



Divorce 1000

Hearing the voice of 1000* parents with lived experience of separation and divorce¹

¹ 509 separated or divorced Dads and 596 separated or divorced Mums took part on the survey online from 17 March to 16 April 2020. Data was collected independently through www.cint.com

Introduction

Inspired by the thousands of distressed children in our Fegans counselling rooms and the heartbroken parents in our DAD.info forum, this survey was devised to gain insight into the impact of divorce and separation on family life. It is our hope that the lived experience of the 1,000 UK parents surveyed will help those contemplating separation or divorce.

In the below we have shared the survey responses in detail to preserve the integrity of the parent respondent's voices. Alongside our findings we have also shared our understanding based on our therapeutic experience of what these results mean for parents grappling with divorce or separation.

It is of note that the data was collected during the first weeks of the March lockdown. Since then, in our view, the situation for divorced or separated parents has deteriorated; exacerbated by Family Courts operating remotely, by lost contact due to varying interpretations of Covid restrictions and by the known increase in domestic violence. The circumstances of 2020 haven't promoted improvements for separated parents.

About us

Fegans is a Christian children's charity which exists to care for children and families in distress; we do this through counselling over 400 children one to one each week and working with parents to enable every child to become everything they were created to be. The most common reason children are referred to us for counselling is because of family conflict and breakdown.²

Fegans also owns and manages Dad.info, a website aimed at Fathers, but also used extensively by Mothers, as a well of information with access to expert parenting support and advice. It is visited by over 500,000 people each year and has an active forum of over 40,000 Mums and Dads.

We are incredibly grateful to our independent data collection partner CINT, for their help and support in ensuring that the questions and their responses were as insightful and effective as possible.

Our hope is that as a result of this report three things happen.

- 1) Co-parents put children first and stop trying to 'win' at divorce.
- 2) Courts rapidly resolve arrangements putting children's wellbeing first.
- 3) Society supports co-parenting as the norm post separation.

² Taken from Fegans impact data 2018-2020 – more data available in the appendix

Separated parents; hearing their voice

We asked the respondents to pass on advice to those who are embarking on divorce or separation. The shared lessons they have learnt, mistakes they made and things they got right. The responses broadly fall into two themes.

1. Put your children first, justice second.

The most common piece of advice by far (given by 1 in 4 parents) was "Put the children first and prioritise their wellbeing/needs above your own personal feelings"

"We both handled things badly and our child was the loser. If I could reach out to every parent making the same mistakes I would for the sake of the children. We do untold harm for the sake of what we think is best for kids but also for own egos. I hope this study can save children from the pain of traditional post break up parenting."

"Put your feelings and emotions behind you and focus your efforts into being the best dad you can possibly be."

"Always consider your children and their well-being and feelings in every decision you make, not just your own."

"Be honest with your kids but don't burden them with your problems. Above all, reassure the children that you will continue to love them and be there for them, come what may."

"The child comes first put your differences between the ex-partner aside, and don't talk about the other parent in a bad way to anybody or in front of the child."

"Think of the children. Think before you speak and what you say in front of your children. Children pick up the negativity and it harms and colours the view of their parent. Be honest and make them feel secure. Divorce and separation can feel like the safety net has been pulled away. Make them feel loved and time, quality time is what they want more than anything. No one should be seen as the enemy."

2. Stay amicable

While Fegans acknowledges that divorce evokes a maelstrom of powerful emotions such as anger, rejection, bitterness, bereavement or even relief, most parents agree that children are not able to manage these emotional burdens. Our therapeutic experience recommends therefore, as far as possible, parents refrain from involving children in their version of the truth, or revenge, or complaints about an ex, however satisfying this might be, it can cause great damage for children, as we frequently experience in our counselling rooms.

In terms of "conflict resolution" over 20% of respondents specifically advised "staying amicable and keeping communication with the other parent open"

"We are amicable and he helps out during difficult times."

"I think my ex-partner and I have progressed to a point where we both agree to disagree on certain issues but must try to co-operate with each other for the sake of my child."

"We communicate when we need to and are quite flexible with arrangements."

"We have a respect and love for each other beyond separation and we still support each other when necessary as a family member."

"We co parent, attend every event together and school activities."

"Try very hard to keep your relationship amicable - the children notice this and it makes it less stressful for them if they see the parents still getting along."

"Maintaining a good relationship with the other party is important and from our perspective shows the children it doesn't always have to be bad after a break-up."

Over one in 20 specifically mentioned not 'weaponising' children or using them to point score against each other; examples of this would be using access as a bargaining tool or criticising the other parent's behaviour, similar numbers advised against arguing in front of kids and not bad-mouthing the ex.

"Whatever you might feel about your ex it is unfair and damaging to communicate this to your children."

"Put the kids first. DON'T use them as weapons to hurt the other parent and don't try to brain wash them against the other parent and don't allow your extended family to do this either."

"Don't treat your children as bargaining chips to score points off each other."

"Do not use your children as weapons. Your relationship with your child is not the same as the one with your ex."

"Try and remain friendly, don't – back stab, blame or get friends and family to take sides. Putting your ex 'in the shit', won't benefit you or your children in any way. Depriving ex's of 'child contact' deprives the child of 'parent contact'."

"Try to remain calm and avoid any arguments in front of the children, something we, at the beginning, found extremely difficult."

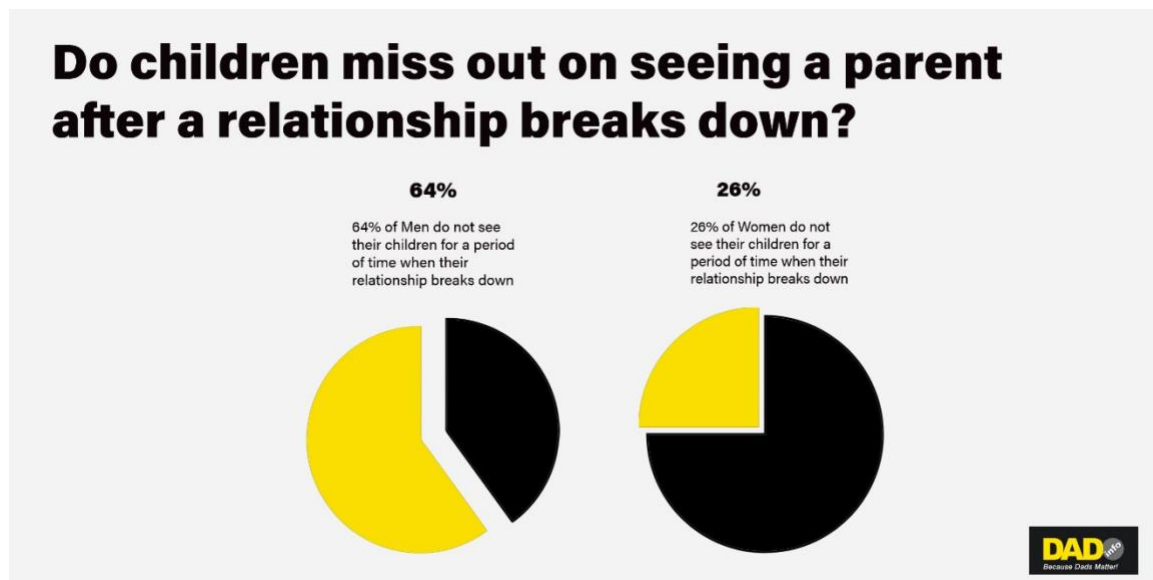
"Do not put the kids in the middle of a personal fight. It's not their fault. I have a normal relationship with all four of my children and their grandchildren but at the time it was touch and go if I'd ever see them again."

