

Parents' Guide to Making Plans for their Children after Separation

Parents' Guide

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1

Put yourself in
your children's shoes
and ask
what's really
best for them.





Introduction

This book is divided into sections in order for you to easily find the areas that you wish to focus on.

It is important that you work through this book at a comfortable pace without feeling the need to complete it all at once.

It may be helpful if you complete a few sections, then set future dates to cover the other sections.

How can this booklet help?

This booklet lets you know what you need to think about when you are making arrangements for your children.

It includes a guide parenting plan which you can either use by filling in the blanks, or as a checklist if you want to make your own version.

It's best if ...

- ◆ Children can keep up a loving relationship with both parents as much as possible.
- ◆ Children keep up their relationship with extended family, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and also their friends on both sides of the family (even if you don't keep in contact yourself).
- ◆ Children have as few changes as possible, especially at first.

2



What arrangements do we need to make for our children?

After you have separated, you both continue to be responsible for your children. Together you will have to sort out how to organise your children's day to day care. If only one of you is going to have regular day to day care, then you will have to agree on the ways your children are going to keep in contact with their other parent.

Who should decide on the arrangements?

It's best for everyone, especially your children, if you agree on the arrangements yourselves. You know your children's needs and what will work best for them.

What if I'm worried about my children's safety or my safety?

3

If there are safety issues you are concerned about (e.g. violence, abuse, drug or alcohol dependency), the safety of you and your children always comes first. Get advice as soon as possible from a solicitor, childrens' services, CAFCASS (Children and Families Courts Advisory Support Service), Citizen's Advice Bureau or the National Domestic Violence Helpline.
(Contact details and other useful addresses can be found at the back of this booklet).





we Don't
want to see
you fight OR
argue.



4



5



We Love
You Both

Plans need to suit the ages of your children

The best arrangements for children vary according to their age, gender, personality and family circumstances.

Parents often have unique qualities - think about these when dividing up responsibilities.

Listening to your children

If your children are old enough, encourage them to say what arrangements are important to them.

Don't put them under any pressure to choose between you. Respect what they say, but don't make them feel it's their responsibility to sort things out - that's your job.

There are many ways of organising things

Children want to share their time with both of you and most say they want it to be fair.

Use the parenting plan in this booklet to help you organise arrangements for your children.

It is easier to organise things, and in an ideal world it would be best for the children, if both parents can continue to live in the same area as before they separated.

That way children have fewer changes to adapt to and there's less travel.



I Like it
when you come
to my school
concerts.

Making arrangements for your ...

Babies and pre-school aged children (birth to 4 years)

Time is experienced very differently for this age group. A few days seems like a long time.

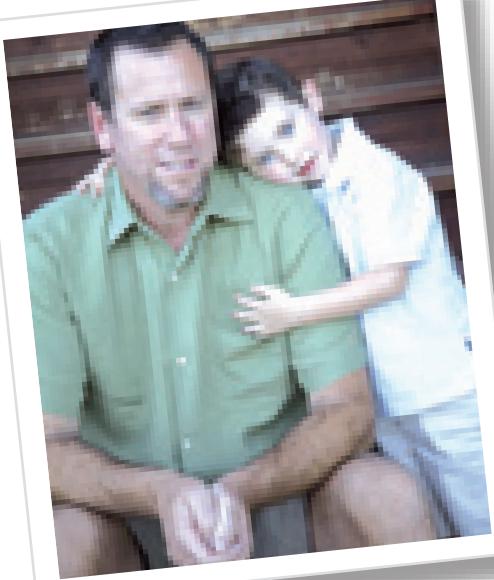
Ideally little children shouldn't be away from either of you for more than a few days at a time.

Short visits at least 3 or 4 times a week are a good idea, doing routine things like feeding, playing, bathing, going for walks and putting to bed. Even babies and toddlers can usually have an overnight stay with a parent when they're used to being cared for by them as long as their routine is kept up.

If you haven't been involved much with children before or after the separation, you'll have to build up time and closeness with them gradually. Parenting courses may also help you learn new parenting skills.

