to consider all the issues and take things slowly, rather than rushing or forcing contact.

Next steps

- Turn the page for ideas on how you can get back in touch with your child's other parent.
- Know where they are but not sure whether you want to take the next step? The information on page 15 might help.



If you're angry with your child's other parent and it's stopping you from getting in contact with them, you might find it helpful to read our guide ***Dealing with your emotions after separation.***

How to find someone

If you don't know the address or phone number of your child's other parent, there are lots of ways you can find out where they live now.

But remember that they might have mixed feelings about hearing from you, so do consider some of the points on pages 16 to 18 as well as the suggestions below.

Searching for them yourself

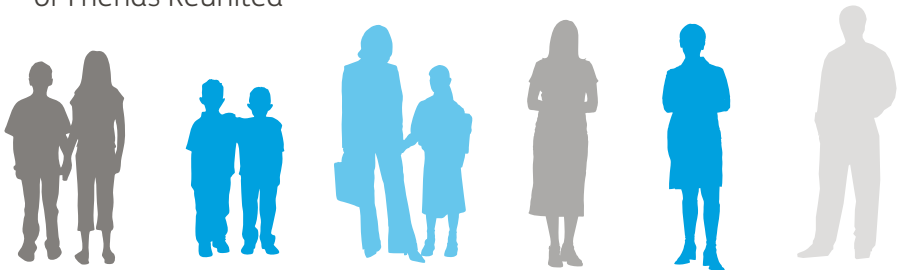
Most people find it easiest to start looking themselves. Different ways to do this include:

- asking friends and family if they have any information that could help you
- searching online 'social networks' such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Friends Reunited

- sending a letter to the last address you have for them
 - it may get sent on to them
- looking in online phonebooks such as Yell.com and 192.com
 - they can let you check the electoral register, which may be useful
- searching for the word 'trace' on an internet search engine. You'll find lots more ideas, as well as information about getting professionals to look for you.



If you don't have access to the internet, you could go to the library or an internet café, or use a friend or relative's computer. Local children's centres often have computers parents can use for free.



Asking someone to help you

There are a few organisations that can sometimes help you find a person.

The courts

Usually, you can only use the courts to trace someone if they owe you money. It can also take a long time and be expensive. For more information about using the courts, speak to Citizens Advice. You can find their contact details at the back of this guide.

The Salvation Army

This charity has a Family Tracing Service which has an 85% success rate in tracing lost family members. However, it will only be able to help you if you are, or were, married to the other parent. You'll also have to pay a small registration fee. You can find contact details for the Salvation Army at the back of this guide.

Tracing agencies

This group includes:

- private investigators
- process servers (who serve legal documents on people)
- enforcement agents (who collect debts and seize property).

If you're thinking about using a tracing agency, remember:

- Tracing agencies charge a fee, so check carefully before you agree to anything. The cost usually depends on how difficult the search is and how much information you can give them about the person you are looking for.
- Tracing agencies sometimes offer a 'no trace, no fee' service, especially if you are able to provide some basic details about the person you're looking for – for example, their name, date of birth and last known address.
- Traces can usually take up to a month, though simple ones can often be done more quickly, sometimes on the same day.



Because of the kind of day-to-day work tracing agencies do, such as serving legal documents and chasing people for money, the other parent may feel threatened if you choose to use a service like this. It's important to remember this, and you may want to try your other options first before you go to a tracing agency.

You can find a tracing agency by searching online or looking in a phone book, but take care to only use professionally accredited agencies. You may want to start by going to the website of one of the professional bodies that regulates the industry, such as the Institute of Professional Investigators (www.ipi.org.uk) or the Association of British Investigators (www.theabi.org.uk).

Using the statutory Child Maintenance Service

The Child Maintenance Service, which runs the government's statutory 2012 child maintenance scheme, can find parents to set up a child maintenance arrangement. This service has improved over the last few years, including having better links with other government departments. So even if they haven't been able to help you in the past, it may be worth talking to them again now.

Remember that some people have mixed feelings about the statutory child maintenance services. If you want to build a relationship with the other parent you might want to consider using a different way of finding them.

Usually, the Child Maintenance Service can only open a case when both parents and the child or children live in the UK, unless the other parent works for a UK-based company or for the UK civil service overseas.



If you want the Child Maintenance Service to try to trace someone you need to open a case with them first. For more information about how to do this call Child Maintenance Options on **0800 988 0988***.