Separated parents; sharing their experiences

We have grouped the survey findings into four core areas to enable easy digestion, relationship with our children, co-parenting, the law courts and other forms of support, such as mediation.

1. Relationship with our children following separation.

Almost two thirds of Dads (64%) do not see their children for a period of time when the relationship with the other parent breaks down, compared with Mums (26%). 27% of fathers do not see their children for between 1-3 months, rising to 41% not seeing their children for 4 months or longer. Almost 1 in 5 dads (19%) did not see their children for over 6 months.



This suggests a gender divide with 1 in 3 non-resident Mums benefitting from seeing their children within just 1-2 weeks and much of the remainder within 4 weeks.

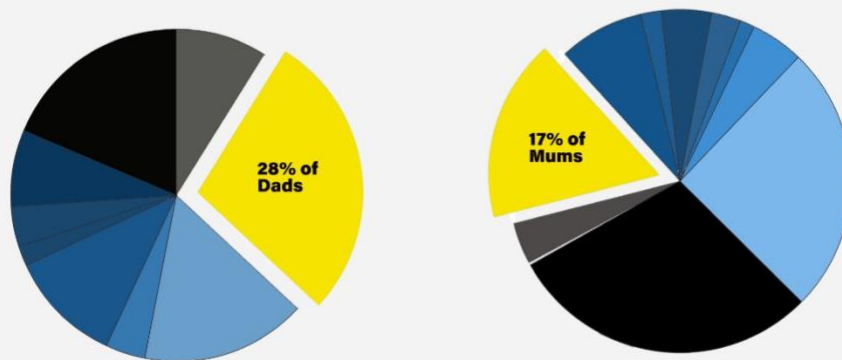
25% of Dads who haven't seen their children for 6 months or more. This is reflected in many of the posts on DAD.info forum which are from men desperate to have a relationship with their children.

38% of Mums said that their children did not have contact with their ex-partner.

Avoiding conflict with an ex is the main reason for parents not seeing children. Almost half of parents said the main reason for not seeing their children was to avoid further conflict with their partner, this was much more commonly cited by Dads (28%) than Mums (17%).

Following conflict, Dads are twice as likely as mums not to see children due to delays in court process or being too far from the family home; received wisdom would say that the courts are the number one reason but our data indicates conflict with the ex is a bigger problem. This suggests that a powerful strategy for parents to adopt could be prioritising conflict resolution through mediation rather than legal recourse, as highlighted by the case studies in the appendix.

Avoiding conflict with an ex is the main reason parents identified for not seeing their kids



38% of Mums reported that their children do not spend time with their Dads but of those who do spend time with both parents, our survey confirmed that in spite of newer technology available, 50% of parents communicate with their children by phone when they are with their other parent, followed by a third through text and WhatsApp with a quarter on Facetime/Video/Skype.

DAD.info and Fegans CEO Ian Soars offers some reassurance to separated parents who are unable to resume their normal contact at this time. "Kids are looking for your intent. Yes, you might not be able to physically see your kids right now, but you can work to show them through video calls, letters, pictures any form of communication that your heart is still all theirs. You should find every method available to you to say that you are there for them and then they will remember that."

2. Co-Parenting

In this context it is interesting to see that most parents no longer subscribe to an interpretation of co-parenting as being a binary 50% *split in responsibility* (only 14% of Dads and 15% of Mums think this). We were happy to find that 27% of Mums and 22% of Dads agree that despite being separated their parental responsibilities remain in full. However still a large proportion of parents are looking for a 50:50 *split in time spent with their children* (38% of Dads and 37% of Mums).

Parents identified “equal rights and decision making for our child” (47%) as the most common definition of co-parenting. In addition, a large proportion of parents surveyed also recognise that having a good parenting relationship and good communication is what it is all about. For those who did see their children and had a good relationship with their ex, a number of trends emerged such as remaining friends, time passing, putting kids first, attending family events together, showing respect to other parent and complimenting ex-partners on being a good parent.

Interestingly, Dads seem more confident than mums that their relationship with their ex-partner would improve over time; we think this bears further study.

The law courts

Conflict with ex partners, rather than court proceedings, is cited as the most common reasons for delays in parents seeing their children post separation.

Around a third of respondents (39% of Dads and 31% of Mums) used the family courts to deal with child arrangements. The majority of parents who used the family courts to agree child arrangements found it helpful and resulting in a good outcome but sadly for one in ten the experience and outcomes were described as awful.

“It was stressful but ultimately helped us to get good arrangements for our child (47% Dads and 47% Mums).

“It was helpful, I felt heard and our child now has good arrangements” (37% Dads and 33% Mums)

“It was an awful experience, has made our parenting relationship worse, and the arrangements for our child are not good.” (10.58% Dads and 10.53% Mums).

Most of the respondents were answering during the first few weeks of lock down and since that time the law courts have become even more significantly under pressure.

Fegans has welcomed a recent [report](#) by the Family Solutions Group which calls for a radical change in how parents separate in the UK to better protect children. As advocates of effective co-parenting, Fegans is fully in agreement with the recommendations made in the report which promote children’s welfare and a

cooperative parenting approach. The report, 'What About Me?' warns that parental conflict causes psychological harm to children, impacting their long-term mental health and future life chances.

"We whole-heartedly welcome this report from the Family Solutions Group which puts children first and sets out a clear case for giving parents the motivation, confidence and tools to resolve conflicts outside of court and to co-parent effectively as a unit together," says Fegans CEO Ian Soars. "Every year, 280,000 children see their parents separate. How those separations are handled will affect the rest of their lives."

Other forms of support during separation and divorce

32% of Dads and 25% of Mums cited family mediation as a significant form of support during separation and divorce, nearly as high as support from extended family (3 out of 10 parents). 1 in 5 parents turned to online digital support. Dad.info's forum offers online support and care to the thousands of parents who turn to it to share information, advice and to be helped through the grief and fear that accompanies separation and divorce.