Little children often get clingy and upset at changeovers because this age group can be frightened of separations. So, changeovers need to be handled patiently and carefully, with as little tension as possible between parents. It can be easier for one parent to drop children off for their visit rather than for the other parent to take them away.

If another caregiver is involved as well (e.g. grandparent, or day care), you'll need to watch out for signs that there may be too many changeovers going on.



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we want to
have a say but
we don't want to
have to choose.

Making arrangements for your ...

School age children (4-11)

School aged children are more used to separating, e.g. when they go to school or to visit friends and family.

Some older children prefer one home base with regular, frequent overnight visits .

However, if both parents have been involved in parenting, then it can work well for some children to split their time more or less equally between two homes.



Making arrangements for your ...

Teenagers (12 years and up)

It's usual for teenagers to want to have a say in how they spend their time with each parent.

Teenagers need more flexibility and a different kind of parenting as they start to develop their own independent lives. Parents need to take their teenagers' school, social and other commitments and activities into account, as well as their need for time to relax.

Teenagers who have split their time equally between their parents in the past might now prefer to have just one home base. Both parents can increase time with them, for example, by going along to their school and sports activities.



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Arrangements for contact

If only one parent is to have day to day care of the children, it's important to work out together how your children are going to stay in contact with their other parent.

What do we do when we've agreed?

Write everything down so there's less chance of a misunderstanding later on. Use the guide parenting plan in this booklet or write up your own.

When you have both signed the parenting plan this becomes your parenting agreement.

You should both keep a copy.



If you want to, you can apply to the Family Proceedings Court (FPC) or the County Court (CC) to have some parts of your parenting plan made into a court order, principally those parts that concern residence and contact.

However, a judge may decide that, because you have reached what he or she considers to be a sensible working arrangement, there is no need for it to be converted into an order.



What if we can't agree?

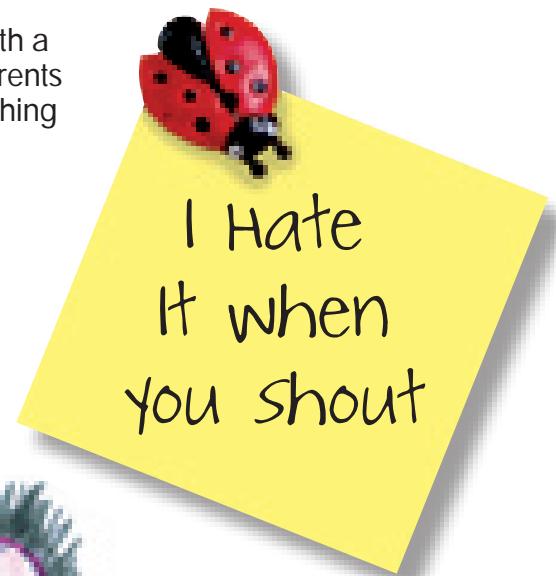
If you are having difficulty agreeing, make it a rule to focus only on the arrangements for your children. Relationship and money/property issues need to be dealt with separately from parenting. (Try the 'helpful tips' for parents in this booklet, always remembering to put your children first.)

If you are still having difficulty, you can look at arranging mediation with a trained counsellor. A counsellor is a neutral person trained to help parents understand and deal with the things which can get in the way of reaching agreement. You will have to pay for this yourselves.

Can we change parenting plans?

You and your partner can agree to review and change the parenting plan at any time to meet the changing needs of your children.

Reviews should be carried out about every year or whenever your children reach a new stage. But if it's been really hard for you to reach agreement and it's working it maybe best to review it less often.





If you want more information or advice

For more information or advice about parenting agreements and parenting orders see:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/childrensneeds>

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies>

<http://www.spig.clara.net/p-plans.htm>

and many other sites to be found on the internet.
(Other useful addresses can be found at the back of this booklet).

What if somebody doesn't stick to the parenting plans?

A parenting plan cannot be legally enforced unless it is incorporated into a court order. The FPC or CC will help you work out any problems with your parenting plan by arranging a session with a CAFCASS officer.

