

Managing conflict with your child's other parent

➤ a supporting separated families guide



- Learning how to deal with conflict

- Practical tools to help you avoid arguments or have fewer arguments

 Child
Maintenance
options

Sorting out separation

Web
app

Get help with issues around your break-up with an easy-to-use web app **tailored to your needs** including:

- children and parenting
- relationships and conflict
- health
- housing
- work and benefits
- money
- legal

Over 50
organisations
who can help

Expert help at
the click of a
button

Find us on many websites
including cmoptions.org



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Help and Support
for Separated Families

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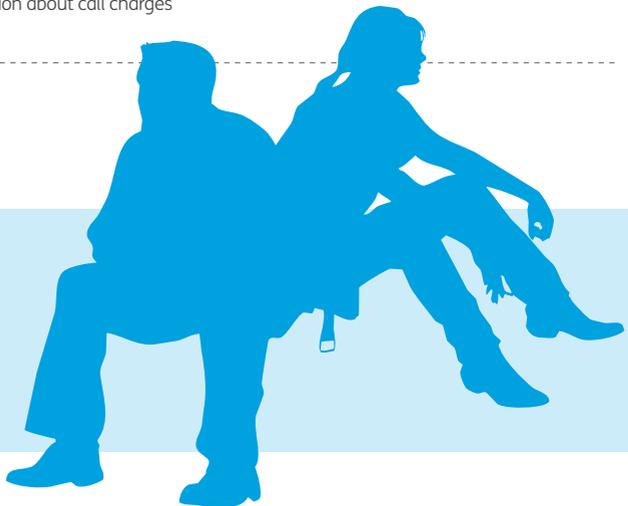
Child Maintenance Options

is a free and impartial service that provides information, tools and support to help you make informed choices about child maintenance arrangements. We can:

- help parents set up a child maintenance arrangement between themselves (a 'family-based' arrangement) and give them the support to keep it going
- give you information, and help with, other types of child maintenance arrangement
- offer practical information on a range of subjects linked to separation, such as housing, work and money, and put you in touch with organisations who can give you more specialist help and advice.

Get in touch with Child Maintenance Options on 0800 988 0988* or online at cmoptions.org

*See inside back cover for information about call charges

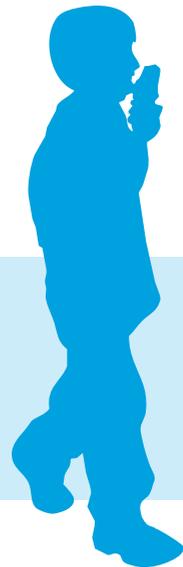


Supporting separating and separated families

Most children, in most circumstances, benefit from having both parents involved in their lives in a positive way, whether they live with them or not. Child maintenance is one way of making this happen, but it's only part of the story. We have written this guide to help parents build relationships and work together, to make sure their children get as much support as possible – financial and otherwise.

The information in this leaflet is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We recommend that you also get independent professional advice which applies to your situation. You can see a list of specialist organisations that may be able to help at the back of this guide. Although we have taken every care in preparing this guide, we cannot guarantee that information is accurate, up-to-date or complete, because it can change over time.

Child Maintenance Options does not endorse the content of any external websites.



About this guide

This guide is for parents who are no longer in a relationship with each other but want to have less conflict between them for the sake of their child or children. It includes lots of practical ideas to help you avoid conflict and work together as parents.

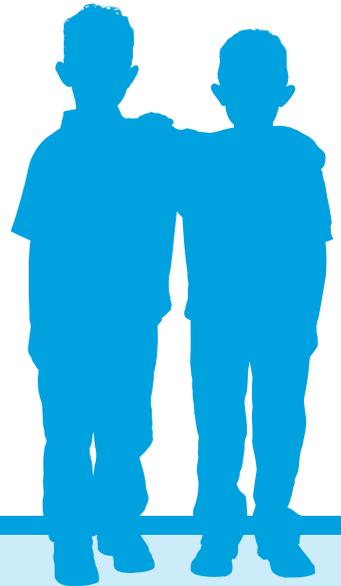
This guide can help you:

- decide how you will work with each other in future
- spot signs of conflict early on so you can deal with it before things get worse
- get outside help to make agreements on things.