Next steps

- Feeling uncertain about approaching the other parent? You can think through some of the issues using the suggestions on the next page.



If you're a parent living apart from your child and you want to know more about arranging child maintenance, take a look at our guide ***Information for parents living apart from their children.***



If you're the parent with the main care of your child and you want to know more about arranging child maintenance, take a look at our guide ***Information for parents with the main day-to-day care of their children.***

Approaching the other parent

It's a big jump from having no contact with someone to starting a discussion about family arrangements – whether that's to do with money, contact or working together for the children's best interests. It's probably better not to rush into these discussions, but try to gradually improve your relationship first. The most important thing is to get in touch again, and then approach conversations calmly and reasonably, to prevent tension or conflict developing. Think about the type of contact that will work best for your situation – whether this is a letter or email, phone call or visit.

Remember to take things slowly. The person you're contacting may be surprised, or even shocked, to hear from you, and might not be sure if they want to talk. You've probably spent a lot of time thinking about getting in touch, so give them some time to get used to the idea too.

If they don't want to talk after having time to think about it, you may have to respect their decision.

Dealing with negative reactions

Remember to take it slowly. It's possible that the other parent will react in negative ways – for example they might appear angry, especially if you contact them out of the blue. You might cause them to feel a lot of raw emotions, and this is why it's important to make it clear why you're contacting them.

Try to focus on the fact that you're doing this for your child, and ask that they try not to let their anger affect their judgement. If they're still really angry, don't push it. Give them a bit of space and time, and then try again.

Are you worried they'll say one thing and do another?

They might be feeling many things – scared, uncertain or guilty, for example. Try to discuss things calmly and give them a chance to deal with their issues. But remind them that it's important for your child that you are both open, consistent and reliable.

Are you worried you've tried this before and it didn't work?

Things change and sometimes emotions get easier to deal with after a lot of time has passed. If you approach the other parent again, and follow some of the suggestions in this guide, you might get a different reaction this time.

Are you worried they're just not interested in their child?

If the other parent doesn't want contact with their child, you can still share information about how they are doing and send photos. However, giving too much information to someone who doesn't want it could push them further away. So approach this with care. It may be better to simply let them know that they can always get in touch if they feel ready to have contact with their child in future.



Are you worried they don't want you involved with your child?



If you need to talk to someone about your feelings, legal rights or anything else to do with making contact, Child Maintenance Options can put you in touch with organisations that can help.

Sometimes there can be a good reason for this, but most of the time contact with both parents is better for children in the long run. Try to understand what the other parent might be concerned about, and ask if there is anything you can do to help reassure them. Can you offer solutions, or suggest ways of taking things slowly?

What you can do to help

We know these things can be easier said than done. But parents in similar situations have found the following 'do's and don'ts' helpful.

Do:	Don't:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• remember to focus on what's best for your child• ask the other parent to do the same• try and be positive – most people want to do the right thing by any children they have• be prepared to compromise• be proud of yourself – you're doing your best to sort things out• be sensitive to the needs of other children the other parent might have.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• bring up issues that are nothing to do with what you're talking about (that is, contact between parent and child)• always expect an argument – that's often a good way of starting one• criticise or make nasty comments• let yourself be drawn into an argument• give up hope – these things take time.

Asking other people to help you

If you're still not confident that you can talk to your child's other parent on your own, don't be afraid to ask for help.

One place to start might be your friends and family. Is there anyone that might be willing to get in touch for you, or act as a mediator during your conversations with each other?

Think carefully about involving family and friends though – this may not be as easy as it sounds. Involving someone like this could complicate things, and even cause conflict if the other parent thinks they are being one-sided. For this to work properly, you'll both need to agree on a person you can trust and rely on to help.

And they'll need to agree to stay calm and neutral. They'll need to remember that the goal is to work something out that both parents can agree to, and which – most importantly – has your child's best interests at heart.

Next steps

- If you're worried about what happens in the longer term, the next page might give you some ideas about how to start parenting together.



If you can't sort things out with the other parent, you might want to think about getting some help from a professional mediator. Mediation can be a neutral way for people to sort out practical issues safely, without getting drawn into conflict. Our guide ***Managing conflict with your child's other parent*** includes a section on mediation. It can give you ideas about suggesting this to the other person, and finding organisations that can help.



Our guide ***Helping someone you know*** will help third parties who support parents in making arrangements for their children – financial and otherwise.