If this doesn't work, you can apply to the court for an order either for residence, contact, prohibited steps or specific issues.

The court will try to help you reach agreement but if this is not possible a final decision may be made by a magistrate or a Judge.

Allowing for reasonable flexibility and unavoidable circumstances you should both follow the parenting plan you've agreed on as closely as possible.



Children say

'We want...'

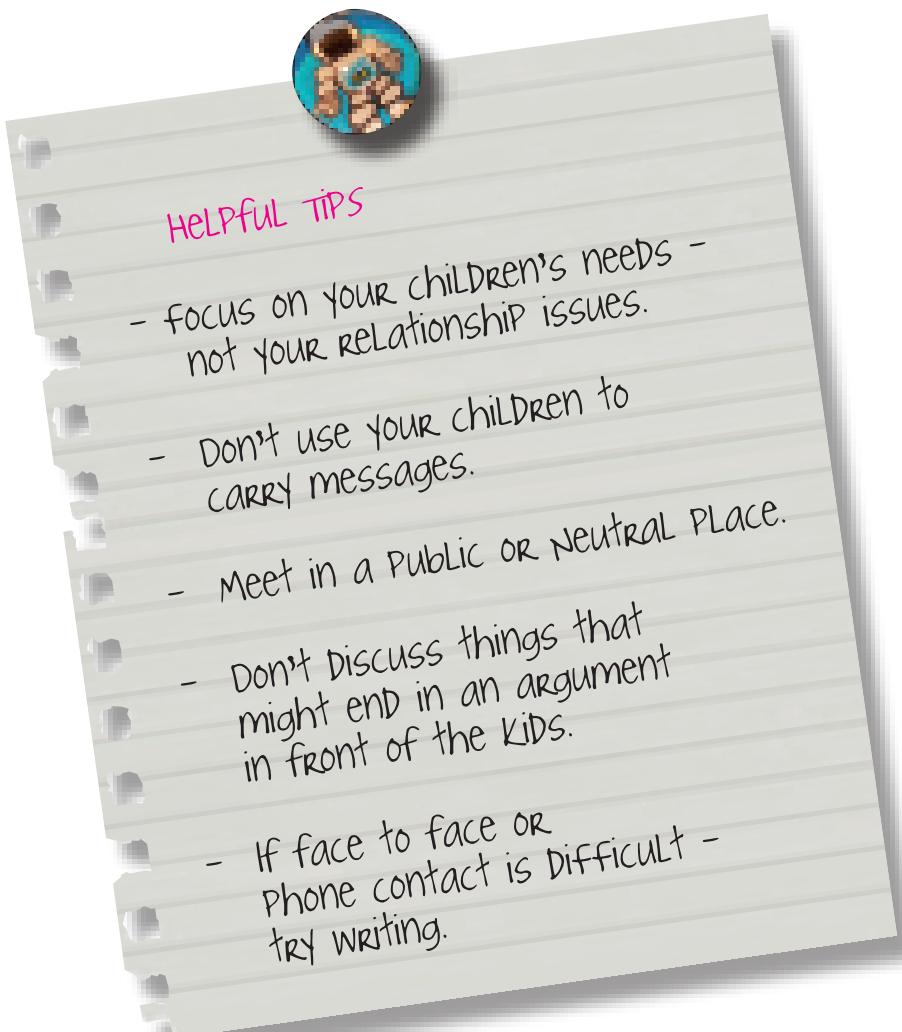


13

- Things to be fair
- Not to be put in the middle
- To be asked our views
- To have lots of time with both of you
- To have fun
- To be loved
- Not to see you fight or argue
- Not to hear you criticise each other

Making a

parenting plan



Steps

1. Go through the parenting plan and agree on what arrangements work best for your children.
2. Write it down.
3. Keep a copy for each of you.
4. Get help from a mediator if you're having trouble agreeing.
5. Do your best to make it work for your children.

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parenting plan for



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we Don't want
to be put in
the middle



Living arrangements

How will the children spend time with each of us?