How to use this guide

Having separated parents doesn't harm children – it's the conflict that often goes with separation that can do the damage. Having less conflict can help everybody involved, and most importantly the children. This guide can help you get started.

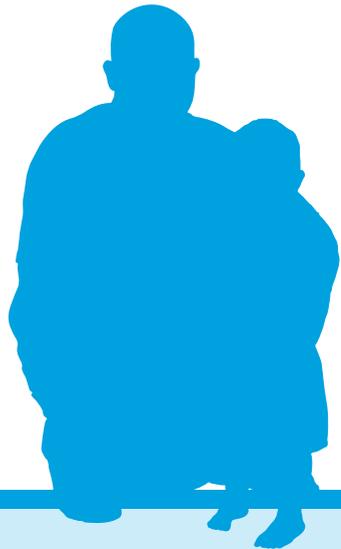
You may decide to read all this guide in one go. Or, if you want, you can read one section at a time, and have a break in between.



It's completely up to you. If you'd rather read one section at a time, then take a look below to help you decide the best place to start.

- **Want to stop the fighting but don't know where to begin?** Try starting with section 1 on page 10.
- **Want to know about how your conflict started?** Turn to page 12 for help on the causes of conflict.
- **Think you need a referee?** Look at our section on mediation, starting on page 23.

It's normal for separation to cause conflict, but in most cases it's possible to work through this so you can both be the parents your child needs. However, if there is a risk of violence or abuse this may not be possible. If these issues affect you, you may want to talk to someone who can give you specialist advice. Child Maintenance Options can help you get in touch with organisations that can do this.



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 maintenance choices
- Tools to help you set up a child maintenance arrangement



Talking about money

- a child maintenance decisions guide

- Take control of your finances
- Think about the types of financial support your child might need
- Tips for talking about money with your child's other parent



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 for parents



Family-based arrangement form

- a child maintenance decisions guide



Child maintenance and staying safe

- a child maintenance decisions guide



Information for parents living apart from their child

- a child maintenance decisions guide

- Understand your child maintenance choices
- Tools to help you set up a child maintenance arrangement



range of practical guides to help on issues.

Practical support for separating parents

• a supporting separated families guide



- Help with making arrangements with your children's other parent
- Information about your housing and employment rights
- Where to find more help and support

Child Maintenance options

Parenting together after separation

• a supporting separated families guide



- Building a working parenting relationship with your ex
- Practical tools to help you parent together successfully

Child Maintenance options

Getting in contact with your child's other parent

• a supporting separated families guide



- Understand common fears and concerns
- Tips to help you find someone and get in touch
- When and how the statutory child maintenance services can help

Child Maintenance options

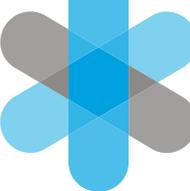
Dealing with your emotions after separation

• a supporting separated families guide



- Understand where you are on your emotional journey
- Tools and tips to help you move on
- Help children deal with their feelings
- When and how to get professional help

Child Maintenance options



How to complain about Child Maintenance Options

Child Maintenance options



How Child Maintenance Options uses your personal information

Child Maintenance options

Introduction – about managing conflict

Why try to deal with conflict?

Sometimes it feels like having less conflict between you and someone else isn't worth the effort. But there are so many benefits to having less conflict between you and your child's other parent:

- It's all about the kids: it's known that children are happier and better adjusted when there's no conflict between their parents.
- Less stress: taking the worry out of your life can help you physically and mentally.
- Moving on: sorting problems out can help you draw a line under what's gone before and start you moving forward again.
- It's all about the kids (again): it can lead to you having a better relationship with your children. They're likely to appreciate it if they know you've tried to deal with your issues.

Who needs to do it?

Conflict between separated and separating parents is common – but not impossible to fix.

Many people are able to patch up their differences. Often this means both parents can be involved in raising their children, even though they are separated. While it won't be possible for everyone, it often is possible. It can be realistic to try to sort out your issues, reach new agreements and work together to raise your children. But it won't happen by itself – you'll need to think about it, practise it and work at it.

This guide can help.



What causes conflict?

Do you know what causes the conflict between you and your children's other parent? If so, you may find that fixing the thing that caused your conflict can end the conflict itself.