Parenting apart

Once you're back in contact with the other parent, you may want to start thinking about the future, and how both parents can have more involvement in your child's life.

As we've already mentioned, children usually benefit from having both parents involved in their upbringing. They're more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem, do better at school and go on to have healthier relationships as an adult. And of course they'll have the financial benefits of having both parents support them.

If there's still some bad feeling between you and the other parent, the idea of working together might seem impossible. And when you're feeling low, it's hard to imagine that things can change for the better.

But by following the suggestions in this guide, and giving relationships time to develop at their own pace, you may find the results worthwhile.



Getting started

Building a new relationship with your child's other parent – one that's based on what your child needs rather than your old lives – is going to take some work.

But if you can keep the following things in mind, you'll be off to a good start.

1 Respect each other

Accept that they are the other parent of your child, and that this will never change. Try to talk positively about the other parent and take an interest in your child's relationship with them.

2 Think about each other's feelings

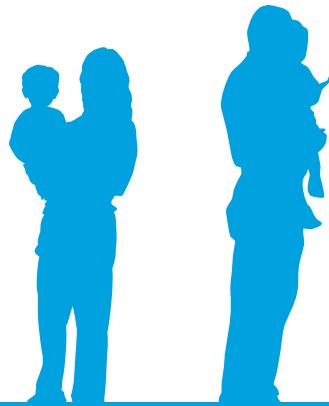
Try to see things from their point of view. Be polite and treat them as you want to be treated.

3 Talk to each other

Listen to what they're saying and be clear about what you mean when you're talking to them. Make sure you share information about your child too.

4 Be flexible

Children's needs change as they grow older, so you need to be able to discuss this with the other parent as they go through these changes.



Parenting together

Every family is different, and it's up to you how you want to arrange things once you're back in touch with each other. But if you haven't parented together before and you're feeling anxious, why not start out small and see how it goes?

If you've not been involved before

There are lots of ways you can get involved in your child's life. Here are just a few ideas to help you get started:

1 Find out what they like to do and take an interest in the same things. For example:

- follow their favourite football team or pop group
- watch some of the same TV shows or films
- read the same book as them.

2 Think about what skills you could teach them – for example how to swim, ride a bike, or even tie their shoelaces.

3 Work on projects together. For example, make a family tree or get them to help you with some simple DIY.

4 Older children often have very busy lives, so give them more flexibility to fit you in. Let them choose how you spend time together – maybe offer to hold a sleepover or take them somewhere with their friends.



If you do most of the parenting

You can help by:

- encouraging your child to send drawings or letters through the post
- making sure your child is home when they're expecting a phone call from their other parent
- preparing your child for when they spend time with their other parent
- keeping up-to-date with the activities the other parent starts off.

How your child might react

Children and teenagers will have feelings about a parent getting back in contact too, and may find these hard to make sense of or talk about. It can be especially difficult if they feel caught in the middle, or feel the need to say what they think you want to hear.

Try not to rush them or force them to talk if they find it hard. Just let them know they can talk when they're ready.



The Parent Connection website www.theparentconnection.org.uk can give you more information about how children may react and how you could respond. Take a look at the 'How children feel about contact' article in the co-parenting section of the website.

Next steps



If you want more help putting these ideas into practice, our guide ***Managing conflict with your child's other parent*** can give you more information about dealing with day-to-day parenting issues together.



If you're going to be working with your child's other parent there are lots of practical questions you might want to discuss. A parenting plan can help you work through these, and record your joint decisions. Find out more by searching for 'parenting plans' on **www.nfm.org.uk** – the information includes a guide you can download.

Useful contacts

Parenting and parenting apart

Centre for Separated Families

www.separatedfamilies.info
advice@separatedfamilies.org.uk

Provides advice and support to parents and other people experiencing family separation.

Family Lives (England and Wales)

www.familylives.org.uk

Family Lives helpline:

0808 800 2222

Monday to Sunday

24 hours a day

Help for parents, families and step families dealing with stressful situations. Runs a helpline, live chat and other services.

Families need Fathers

www.fnf.org.uk
(England and Wales)

www.fnfscotland.org.uk
(Scotland)

Helpline: 0300 0300 363

Every day 7am to midnight (England and Wales),

Monday to Friday

6pm to 10pm (Scotland)

Help with issues caused by relationship breakdown and parenting apart. Help to involve both parents in a child's life after separation. Services include a national helpline and local branch meetings across the UK.