Both men and women sought counselling for themselves followed by couples counselling and counselling for children. One of Fegans' professional counsellors explains how therapy can be helpful;

"When parents separate, the child can feel a range of emotions. A younger child may cry a lot, become very clingy and not want to go to school or nursery, or even fear that a parent may not return for them. Some will also struggle to get to sleep or will not want to sleep alone. Older children may feel angry, blame themselves for the separation, become withdrawn, cry a lot, be moody and resentful towards one or both of the parents. Sometimes the child may self-harm or become reckless in their behaviour.

The child needs to grieve the loss of their parents being together. Their family life as they knew it has changed forever. It can take several months or even years to come to terms with their new way of life. Parents can help their child by talking to them about how their life will be, answering any questions they may have in a calm, sensitive manner but sometimes speaking to a neutral adult outside of the family is needed for the child to speak freely and process their emotions without feeling they are hurting their parents feelings."

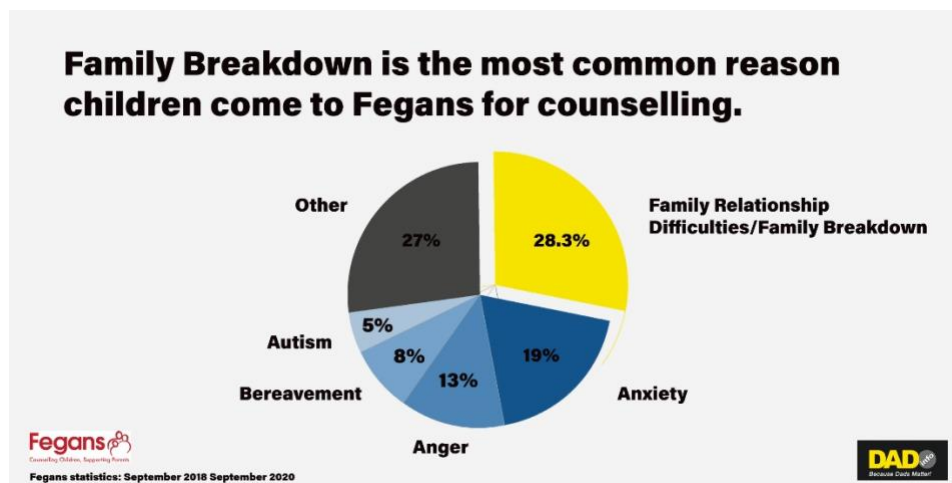
Separated parents; Fegans' approach

It is hard to read some of the responses to this survey without an increasingly heavy heart. Clearly there is a greater cost to separation than the well-known and reported financial cost; there is also the emotional impact to consider; to ourselves and to our children.

Thousands of DAD.info forum posts suggest that many parents who separate are not prepared for what it likely to happen and are suffering as a result. We would love this survey to educate parents and provide guidance for avoiding the unnecessary distress and damage that others have experienced.

The responses in the survey highlight the potential damage to children when separating parents are not supported effectively. Analysing their lived experience reassures us that with the right support it is possible to “do divorce and separation well”. When Fegans works with parents in recovery groups, online and in our therapy rooms we recommend that parents:

1. Agree to share your decision to divorce, with your children, together.
2. Have an agreed understanding of how you are going to co-parent, when you will each have time with the children.
3. Agree as many common house rules as you can.
4. Keep as much the same as you can; schools, bedrooms, homes, grandparent access.
5. Do NOT blame each other; it may make you feel better in the moment but shakes your child's faith in their only real rock.
6. Do parent evenings, school matches together.
7. Commit to spend MORE quality time with them...not less.
8. Give time for your children to say what they are feeling. It will be painful...but don't close them down.



Fegans sees 400 children in our counselling rooms each week and the number one reason for referral is family conflict and breakdown but there is always hope as CEO Ian Soars explains:

“Separation is an incredibly stressful and upsetting time, and we can’t always protect our children fully from the impact of a broken relationship. However, research shows that children benefit from ‘shared parenting.’ This is not just about how much time they have with each parent - although that is important - but it is also about how they experience the relationship between their parents.” At Fegans and DAD.info we believe that there is always hope. We are passionate about helping families to traverse the post-separation landscape as well as possible, for ourselves and for our children. If we get that right, the pain of today can give way to hope for tomorrow.”

Fegans counsellor, Debbie Pattison echoes this and offers this advice to parents;

“Even if the separation isn't amicable, resist speaking badly of the other parent. Help your child to adjust to the differences in the two households; such as, what is acceptable and what is not in Mum and Dads houses. Try to keep to the usual structure and routines and maintain any activities they were used to. This will help the child to feel secure. For a child who is struggling to sleep or stay asleep, have a night time 'wind down'. This can be a hot chocolate, warm bath, story and no screens an hour before bed. Sometimes relaxing music helps too.

It is extremely important to reassure your child that the separation is not their fault. Inform their school, nursery, childminder of the separation, so that they are aware of what is happening and can support your child too. Above all, listen to your child and encourage them to talk about their feelings and emotions.”

We felt it fitting to end with hearing from more parents who kindly took part in our survey;

“I know it's really hard I thought about taking my own life because I thought there wasn't anything left in my life and my ex was being very difficult. but I realised my daughter needed me to be there for her so I was the better person and now we get on brilliantly. It was very hard for me but it was all worth it for my daughter.”

“Spend as much time with your children as possible.”

“Stay in touch with your children no matter what.”

“Do everything you can, make any sacrifice, to maintain your relationship with your children.”

“Please try all you can to come to some arrangement long term for access to the children. This can only be good for all involved if the child knows they are loved by both parents.”

“Above all, re-assure the children that you will continue to love them and be there for them, come what may.”

Further support –

If you are considering separation or divorce or are currently going through this process you might find some of these resources helpful;

Parenting after Separation Course

This free online course has been developed by the team at Fegans to help separated parents. It uses short animated videos to provide helpful tips and strategies to support your child during and after separation.

<https://www.dad.info/divorce-and-separation/free-course-parenting-after-separation>

Online counselling and parent support

Complete the referral form below to request 1-1 counselling and parent support sessions via Zoom video conferencing. Please note a charitable donation will be requested for this service.

<https://www.fegans.org.uk/referrals/>

Parent support forum

Visit our free DAD.info forum to get support from other thousands of other parents and ask a question to one of our expert moderators.

www.dad.info

Find a mediator

Rather than head straight to an expensive solicitor why not try mediation first? Visit the National directory of Family Mediation to find a mediator near to you.

<https://www.nfm.org.uk/>

Interested in finding out more about the family legal system?

This is the report we referred to earlier, which provides greater background into the changes required in the legal system to support separating families further.