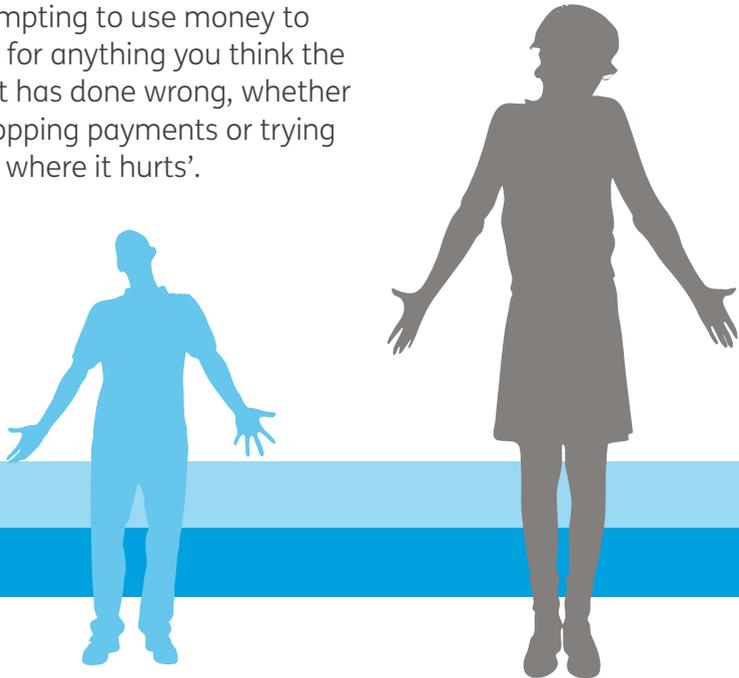
If you don't know, it may be worth thinking about. See if you can work out what makes you angry and why. Some of the reasons below may help.

There are six common things that separated parents fight about:

Money

You'll probably find that your living costs are higher now that you're not living with the other parent, and that on its own can be stressful. You may also be in the middle of dividing up jointly owned property or bank accounts.

It can be tempting to use money to get revenge for anything you think the other parent has done wrong, whether it means stopping payments or trying to 'hit them where it hurts'.





Money worries causing conflict? Take a look at our guide ***Talking about money.***

Time with the children

The amount of time each parent spends with their children is sometimes used as a bargaining tool, especially during arguments about money. For example, “If you don’t pay me child maintenance I won’t let you see the children” or “I’ll stop paying child maintenance if you don’t change your plans and let me have the children when I want”.

Decision making

Parents who feel they have been treated badly may think that the other parent doesn’t deserve to have a say. Or they might make a decision on their own because they just can’t face talking to the other parent. In other cases, parents may make decisions on purpose that they know the other parent won’t like.

Parenting ‘values’

These are your beliefs about how you should care for your children, and they may be different from those of their other parent. For example, you may believe that it’s important for your children to do well at school, while the other parent may think it’s more important for your children to take part in lots of out-of-school activities.

Parenting style

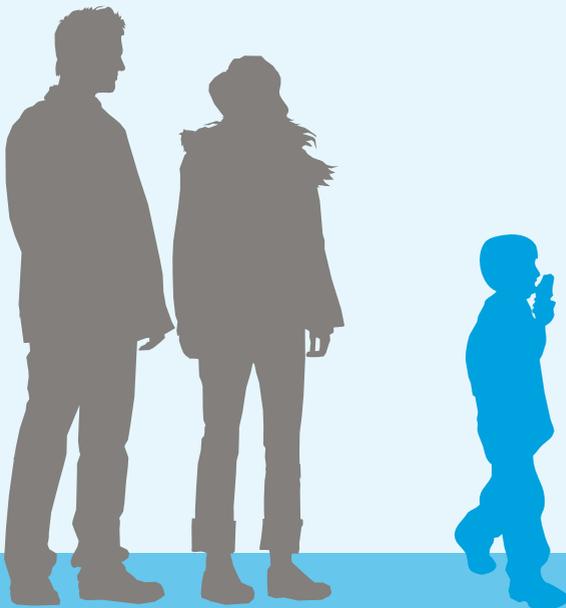
Your ex might have different ideas about what's acceptable for the children. For example, they might prefer the children to sit at the dinner table to eat while you don't mind if they eat while they play or watch TV.