Gingerbread (England and Wales)

www.gingerbread.org.uk

Lone Parent Helpline:

0808 802 0925

Monday 10am to 6pm

Tuesday, Thursday and Friday

10am to 4pm

Wednesday 10am to 1pm

and 5pm to 7pm

Information for single parents about a wide range of legal, financial and parenting matters.

ParentLine Scotland **www.children1st.org.uk**

0800 028 2233

Monday to Friday

9am to 10pm

Saturday and Sunday

12noon to 8pm

Free confidential support for parents and carers in Scotland who need help with family or relationship issues.

Salvation Army Family Tracing Service

www.salvationarmy.org.uk

0207 367 450

Can help people trace adult relatives with whom contact has been lost and so restore family relationships.

The Parent Connection from One Plus One

www.theparentconnection.org.uk

A website for parents who are separating or are separated. It provides a wide range of tools and information adapted from face-to-face mediation techniques that parents can use for themselves.

Money and work

Child Maintenance Options

cmoptions.org

0800 988 0988

Text 'OPTIONS' to 66644

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm,

Saturday 9am to 4pm

Free, impartial information and guidance to help separated parents make informed decisions about supporting their children.

MATCH

www.matchmothers.org

Non-judgemental support and information for mothers apart from their children in a wide variety of circumstances.

General advice and support

Citizens Advice (England and Wales)

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Advice line England:

0844 411 1444

Advice line Wales:

0844 477 2020

A popular source of free, independent and confidential advice about legal, money and other problems. Can put you in touch with a local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Scottish Citizens Advice Bureau

www.cas.org.uk

Citizens Advice Direct:

Call 0808 800 9060

Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm and Saturday 10am to 2pm

Free, independent and confidential advice through its network of bureaux in Scotland.

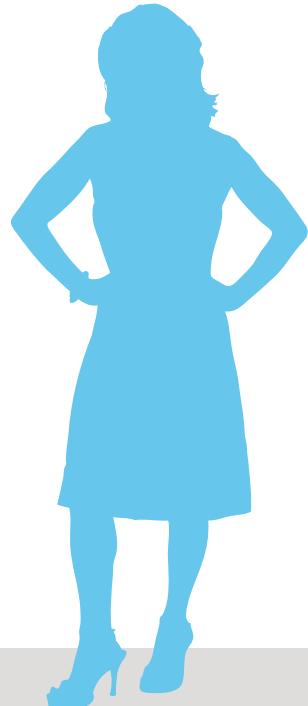
Gov.UK

www.gov.uk

Government website providing information about parenting, money, benefits and work, and access to online government services.



You can also download **Parenting Plans**, a free guide that can be a useful source of information for parents dealing with divorce or separation.



Legal advice and mediation

Community Legal Advice (England and Wales)

www.gov.uk

Helpline: 0845 345 4 345

Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm,

Saturday 9am to 12.30pm

A free, confidential and independent legal advice service.

Family Law Association (Scotland)

www.familylawassociation.org

An online information and advice centre explaining family law in Scotland.

National Family Mediation (England and Wales)

www.nfm.org.uk

0300 4000 636

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

A network of family mediation services that helps couples who are going through separation or divorce, or living apart, to sort out issues affecting both of them.

Relate (England and Wales)

www.relate.org.uk

0300 100 1234

Relationship counselling for individuals and couples, and counselling for children and young people.



Relate has a sister website that provides online advice and support for parents and families:
www.relateforparents.org.uk



Relationships Scotland

www.relationshipsscotland.org.uk

Relationship and family support across Scotland, including mediation services and child contact centres.

Resolution

(England and Wales)

www.resolution.org.uk

01689 820 272

9am to 5.30pm

National organisation of family lawyers that helps families reach solutions to problems in a non-confrontational way. Can provide information about all aspects of family law.

Scottish Legal Aid Board

www.slabb.org.uk

Legal aid helpline:

0845 122 8686

Open 7 days a week

7am to 11pm

The organisation responsible for managing legal aid in Scotland, providing funding for people who qualify for it.

Dealing with domestic violence

Mankind

www.mankind.org.uk

Helpline: 01823 334 244

Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm and 7pm to 9pm

Support for male victims of domestic abuse and violence. Provides information, support and access to local police, counselling, housing and other services.

National Domestic Violence Helpline

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 2000 247

7 days a week, 24 hours a day

Free helpline available around the clock to give emotional support and practical advice to victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Emotional wellbeing

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk (England)

www.nhs24.com (Scotland)

www.wales.nhs.uk (Wales)

Information from the National Health Service on conditions, treatments, local services and healthy living.