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/what-about-me-reframing-support-for-families-following-parental-separation/>

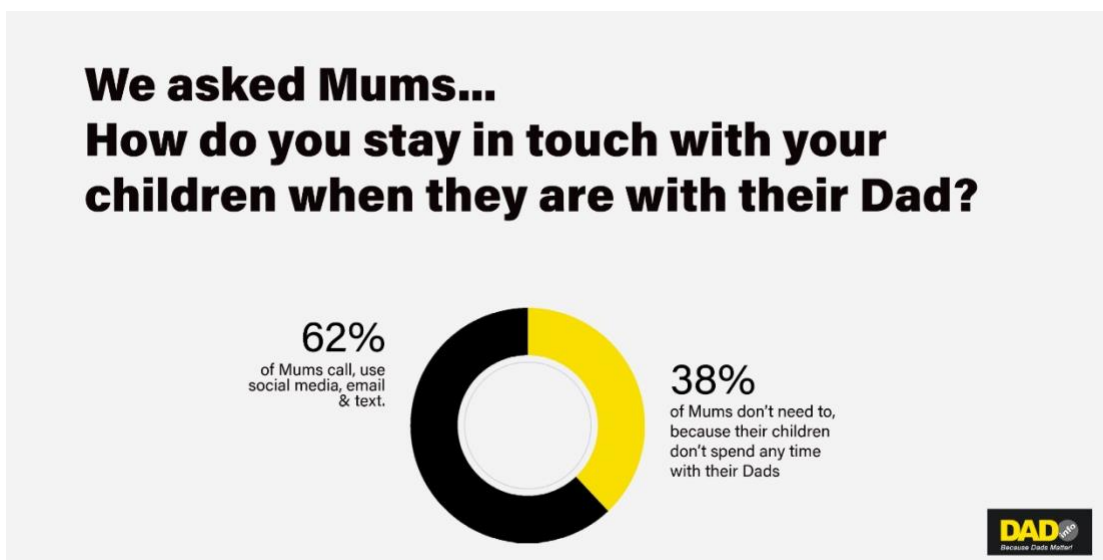
Appendix 1

Dad.info Survey Findings

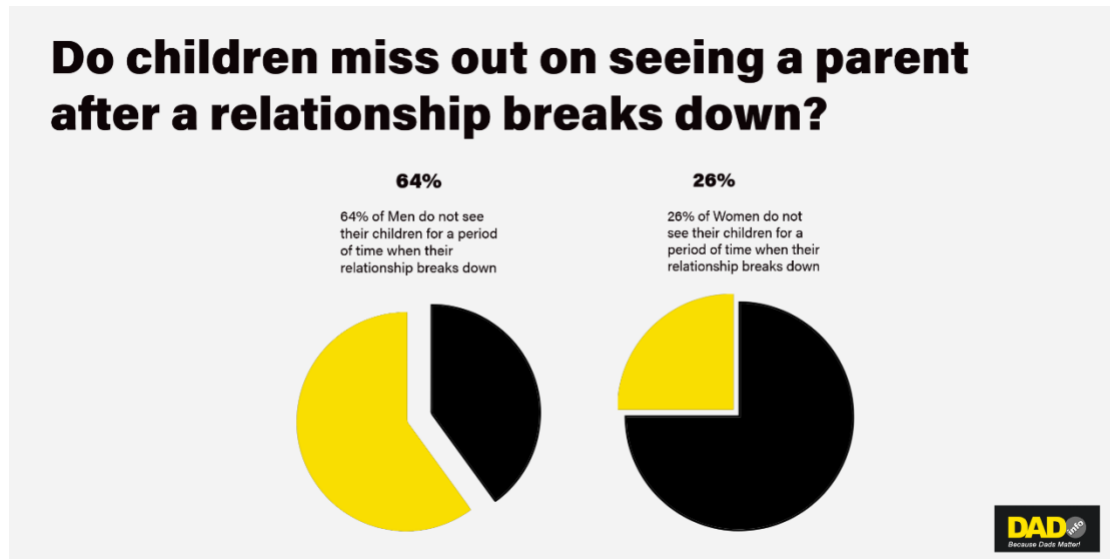
Every year 280,000 children see their parents separate (*source: From the estimate of Christina McGhee in 2008, see McGhee, C. (2008). Separation and Divorce. Helping Parents to help Children. Published and Produced by Resolution*)



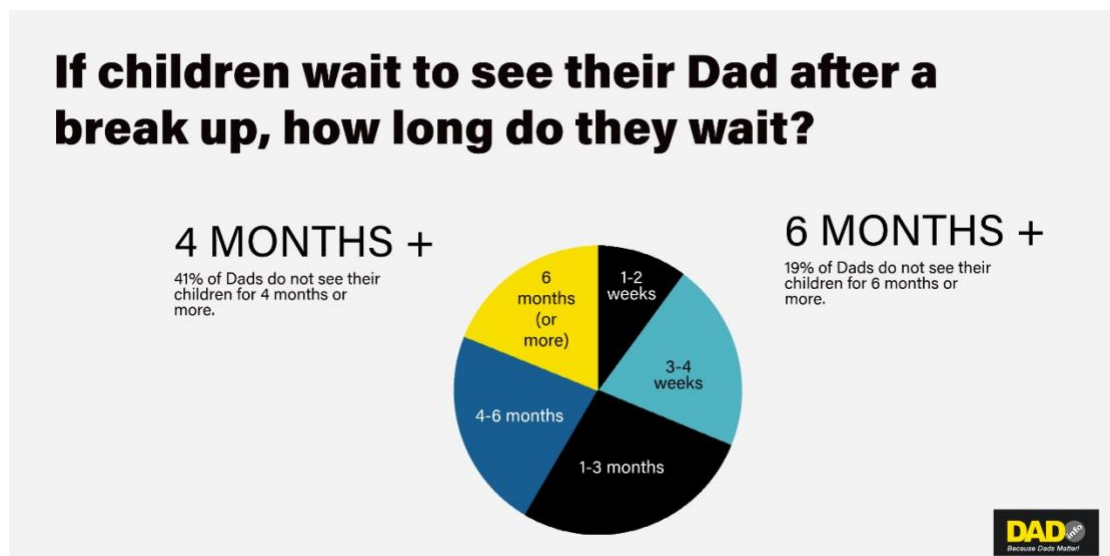
38% of Mums say their children do not spend time with their Dads following separation or divorce.



Almost two thirds of Dads (64%) do not see their children for a period of time when the relationship with the other parents breaks down, compared with Mums (26%).