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To help you get started

An easy way to get started is to make a weekly or monthly calendar showing how the arrangements all fit together. At the back of this book is a blank weekly and monthly calendar you can use.

weekly plan

A weekly plan for a pre- school child might look something like this:

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
8.00 am							
9.00 am							
10.00 am							
11.00 am							
12.00 pm							
1.00 pm							
2.00 pm							
3.00 pm							
4.00 pm							
5.00 pm							
6.00 pm							
7.00 pm							
8.00 pm							
Overnight							

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The shaded times are with **Parent A** - all day Monday and Monday night, 4pm to 7pm Wednesday, all day Friday and Friday night, Saturday morning. Blank is time with **Parent B** - all other times.

monthly plan

A monthly plan for a school - aged/teenage child might look something like this:

Week	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Week 1 The shaded times are with Parent A - Friday after school to 8am Monday (before school). The rest of the time is with Parent B.

Week 2 The shaded times are with Parent A - Tuesday after school to 8am Wednesday (before school) and the rest of the time is with Parent B.

Monthly plans may be more useful for children.

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when discussing things ...

USE

'I' statements and make it Positive -
"I WOULD REALLY LIKE it if you PACKED Sam's track suit bottoms because ..."

Avoid

'you' statements which tend to blame or accuse -
"you never PACK the right clothes for Sam"



contact arrangements

 When the children are staying with one of us, what contact will they have with the other?

 What support may we need in arranging contact i.e. child contact centres, friends and family?

 When will the children spend time with other important family and friends?

changeovers

 How will the children get from one household to the other?

 Who else will be present at changeovers eg; partner, friends?

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 Will changeovers sometimes take place at school (for example one parent drops child off at school in the morning, other parent picks up child from school in the afternoon) and on what days?

What will happen on special occasions?

 Birthdays (children's and parents)

 Mother's Day

 Father's Day

 Long weekends/half term/other public holidays

 Religious festivals, eg; Diwali, Christmas, Eide

22



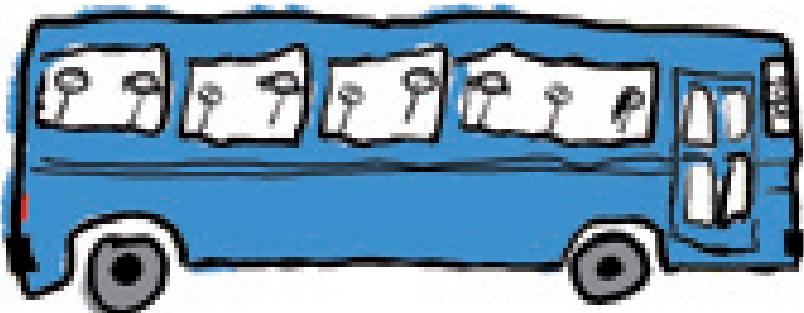
Keeping our children safe

At what age are the children ever allowed to be at home on their own?

At home ... away from home - are the children ever allowed to walk/catch public transport on their own?
In what circumstances?

23

Other arrangements



Who else can look after our children?

Eg; babysitter, family, friends, childcare, after school club



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What happens if one of us isn't able to look after the children during our set time?

health

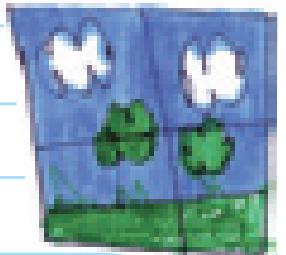
When and how will we communicate with each other if the children are sick?

How will we share responsibility for looking after the children when they are sick/unable to go to school?

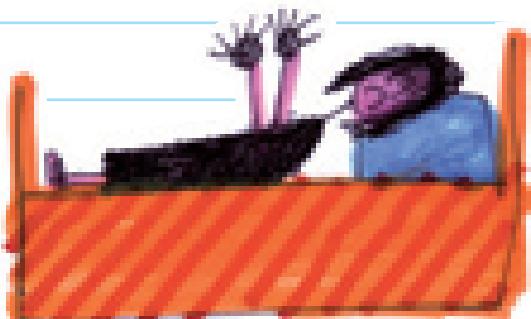
Will the school have both of our numbers for emergency purposes?