New relationships

You or your ex might have found a new partner, which can be upsetting for the other parent and may take a while for everyone to get used to.

Next steps

- If you're struggling to let go of the past or cope with the emotional after effects of separation, read our guide ***Dealing with your emotions after separation***.
- If you and your ex can't seem to stop fighting, read the next section '**Dealing with conflict**'.



Dealing with conflict?

It is widely accepted that it's not separation or divorce itself that causes the greatest amount of harm to children. It's the level of conflict that they witness between parents during this difficult time.

The thought of having an argument-free discussion with your child's other parent might seem impossible. Many separated parents say, If I could have a proper conversation with them then we wouldn't have split up in the first place!

But your child needs you to learn how to handle your differences and deal with any conflict, so that you can work together.

When it comes to conflict, the people who lose out the most are children. And no one wants that to happen. So it's really important that you both do your best to avoid conflict as much as you can.

Recognising the signs of conflict

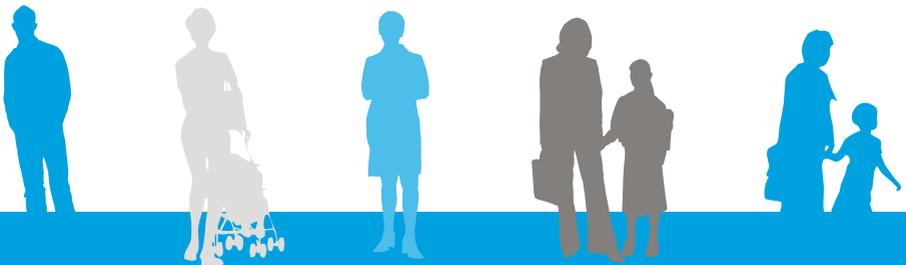
Conflict usually starts when either you or the other parent is:

- struggling to deal with feelings about the separation
- unhappy with arrangements to do with your children
- unhappy with the other person's behaviour or attitude.

Things that you used to be able to compromise on before might have become more of an issue now that you've separated.

Conflict can show itself in several ways:

- stopping the other parent's contact with their children or threatening to take them away
- you or the other parent breaking things, or shouting or acting aggressively
- refusing to speak to each other or not keeping to arrangements
- criticising the other parent in front of the children.



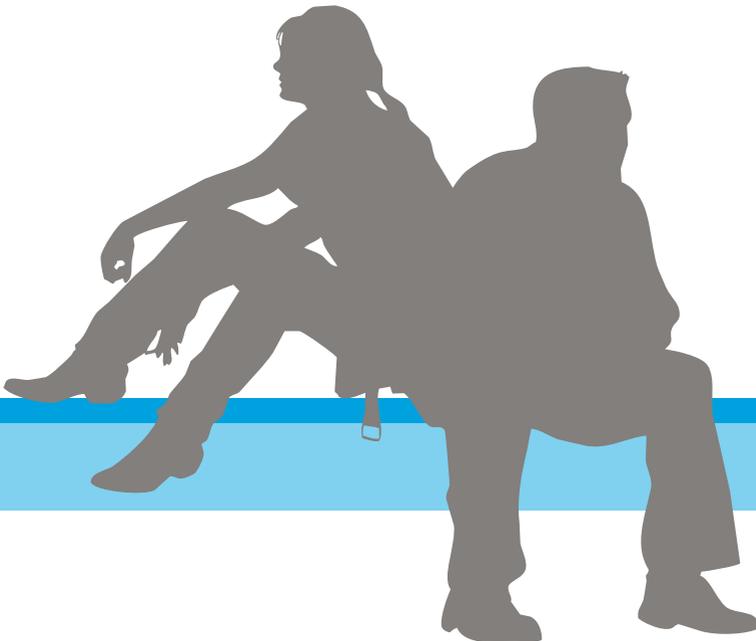
Here are a few examples of how parents criticising one another can actually harm children.