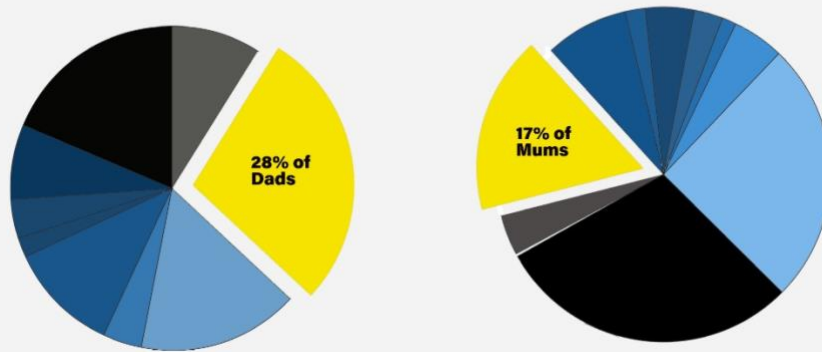


41% of these Dads do not see their children for 4 months or longer and almost 1 in 5 Dads (19%) did not see their children for over 6 months.



The main reason parents gave for not seeing their children was to avoid further conflict with their ex. This was much more common in Dads (28%) than Mums (17%).

Avoiding conflict with an ex is the main reason parents identified for not seeing their kids



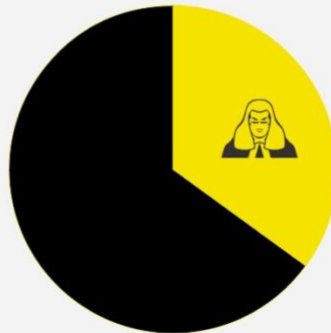
Of the Dads who went over 6 months without seeing their children, one in four were told by their ex-partner that their children did not want to see them.

One in four of the Dads who didn't see their children for 6+ months were told by their ex that their child refused to see them.



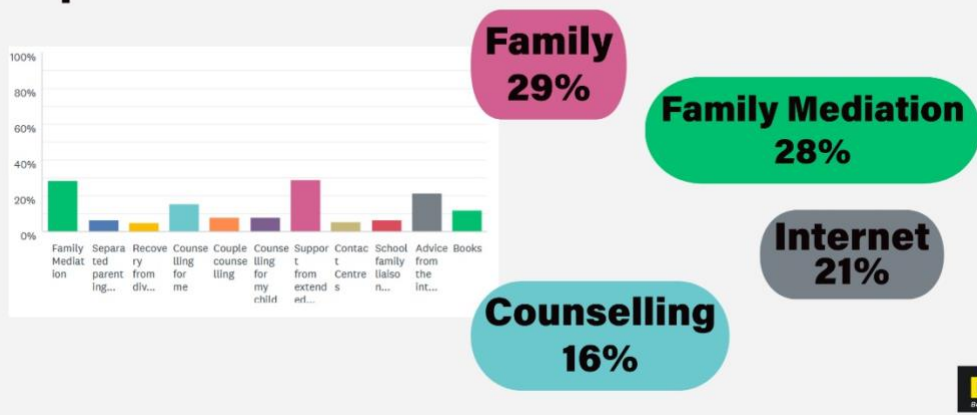
A third of parents surveyed used the family courts to make childcare arrangements during their separation.

A third of parents surveyed used the family courts to make childcare arrangements



Family mediation is a significant source of support during separation (cited by 32% of Dads and 25% of Mums) as was support from extended family (28% of Dads and 30% of Mums). Over 20% of parents sought advice from the internet.

Where do parents turn for help during separation or divorce?

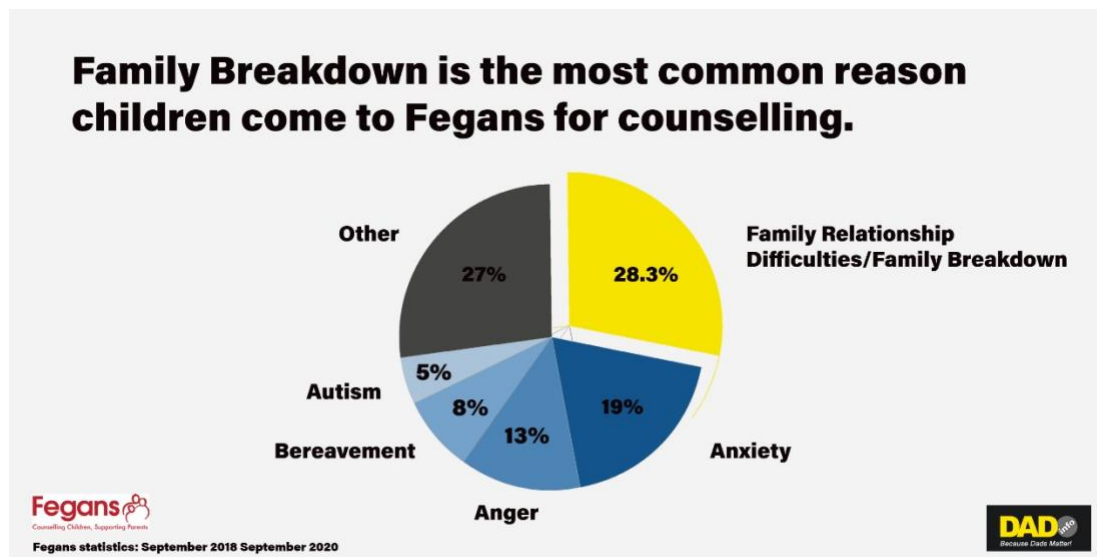


The most common piece of advice (cited by over one in four parents) was to “put the children first and prioritise their wellbeing or needs above your own personal feelings.”

Fegans provides professional one-to-one counselling for over 400 children every week.

The single most common reason for children to be referred to Fegans for counselling is family relationship difficulties and the effects of family breakdown

(28.3% of referrals to Fegans for counselling from September 2018-September 2020)



Appendix 2

Parent Case Studies

There is such a negative thing about separated parents - that the pain will last forever, you will never be able to speak to him again, he has done this awful thing and I am pleased that is not our story. Not our children's story.

Emma, separated mother of 3 girls

Emma's Story*

Emma has three girls, (14,12 & 8) and has been separated from her boyfriend for 6 years.

Emma was in a psychologically abusive relationship. Still very much in love with the father of her children, leaving her ex was frightening. Emma initially thought breaking up with her partner would be the end. She hadn't considered how they would share care of their young children. She was so disillusioned with her ex that she thought he wouldn't be bothered about seeing them. Their initial solution was to divide weekends between them, the children going to their Grandmother's home on father's weekend. Emma though felt manipulated and still under her ex-partner's control. Urged on by well-meaning friends Emma contacted solicitors. Her concerns for her partner's mental health meant when the solicitors asked if she was frightened about the children being in their father's care, she answered yes. She knew he was drinking and she wanted reassurance. A letter was sent to her ex stating she wouldn't allow him to look after the children until he had completed a psychiatric assessment. They were set to go to court.

Before you go to court you have to see a mediator.

Emma and her ex attended mediation. As there had been abuse in their relationship special arrangements were made. The mediation was very painful, but it meant they avoided the expense and extreme upset of court. They came to a personal agreement about their finances and how they would care for their children. Emma's ex agreed to see a psychiatrist and received a partial diagnosis.

