

Parenting Plans for children. What you need to consider.

Child focussed mediation is a process in which parents work together to develop a parenting plan for their children after their separation.

When parents use mediation to develop a parenting plan on their own, their children are able to avoid loyalty conflicts and feelings of abandonment and alienation, and are less likely to suffer the stress caused by their parents battling over their future.

The parenting plan can be as detailed as the parents wish, or as structured or flexible as necessary, but it needs to be child-focussed. Child focussed mediation helps to re-focus any conflict to create a process where the parents interact to work out an agreement. The parent's co-operation in this process is more important than the agreement itself because their relationship and communication needs to be maintained and sustained for the benefit of the children.

Sometimes the agreements reached may not achieve what the parties believe are their most significant goals, but will often prevent the worst alternative outcomes and protect the rights and interests of the children.

Important points when creating a child focussed parenting plan – what we tell parents to think about before coming to a mediation session:

- Do focus on the child's needs
- Do not focus on parental needs
- Avoid labels such as 'residence' and 'contact' and instead focus only on what is best for the child and how they share their time.
- Do not focus on child support or property when trying to formulate a parenting plan.
- Acknowledge each child's special needs according to their age, temperament and development.
- Do not assume that there is a standard plan that fits all children.
- Do acknowledge the other parents strengths and bring up only valid concerns about the other parent's ability to care for the child.
- Do not bad mouth the other parent.
- Do acknowledge that the child needs time with both parents in a safe environment.
- Do not punish the other parent by denying them time with the child.
- Come to mediation to discuss a parenting plan with: a proposal for parenting and time-sharing; a calendar which identifies school holidays, work schedules and child's activities; and a flexible and business like attitude.

If you need help with child arrangements following separation please contact us by phone on 01202 721822 (Bournemouth and Poole) or 02380 715432 (Southampton) or email your enquiry to info@laceyssolicitors.co.uk

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