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Helpline: 08457 909 090

Open 7 days a week,

24 hours a day

Free, confidential emotional support for people experiencing stress, anxiety, despair or similar feelings.

Young Minds Parents Helpline

www.youngminds.org.uk

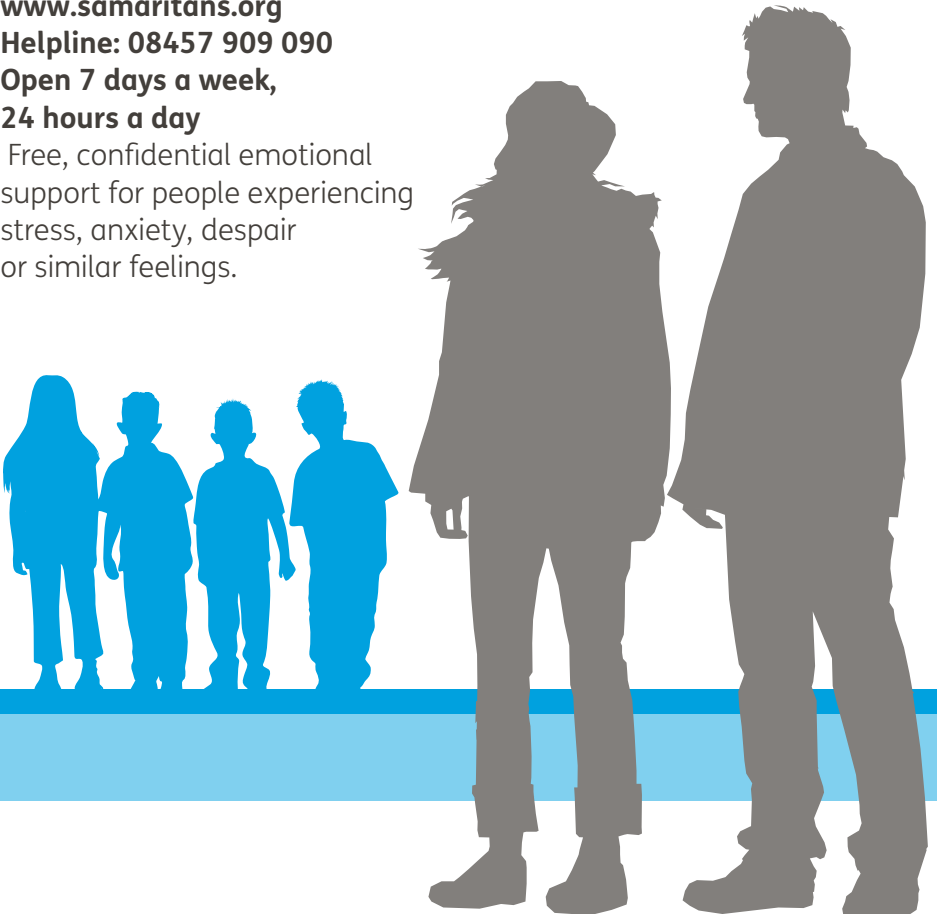
0808 802 5544

Monday to Friday

9.30am to 4pm

parents@youngminds.org.uk

Confidential support for anyone worried about the emotional problems or behaviour of a child or young person.



The main sources of research used to write this guide are:



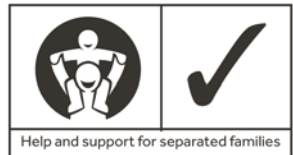
- Andrews, S., Armstrong, D., McLernon, L., Megaw, S. and Skinner, C. (2011) Promotion of child maintenance: Research on instigating behaviour change. Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission Research Report
- Wikeley, N., Ireland, E., Bryson, C. and Smith, R. (2008) Relationship separation and child support study. DWP Research Report 503
- Rodgers, B. and Pryor, J. (1998) Divorce and Separation – the Outcomes for Children. Joseph Rowntree Foundation Research Report.

*Call charges

Calls to 0800 numbers are free from BT land lines but you may have to pay if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

Calls to 0845 numbers from BT land lines should cost no more than 4p a minute with a 15p call set up charge. You may have to pay more if you use another phone company or a mobile phone, or if you are calling from abroad.

Calls from mobile phones can cost up to 40p a minute, so check the cost of calls with your service provider.



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