Emma feels she and her ex are now in a good place, respectful of each other and able to enjoy sharing memories of their children on birthdays, attend social events and her family can shake his hand and respect him as the children's father. Her children now enjoy a wonderful relationship with their father, a better relationship than they could have expected if they'd stayed together. They were two unhappy people, who broke up and went their separate ways to find happiness and are better parents apart.

Emma in her own words:

The Break-Up

I just needed to get away from him. I didn't think what was on the other side. It was highly emotional; I was madly in love with him still and I didn't initially imagine what life would be like on the other side.

One morning, the kid's dad has flown at me, he really wants to hit me and I kind of want him to hit me because that would have made the decision for me, I was crying and my little girl put her arm around me and said "Mummy it's time for you to tell Daddy to stop now, that's it, leave you alone" she has witnessed all that upset, we have spoken about it since and she knows it is called abuse. When her father and I broke up she said 'my heart's broken' and my heart was broken as well.

I had people giving their opinions and saying you'll never be able to be in the same room again together, and you should never speak to him again. People even said if he wasn't going to pay for the children, which is what he said initially, then don't let him see them.

It was very messy, and he was so manipulative, and I was still so much under his control. He said the kids would come and live with him and I said that wasn't going to happen. It was the first time I said No to him in 10 years.

Solicitors

I was worried about him moving back to London with the kids and I said I would like him, for my piece of mind, to see a psychiatrist before we moved forward. That caused a lot of problems because he got a letter from the solicitor saying, 'you can't see your children until you've seen a psychiatrist'. I couldn't live with myself as the only adult who knew how frightening he could be, I needed to do everything to be sure my children would be safe. It was very upsetting for him.

I was thinking about going to court, I wanted a piece of paper saying the children would be safe, but you are never going to get that.

Family Mediation

Solicitors are so harsh; it is all about the documents. Mediators understand that this is two people who are very hurt and behaving like children themselves and they kept bringing it back to the 'actual children'. The mediators are the voice of the kids in that room.

Co-Parenting

Where we are now is good. We share a lot; we share photographs on the girl's birthdays, our memories. They are the only person in the world you have had that little

baby with so it is nice you can share those memories together. Its good we can be at birthday parties and family and friends shake his hand. They know if they take sides the children are always going to pick Daddy.

He has always paid their money, and even though it is a contribution to the children that he should be paying for, I always say thank you and appreciate he has to earn that money. We have got to a more respectful place, thank god.

We were two unhappy people, we separated and made ourselves happy. It means you can be happy for each other.

There is such a negative thing about separated parents - that the pain will last forever, you will never be able to speak to him again, he has done this awful thing and I am pleased that is not our story. Not our children's story.

*Emma is not her real name, we have also changed some minor identifying details to preserve Emma's anonymity.

She gave the baby a name and I wasn't consulted at all. I was left in the dark.

Bill337, divorced Dad of 3 girls

Bill337's Story*

Bill337, has three girls (7,4 & 2), he has been divorced for two years.

Bill337's wife left him when she was pregnant with their third child explaining she hadn't been happy for seven years and was disillusioned with their marriage. She left with their children and for two weeks Bill337 grew increasingly frustrated and upset as she refused to be in touch or tell him where their children were. For the next six months the children and his ex lived in a council hostel before moving back in with family. Bill337's ex wasn't speaking directly with him, messages were passed by his ex's brother and they reached an informal agreement that he could see the children every Saturday 10am – 6pm. Each week these hours were eroded. Bill337 saw his new baby for just a few seconds on the day of her birth and wasn't allowed to hold her. His children were asking Bill337 if they could stay overnight with him, so he decided to go to court.

Naïve about the court system, Bill337 rung a solicitor and spent a fortune having forms completed.

Before you go to court you have to see a mediator. However, in Bill337's case the mediator signed him off without attempting mediation. Bill337 needed regular contact with all his children, at this point he was spending just one hour a fortnight with his new-born child and the mediator agreed court was the most direct approach.

A child arrangement order was agreed, with overnights and a recital about allowing more time with the baby as she grew older. The result of the court hearings was increased conflict between Bill337 and his ex-wife. Bill337 reapplied to the courts after his ex-wife broke the court order and withheld access to his children. He had called the police to try and enforce the court order but as these are civil matters, the police were kind, but there is little they can do except advise a return to court.

This time Bill337 self-represented at court. He felt he was fairly dealt with and new child arrangements were made which gave him more time, overnights mid-week and Friday to Monday alternative weekends with his older children, half the summer holidays and longer times with his youngest child. Just as this agreement was made, the first Covid Lockdown came into effect and like many fathers Bill337 lost contact over concerns about the virus's spread. He still hopes for more time with his children and looks forward to the children growing older and having their own opinions about how they share their time between Mum and Dad.

Bill337 in his own words:

The Break-Up

We were married for close to 8 years and one day she told me she had been unhappy for the last 7 years. She became disillusioned and she just decided to leave with the kids. She left while she was pregnant with our third child.

Then there was a two-week gap, there was a lot of confusion. I kept asking 'where are the children?' and for some reason she didn't want to tell me. I went around asking family members and I got the same reply 'she's told me not to tell you anything'.

I was just confused and upset and frustrated and angry. I looked up the five stages of grief and it fits in with that. The main issue was not knowing where my children were and not being able to see them. One day she passed on a message through her brother that she was no longer talking to me.

She gave the baby a name and I wasn't consulted at all. I was left in the dark.

I visited the hospital to see the baby after she was born. The mother's sister repeatedly told me to wait outside. I was present at the birth of my other children. I left the hospital in tears, having only seen my child for a matter of seconds and not holding her. I made another attempt to see the baby. The mother said I was to see the baby in the back of my car for 20 minutes (outside their flat). On a cold winter night, I saw her for ten minutes in my car.

Mediation

I had to sit with a mediator, do a MIAM, it was a brief phone call with them, a video call which lasted for 20-30 minutes. I just explained to them that I had been seeing the kids every Saturday, but she refuses to let the kids stay overnight. I also told them I haven't seen my newborn child. The mediator said I was better off going straight to court as the longer I leave it without seeing the children, things will just get worse for me. They said there was no point inviting my ex to mediation and they just signed me off to make a court application.

Court

The main issue for going to court was the kids were asking can they stay the night with me. Their mother said 'they aren't ready for that yet' and I was asking myself, well when will they be ready?

I was completely clueless about the court process and ended up ringing a solicitor and giving them lots of money to fill in an application form. The application form was daunting, I printed it out and it was something like 30 pages long.

I had three court hearings last year and I hired a barrister for each of those. That was very expensive, £900 a hearing.

When I left court after the three hearings, I thought it was all finished, but my ex was looking for tit for tat, troublemaking. I ended up calling the police. .They did their best and went up to the flats to speak to the mother and her brother. They tried to promote contact, but it didn't really get anywhere, and the police said the only thing you can do is go back to court.