You might say:	Your child might feel
“They don’t like sleeping over with you when your new partner is there... isn’t that right?”	Like they are being forced to choose between the two of you and are unable to show their real feelings.
“Tell Dad that he needs to put some money in the bank account,” or “Tell Mum to pack some more clothes next time you come to stay.”	Worried that their other parent will become angry with them, and feel under pressure because of having to pass on messages.
“Is that all you did today? That’s not very exciting.”	Let down and bad about the day spent with their other parent.
“Unless you stick to the agreement I will go back to court.”	Like it’s all their fault and maybe you wouldn’t be fighting if they weren’t around.
“What would you know about being a responsible parent – you’re a loser!”	Bad about where they come from. If you put down the other parent, they might think you feel the same way about them.
“The kids told me you let them stay up late – you should have asked me first!”	Afraid of what might happen if they say anything about their other parent.
“I have nothing, your mother has everything!”	Fearful, angry and worried that if they don’t take sides they will lose the love and affection of the other parent. This could hurt your relationship with your child as well as with the other parent.

It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you regret, but try to think carefully about what you say in front of your child. Children can learn from seeing conflict managed in a positive way, just as they can be harmed by conflict which goes unchecked. Often, the things parents end up arguing about the most may hide deeper issues. But if you can uncover what's really going on it can help you move forwards.



You can find some helpful ideas on the Parent Connection website for working out what these deeper issues might be. Go to www.theparentingconnection.org.uk and find the tool '**Hidden issues for separated parents**' in the 'co-parenting' section.



Avoiding conflict

Here are some tips to help you to stop disagreements with your child's other parent turning into outright conflict.

1 Deal with your emotions

Dealing with any hurt, anger, guilt or other emotions you might be feeling is the first step towards your new life and your new relationship with your child's other parent.

If you're trying to deal with the end of a relationship, it can be easy to let your emotions get in the way, even if you have the best of intentions. Sometimes they can cause you to act in

certain ways without you really understanding why. But if you can't get past your emotions, you won't be able to separate the relationship you used to have with your ex-partner from their relationship with your child.

You don't need to forgive and forget, but your child may need you to accept what happened in the past so that you can both be good parents in the future.



If you're finding it hard to put your feelings to one side you can find some more information and practical suggestions in our guide ***Dealing with your emotions after separation***.

2 Focus on your child

Concentrate on what's best for your child rather than getting caught up in your 'rights' as a parent. For example, think in terms of "the kids will be happier if they see both of us regularly" rather than "I want to see the kids every other week."

Unless there is a risk of harm, try not to interfere with their other parent's values or parenting style during their time together. Remember children can enjoy doing different things.

If you're not happy with something the other parent has done, think about the reasons why you're not happy. Is it because you think the children will suffer or is it because it makes you feel bad?

3 Look at things from the other parent's point of view

It can be hard to look at things from the other parent's point of view, especially if you feel they've treated you badly. But considering the other parent's feelings is an important part of working together.

- **If you're the parent with the main day-to-day care of your child:** Try to appreciate that you probably get to spend more time with the children than their other parent does
- Also, you'll probably find that you get more financial help. The other parent might find this hard to accept, especially if they've had to set up a home from scratch.
- **If you're the parent who lives apart from your child:** Try to appreciate that the other parent probably has to do more of the daily work involved in caring for your child.

4 Be clear about what you've agreed

Misunderstandings almost always lead to conflict, so make sure the other parent is clear about what needs to happen, and check that you understand what you need to do.

5 Be prepared to compromise

Compromise involves a little bit of give and take on both sides. If you can both learn to do this, you're more likely to make arrangements that will work for your family.

Compromise doesn't always mean meeting each other halfway on every issue. Sometimes parents find it easier to agree one thing to suit one person, and another to suit the other person, and so on. This can feel better because it means you each make compromises but also get some of the decisions you want.

6 Be realistic

- Accept the other parent for who they are. Most parents have good intentions at heart, even if it doesn't seem that way. But like all of us, they sometimes make mistakes.
- Accept that both you and the other parent are going to have to make changes.

- Remember that there are no quick fixes or miracles. You can do all the right things and still not see immediate results. But keep trying, for your child's sake.

7 Admit when you're wrong

It's hard to do, but the other parent is likely to have more respect for you if you're prepared to admit when you're wrong.



If you can't avoid conflict

- Do still try to avoid arguing in front of your children at all costs.
- If you do have an argument, try to end it as soon as possible – don't let it go on and on, because it may get worse.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. In the short term, friends or relatives could help you avoid contact with your ex. For example, they can pass on messages and pick up or drop off your child at the beginning or end of visits with their other parent.