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How will we share responsibility for taking the children to medical/dental appointments?



Do we agree that our children should be immunised?



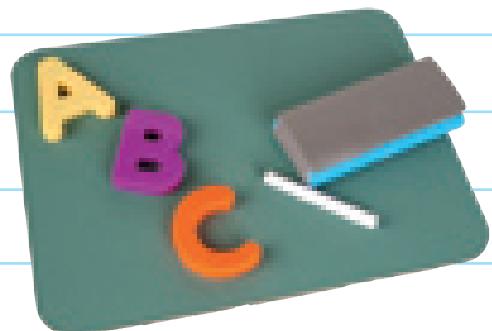
School



Who will tell the school when there are changes in children's circumstances?



How will we manage both of us attending parents evenings and other school events?





When the children get older and the time comes for a change of school how will this be agreed on?



Can the children receive religious education at school?



Can the children receive sex education at school?

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How are decisions going to be made about choosing course subjects?





How will we know about progress at school and how will we ensure that both of us receive school reports and notices?



Who will look after the children during inset/teacher training days?

After school activities



Who will take responsibility for getting the children to these?
eg; tea at friends, sleepovers, sporting activities.

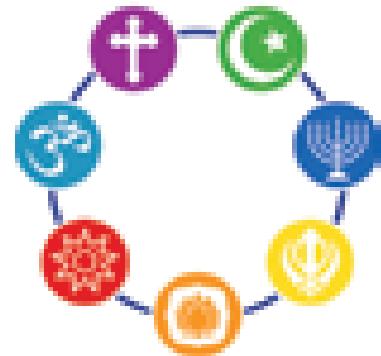


holidays

Who will the children spend their holidays with and who will make any travel arrangements?



Special cultural and religious matters



Special medical or health matters

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When will we have regular discussions about the children?

Extras

Who will look after the children's important documents?

Money checklist

If you can't agree on anything in this checklist, don't let it get in the way of finishing the other arrangements first. You can come back to these things later on. Just write in: 'to be agreed later'.

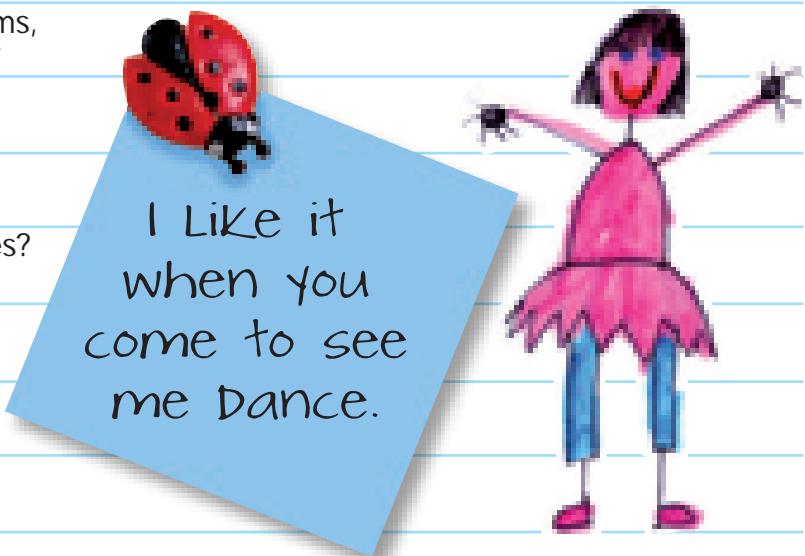
Are either of us making regular payments for the children to the other?
(these can include payments through the Child Support Agency).

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How are we going to pay for everyday clothes and shoes?

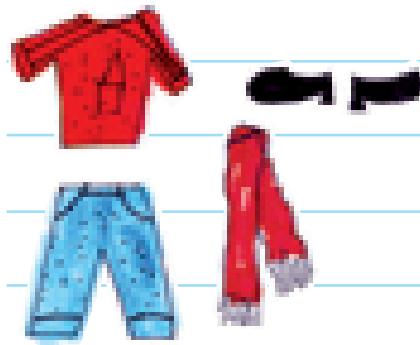
How are we going to pay for school uniforms,
clothes, shoes, sports, daytrips & activities?