Back to Court

I went back (to court) and told them what had happened and told them I was asking to spend my time with the children and it wasn't being given. They were magistrate judges and they were sensible and they believed that I should not have come back to court, they told both of us they didn't want us back in court and they made it a final hearing. They gave me what I asked for.

While the court hearing was going on that is when the lockdown started happening for the first time. So many dads were blocked from seeing their children and the same thing happened to me. Because of the risk of Covid, the mother wasn't allowing me to see the children. I asked for video calling, she said you can't use my internet, you need to hand over a phone and provide data.

I would love to have more time with the children now, but I have to deal with how it is in the court order. I hope, when the children are at an age with their own understanding and their own voice they can decide if they want to spend more time with their Dad.

I don't want to become a repeat customer going in and out of court arguing for 1 extra night it's not really worth the stress and hassle.

Bill337 is the name this father uses on the [Dad.info](#) forum.

Appendix 3

Quotes from respondents

We are older and wiser.

I never bad mouth her to my son. Always encourage him to have a normal relationship and we co-parent well even when we are not getting on with each other.

We are amicable and he helps out during difficult times.

We are doing well.

We have discussed were we both went wrong and now get on quite well together.

We get on a lot better now than we did then.

We have always put the children first and agreed its best for all of us.

We are amicable when around our child. They never see any conflict between us.

I think my ex-partner and I have progressed to a point where we both agree to disagree on certain issues but must try to co-operate with each other for the sake of my child.

We don't harbour any grudges.

Life is too short.

He's a good father.

We are still friends and often attend family get-togethers with our new partners.

We communicate when we need to and are quite flexible with arrangements.

We both loved the children.

We communicate regularly, exchange gifts and cards at birthday and Christmas.

Very supportive.

We followed parenting courses.

We have a respect and love for each other beyond separation and we still support each other when necessary as a family member.

We are still on friendly terms following initial animosity. We take joint decisions regarding the children and are mutually supportive emotionally.

We want to be amicable for the kids' sake.

A long time has elapsed. We were both immature and young when we were married. Now all is forgotten and forgiven and we are good friends. We still exist as a family.

We have reached a point of calm and clarity that only time could heal. It takes time for everybody to adjust to the shifts and new territory that comes with a separation.

We co parent, attend every event together and school activities.

Putting the kids first helped us to see we were being silly.

I now have a fantastic relationship with her mum and she's a great mum.

We both behave like adults, we do not criticize each other to the children.

As time has gone by and the children have grown up without any real damage to their education and appear to be unscathed by the experience it's like water under the bridge. I live near my ex wife and children now and there is no animosity between us and we are reasonably friendly with each other.

We had a very amicable divorce, everything was handled by us both outside of court including arrangements with the children. I helped her move house and we remained good friends.

No conflict, respect shown from both sides, polite and friendly to each other.

Me and her mum get on really well now and I call in whenever I want to see them.

We both as a couple agreed to get on for the sake of our child. Maintenance was set up and planned and arranged visiting time and also child share was set up by the both of us.

Advice

Make sure the child understands they aren't the reason in anyway and that you love them and work out ways to stay in contact directly and always check in with them to say hello so they know you are always thinking of them. Work towards a friendship with your ex partner and put the past behind you and offer support if they need it. Put your feelings and emotions behind you and focus your efforts into being the best dad you can possibly be.

Whatever you might feel about your ex it is unfair and damaging to communicate this to your children.

Children need both parents and stability, unless there is a risk to the child/children then it should be maintained and parents should never speak about the other in a bad way.

Be as open with your child about what is happening as you feel able to - kids are extremely observant and can tell when things are not right. Plus, they will eventually find out sooner or later and it makes sense to make the process go as smoothly as possible.

Put the kids first. DON'T use them as weapons to hurt the other parent and don't try to brain wash them against the other parent and don't allow your extended family to do this either.

Be fair. Try and keep calm and balanced. Time will heal wounds and your children need to see both parents.

Children pick up on everything, try to keep disagreements and negative comments to yourself when the child is around.

Don't treat your children as bargaining chips to score points off each other.

Spend as much time with your children as possible.

Keep calm, be honest and reliable.

Don't give the other parent too much scope to dominate the parenting from the outset of the break-up. Stay involved and committed to still being the same parent to them that you've always been.

Try and keep things civil. It isn't about your best interests, it's about the child's best interests. Make the effort, don't make another life away from them and forget about them... but then play the guilt card to attempt to keep a relationship with the child when it's clear there is no interest. The child grows up and realises that.

Always try to keep in touch because you don't know if it could get better if you don't let it.

Do everything you can, make any sacrifice, to maintain your relationship with your children. Nothing else matters until they're independent adults.

Do not make excuses for the other parent

Please try all you can to come to some arrangement long term for access to the children. This can only be good for all involved if the child knows they are loved by both parents.

Try to do best by the child and to leave their own personal feelings out of it. That child needs both a mum and a dad in their life wherever possible, obviously there are occasions that safeguarding has to become paramount and if it's not safe for a child to be with one or both of the parents then this must happen.

Keep talking and always tell the truth to the kids.

Try not to be defensive and think how the children would want the other parent to be treated. Keep them in mind in all decisions and what makes them happy.

Be open minded and don't try and use the child as leverage.

Try to keep things civil and avoid confrontation in front of the children.

Never bad mouth the other parent to the children, however badly you were treated.

Be honest, do not make the children take sides, do not run down their other parent.

Stay civil to each other and let your child know you both still love them.

Take a deep breath and don't rise to little things.

Don't be poisonous, you'll only lose the child in the longer run.

Try to stay friends with your ex partner for the sake of everyone especially everyone's mental well-being.

Always consider your children and their well-being and feelings in every decision you make, not just your own.

Try and remain friendly, don't - back-stab, blame or get friends and family to take sides. Putting your ex 'in the shit', won't benefit you or your children in any way. Depriving ex's of 'child contact' deprives the child of 'parent contact'

Try very hard to keep your relationship amicable - the children notice this and it makes it less stressful for them if they see the parents still getting along.

Never use the children as a weapon because your relationship has broken down.

Do not continue your arguments after divorce but look to the future and do not degrade the other parent to your children.

Don't put off the end of a bad relationship because you think you are putting the children first. Years later they told me they wished it had been sorted far earlier.

Aim to create the best possible outcome for your children.

Don't forget that you are both responsible for your children. They are not your possessions. Nor are you babysitting when you have them. You are parenting.

Don't lie to your children but don't badmouth your ex, they are still a loving parent.

Before living apart, see a marriage guidance counsellor, even if it's just you.

I know it is sometimes easier said than done but for the sake of your children try to put your differences aside & after listening to what your children want, try to agree the best possible package of care for them. Try not to bad-mouth your ex-partner & any new partners they may acquire & try to be consistent in your co-parenting. Be honest with your kids but don't burden them with your problems. Above all, re-assure the children that you will continue to love them and be there for them, come what may.