If you can't sort things out, the National Association of Child Contact Centres can arrange for children to see their other parent without you having to come into contact with each other. You can find their details at the back of this guide.

Next steps

- Need some help with making agreements with the other parent? The next section on mediation can give you some ideas.
- Money worries causing conflict? Take a look at our guide **Talking about money** for some ideas about how you can sort things out.

What is mediation?

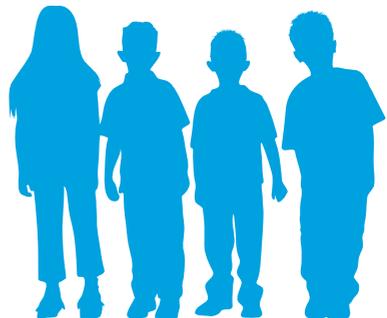
'Mediation' is when separated or separating couples meet with someone who's been trained to help them come to practical decisions: about money, child maintenance, property, or all these issues.

To put it another way, it's a chance for you to sit down and talk to your child's other parent with a neutral professional. Mediation can help parents who have been separated for a long time or have never lived together.

Following a change to the law in 2011, if you are going through a legal separation you are expected to try to sort things out through mediation before you make an application to a court. There are exceptions to this and the rules can be complicated. If this applies to your situation we recommend that you get expert advice.

For most people, successful mediation is all about taking a small step towards improving a tough situation. At first, it may simply mean better communication between two parents at a very stressful and emotionally difficult time.

Secondly, if mediation leads to there being less conflict between you both, it's then much easier to sort out the big issues that result from separation, divorce or getting a new partner. This is important for lessening the impact that changes like these have on the children.



How mediation can help you

- It's a way to help you make decisions before or after you've separated or divorced.
- It can be cheaper than going to court and can lead to positive results.
- It can help you both work together to decide what's best for your child.
- It's a positive way to reduce conflict.
- It can provide a flexible, lasting agreement on issues such as child maintenance.
- It's confidential.

The cost of mediation

It can be difficult to work out how much mediation might cost. If you qualify for legal aid, it could be free. But if you're paying for it yourself, the charges are different for different mediators. The costs of mediation can vary between England, Wales and Scotland too.

Don't be afraid to ask for prices before agreeing to any mediation sessions. And remember that no matter how much it costs, mediation will often be cheaper than going to court.



Finally

Working to reduce conflict in a relationship is never easy, and it's rarely done quickly. It's a long, hard road. But you're clearly determined to work at it and in most cases there's no reason why you can't achieve your goals.

When the going gets tough, just remember the reasons why you want to remove the conflict from your relationship with your child's other parent: it's good for you and, perhaps more importantly, it's good for your children.

If you need more advice or information some of the organisations listed on the following pages may be able to help.



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

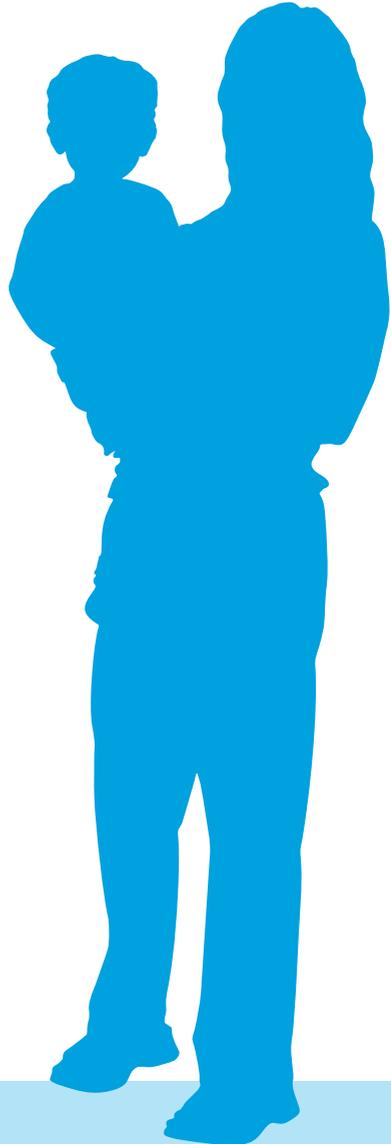
12noon to 8pm

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

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.