How will we pay for outside-school activities?
(e.g. sport, music, dancing)?





How are we going to pay for the other school expenses e.g. fees, donations, transport, trips, stationery?



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How are we going to pay for childcare?

It's About YOUR CHILDREN

1 How are we going to pay for holidays and travel e.g. visits to grandparents and friends?

2 How are we going to pay for large items e.g. bicycle, mobile phone, computer?

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4 Are either of us going to give our children pocket money and how much?

How will we make sure this plan is kept up to date for the children?



weekly plan

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
8.00 am							
9.00 am							
10.00 am							
11.00 am							
12.00 pm							
1.00 pm							
2.00 pm							
3.00 pm							
4.00 pm							
5.00 pm							
6.00 pm							
7.00 pm							
8.00 pm							
Overnight							

monthly plan

Week	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

35

notes/contact numbers

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USEFUL NATIONAL WEBSITES AND PHONE NUMBERS

Advice Now Information and advice for couples

Information on parenting issues and advice on play and development

Children's Legal Centre Promoting children's rights **0845 345 4345**

Child Psychotherapy Trust Leaflets/resources to help children's emotional well-being & mental health.

Divorce Aid Advice

Divorce UK Information and advice website

Families Need Fathers - 08707 607496

The Fatherhood Institute

Get Connected (16-25year olds) **0808 808 4994**

Gingerbread Supporting lone parents **0800 018 5026**

Grandparent's Association Advice and support on all aspects of being a grandparent.

Helpline 0845 434 9585

Website designed for children to help them to work through feelings about family conflict.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation Information on the effects of separation and divorce on children

Lone Parent Helpline 0800 018 5026

Married or Not Information on rights and responsibilities of co-habitees

Match Non judgemental emotional support for mothers who are apart from their children

My Mum and Dad Argue a Lot Resources for practitioners working with parents and families

National Association of Child Contact Centres 0845 4500 280

National Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247

National Family Mediation 01392 271610

One plus One Research into what makes relationships work

Parent Connection Parenting branch of one plus one

Parentline Plus Parenting courses, workshops, a free helpline, information and resources for parents **0808 800 2222**

Relate Relationship counselling **01788 573241**

Resolution Association of solicitors specialising in family law **01689 820272**

Reunite Charity specialising in international parental child abduction, online advice and **Helpline 0116 2556 234**

Samaritans 08457 90 90 90

Listings of useful links about separation and divorce

Understanding Childhood Free information and leaflets for parents and childcare practitioners to help raise emotionally secure children

Information on young people's mental and emotional health

Liberty's guide to human rights

www.advicenow.org.uk/livingtogether

www.bbc.co.uk/parenting

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

www.clsdirect.org.uk

www.divorceaid.co.uk

www.divorceuk.com

www.fnf.org.uk

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

www.getconnected.org.uk

www.gingerbread.org.uk

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

www.itsnotyourfault.org

www.jrf.org.uk

www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk

www.marriedornot.org.uk

www.matchmothers.org

www.opo.org.uk/mymumanddad/introduction

www.nacc.org.uk

www.nfm.org.uk

www.oneplusone.org.uk

www.theparentconnection.org.uk

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

www.relate.org.uk

www.reunite.org

www.samaritans.org

www.separation.org.uk

www.understandingchildhood.net

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.yourrights.org.uk

Parents' Commitment

We understand that we are still both joint guardians of our children even though we've separated.

We accept that this means that we are both responsible for major decisions about their future such as their education, religion, where they live and overseas travel.

We will work out decisions about these things together, as co-operatively as we can, until the children are adults.

We accept that the responsibility to make the day to day decisions for our children will have to be taken by whoever they are staying with at the time.

We both read and understand the arrangements for the children recorded in this Parenting Plan and will follow it as closely as we can until we make another agreement together.

& Parent's names

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are the parents of

agree to the terms of the parenting plan.

Signed

Signed

Date





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