Get things legally sorted before your ex is in another relationship as this will mess things up.

Never slag off the other parent to your children. I am always polite about their dad and never negative, he's rude about me all the time to them.. in time kids grow up and realise the truth and what's what...

Just try your best and sort things out among yourselves for the sake of the child. Tell your kids you love them and although you are not there, reassure them you still love them.

Make sure you are pretty sure he will stay around even if you split. Try and keep things on civil terms for the child. Don't argue or air grievances in-front of the child. Don't rush in to having a child. Find out where your partner's morals and beliefs lie when it comes to having children and how he would deal with the situation of a split was ever to happen.

Don't take it out on the other parent it's not good for the child.

Don't argue in front of kids. Keep any tension or arguments behind closed doors.

If the terms are not friendly use family members and never send letters texts etc that can be used against you.

Don't think about the past just think about your child and their future.

I have no new angle on this and the message is simple to convey but difficult to practise: count to 10 in the bad moments with your ex and try hard to put the kids' needs first. A counsel in perfection that should always be your goal but which you will not always achieve. Just try afresh each day. You'll get there.

Remember if the children are young that this can be a traumatic time for them as well as the parents just show them love and understanding talk to them listen to their problems views and worries treat them as people not just a product of a relationship and most important both parents should make and let them know that they are loved wanted and cherished and important in both the parents lives.

Do not argue or shout Infront of the children. Make them feel as safe as possible and ensure they know they are loved, it isn't their fault.

Be civil to each other as a kid should feel safe and not feel that they are to blame for the divorce.

Do not let the children hear you bad mouthing the other parent; always stay calm.

Don't use children to settle a score with your partner. If other parent wants to be part of their life then be reasonable in ensuring that happens.

The child comes first put your differences between the ex partners aside, and don't talk about the other parent in a bad way to anybody or in front of the child.

Mutual respect and not put your other partner down in front of your child.

Love your children unconditionally. This will help buffer the inevitable shocks to the family interrelationships.

Be aware that this is likely to be the most emotional period in your life. Make sure you pay close attention to your mental health and don't delay in getting help if needed.

Stay positive against all the difficulties. Things get easier for everyone as long as no one creates further problems/ difficulties.

Don't use children as a weapon during a divorce. The best gift to your children is no animosity.

Discuss what you will say to the children so they do not know half truths.

Don't let your Divorce change your relationship with your children.

Do not use your children as weapons. Your relationship with your child is not the same as the one with your ex.

I've been divorced three times during my life so far with the last two relationships both having two children so I'm experienced in separation matters in this respect. Both sets of my children have not suffered from the events and on reflection however bad it may seem they had the best of both their parents on a one to one basis during their growing up. If you try and be calm and take on board the circumstances it will all turn out okay in the end. Try to forget the fear factor and be open and honest with each other for the sake of your child/children.

It is difficult, it can be upsetting at times but the main goal is the well being of the children involved. It has to be looked at by both parties with no narcissism. doing what's best for them isn't always what's best for you. Maintaining a good relationship with the other party is important and from our perspective shows the children it doesn't always have to be bad after a break up.

Don't slag off your ex to your child, or in front of them. Your ex is still their parent and it's unfair.

Do not use any children as pawns in any separation they are innocent.

Make time for your child they grow up quickly and they don't forget.

Write everything down. Focus on your children's needs and look at what the family court expects before entering into it.

Tell your children you love them and they are not the reason you're splitting up.

Keep the anger away from the kids, things will get better, and you will both move on and find happiness.

Get on with it the more it's drawn out the more it affects the children.

We both handled things badly and our child was the loser. If I could reach out to every parent making the same mistakes I would for the sake of the children. We do untold harm for the sake of what we think is best for kids but also for own egos. I hope this study can save children from the pain of traditional post break up parenting.

You once liked or loved the person you are separating/divorcing from and they are still your child's mum or dad so be respectful and do not resort to hurling abuse as you will only damage your child/children.

Stay in touch with your children no matter what.

You take equal responsibility in all areas including financial and contact and decision making. You never ever skip on this for your child/ children life is too short...

Have a honest conversation with your ex about co parenting successfully. However, if it is not working and it would do more harm than good - the children and your mental health should be your sole priority.

Don't speak badly of the parent that has walked away in front of kids 16 and under. Don't stop your child if he or she want to see the other parent.

Explain as much as you can in simple terms eg Mum and Dad still love you although we don't live together now. Emphasise child's importance.

Try not to get the children caught in the crossfire, keep stability as much as you can.

Don't use the kids as a weapon.

Don't forget that the children love both parents and contact is very important to maintain sense of self and family relationships.

Be tolerant and civil towards each other and try to be amicable so that the child can still see responsibility from both parents.

Never make the children feel as though they are stuck in the middle of things.

If a child no longer wants to see a parent, then that parent should seek to listen and really understand why. Not make automatic assumptions that one parent is engaging in alienation tactics or actively doesn't want their child to see the other parent. I really believe most parents want to be co-operative and for their child to have two loving parents. If a child really doesn't want to see/refuses to see one parent ask yourself 'why don't they want to see me any more?'

Try to keep things amicable. Do NOT speak ill of the other parent to the children. Keep communication going as much as possible. Reassure the children (your utmost priority). Try to keep the relationship with both parents going. Let your children ask as many questions as they need to.

Try to remain calm and avoid any arguments in front of the children, something we, at the beginning, found extremely difficult.

It depends on the situation and what the other person is doing but just keep telling the truth and keep at it and do what the courts instruct you to do to the letter and you will win in the end and don't forget the effect this is having on the children they are the real victims here not you or your ex.

However painful sort all the details to prevent disputes; do not try to out do each other.

Keep communication open. Be honest and put the needs of the children before your needs. Child is paramount.

Make sure you don't let your child see what you are struggling with in terms of getting along and arguing, never talk badly about your ex to your child and always present a mature front about the situation so they can ask questions later.

Do not put the kids in the middle of a personal fight. It's not their fault. I have a normal relationship with all four of my children and their grandchildren but at the time it was touch and go if I'd ever see them again.

Think of the children. Think before you speak and what you say in front of your children. Children pick up the negativity and it harms and colours the view of their parent. Be honest and make them feel secure. Divorce separation can feel like the safety net has been pulled away. Make them feel loved and time, quality time is what they want more than anything. No one should be seen as the enemy.

I know it's really hard I thought about taking my own life because I thought there wasn't anything left in my life and my ex was being very difficult. but I realised my daughter needed me to be there for her so I was the better person and now we get on brilliantly. It was very hard for me but it was all worth it for my daughter.

Don't forget about your children they may be suffering without you knowing.

Be kind to yourself and your child.