HM Revenue & Customs

www.hmrc.gov.uk

Tax Credit helpline:

0345 300 3900

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm,

Saturday 8am to 4pm

Child Benefit helpline:

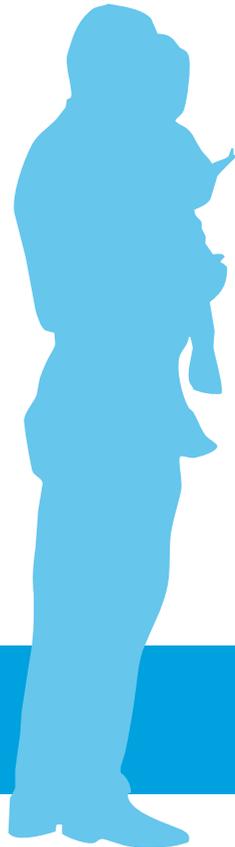
0845 302 1444*

Textphone: 0345 300 3909

Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm,

Saturday 8am to 4pm

Information about Child Benefit and Tax Credits.



Jobcentre Plus

www.gov.uk

Benefits helpline:

0800 055 6688

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Jobsearch helpline:

08456 060 234

**Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm,
Saturday 9am to 1pm**

Government service that gives jobseekers information and services including benefit claims, loans and grants and help with finding a job.

Money Advice Service

www.moneyadvice.org.uk

Money Advice Line:

0300 500 5000

Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Information and advice on all types of financial matters, including about parenting, separation and divorce. Can arrange face-to-face sessions to help parents put budgets together.

National Debtline

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

0808 808 4000

**Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm,
Saturday 9.30am to 1pm**

Free and confidential helpline for advice about dealing with debt.



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**

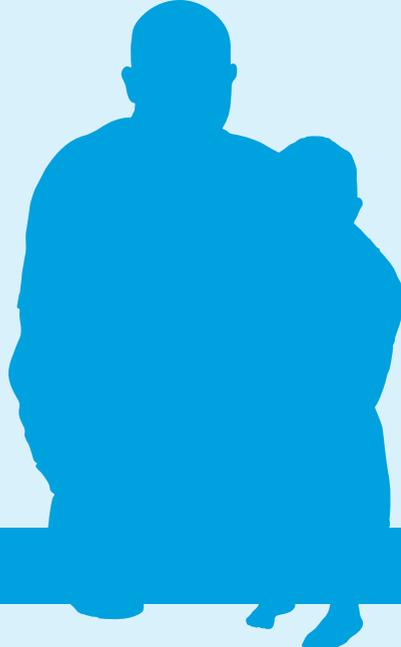
**Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm
and Saturday 10am to 2pm**

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.



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

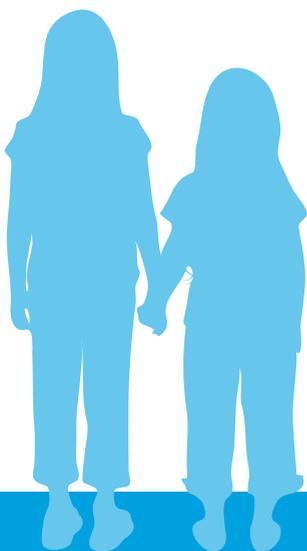
0300 4000 636

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.



You can also download **Parenting Plans** from nfm.org.uk It's a free guide that can be a useful source of information for parents dealing with divorce or separation.



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.relationshipscotland.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

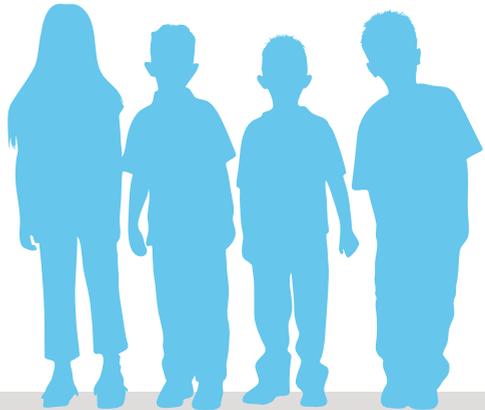
Legal aid helpline:

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

**Open 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 statistics quoted in this guide are based on the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey, the 2008 ONS population projections, the 2007 Families with Children Study and up-to-date Child Support Agency administrative data.



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
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***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.

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