

separation in northern ireland



family mediation

to help you work things out

(parents + children)
separation + mediation = better outcome

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/family-policy

separation

a guide.

Separation and divorce are ever present realities in Northern Ireland. Although our rates of divorce are slightly lower than for the rest of the United Kingdom, they continue to rise. Between 1 in 4 and 1 in 3 of those couples marrying will experience separation. 1 in 6 of our children in Northern Ireland will experience the separation of their parents before they leave school.

The breakdown of a relationship propels the family into uncharted and inhospitable terrain. We are increasingly aware in Northern Ireland that more assistance needs to be more readily available earlier in the process of separation in order that the terrain becomes more manageable for all, but particularly our children and teenagers.

The Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety in recognition of the high emotional, social, economic and

educational impact of finding ways through this most challenging of transitions, has commissioned Family Mediation NI to publish this guide. Each family's experience is unique and this booklet is a work in progress. In any of life's significant transitions the more information we have the easier the passage, the more knowledgeable our choices and the more available the opportunities for new growth and development.

This booklet contains the observations and ideas of the families and family mediators who have used mediation skills here in Northern Ireland during the last 22 years. Material has also been drawn from some excellent websites and publications.

A reference list can be accessed by contacting Family Mediation NI. (See "Sources of Helpful Information").

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While recognising the impact of separation and divorce on the extended family and wider social networks, e.g., in our schools and workplaces, this guide particularly emphasises the needs of children, teenagers and their parents.

The guide deliberately refers throughout to “You”, “Us” or “Them” reflecting the complexity of separation and divorce, its closeness to each one of us and the growing body of research evidence into what helps or hinders successful adjustment.

For ease of reading, a child or young person is referred to as he.

All individuals shown in photographs are models for illustration only.
All information is offered in good faith, errors and omissions excepted.

What Is Family Mediation?



However willing and able you, as parents, are to negotiate with each other, there is a high chance that you will find that there are issues you can't resolve on your own.

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What Is Family Mediation?

Rather than derail any co-operation you and your partner may have or increase the conflict level between you, consider the possibility of working out a negotiated settlement by using a family mediator.

“over 70% of couples who attend 3 or more mediation sessions reach agreement”⁽¹⁾

Family Mediation is voluntary and is an alternative dispute resolution method (ADR). It relies on you and your (ex) partner exchanging information and ideas with the assistance of an impartial qualified third party in order to resolve matters without necessarily going to court or without prolonged court proceedings. It is cost effective and over 70% of couples who attend 3 or more mediation sessions reach agreement.⁽¹⁾

Family Mediation works towards a win-win outcome and avoids the scenario where one of you wins and the other loses. It is particularly important if you have children, to work together in your children's interests (see “Parenting Children and Teenagers following Separation and Divorce” and “Children Caught in the Middle following Separation and Divorce”).

If you have already separated, or plan to do so, you are encouraged to contact a professionally registered family mediator or Family Mediation service to check out the possible benefits to you and your family.

Family Mediation is confidential - the content of conversations held in mediation will not be disclosed without your consent (except in the very specific serious circumstance of someone being at risk of

harm, particularly a child, or the mediator considering that there may be a possibility of fraudulent activity).

Family Mediation is safe. A family mediator (or 2 mediators co-working) will work with you and your (ex) partner so that difficult conversations can take place, issues explored and joint understandings be reached regarding your future arrangements. Depending on your needs, the agreements reached will be written down by the family mediator and a useful working document (often referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding) created. With your consent, this document is sent to your respective solicitors to become legally binding or become the basis of a court order if necessary.

“Family Mediation is not a substitute for individual legal advice”

Family Mediation saves time, money and reduces the anxiety involved in going to court. It does not take away any of your legal rights and at any stage you may revert to a court process. Family Mediation is not a substitute for individual legal advice. Indeed, the family mediator is required to be impartial and cannot give you individual advice, although he or she can provide you both with information.

“Family Mediation is NOT couple counselling or therapy”

Alternatives to Family Mediation include negotiation by your respective solicitors, e.g., through the process of collaborative law or the imposition of a court order. Court orders are sometimes necessary and important but take longer, are costly emotionally and financially, and you have less control and ownership of the outcome.

What Is Family Mediation?

Where there may be a perceived reluctance of your (ex) partner to participate, Family Mediation may still be worth trying. Even with those couples who do not achieve resolution of all issues, feedback indicates that each person benefits from the opportunity to communicate with the other in a controlled and supported environment; that each person clarifies and prioritises the issues in dispute; and that future interactions are made easier.

Family Mediation is typically described as a process of empowerment. It keeps family decision making, where possible, within families and achieves joint decisions which have not been imposed or negotiated by others. It is not appropriate for all but is deemed appropriate for very many.

Family Mediation is not easy; however, having the ownership of the understandings reached

makes the outcomes much more likely to be upheld.

Family Mediation is NOT couple counselling or therapy. If there is any possibility of both partners exploring reconciliation, you will be referred promptly to specialist couple counselling.

Many family mediators are qualified to consult directly with children and teenagers, but again they will refer on promptly if counselling is indicated. Parents and children may meet together in mediation, but if ongoing support is needed, then referral to a family counselling service may be suggested. (See "Sources of helpful Information").

What is a Memorandum of Understanding?

The Memorandum of Understanding or Outcome Statement is a summary of your discussions in mediation.

It is your document for your use and marked "Without Prejudice".

Typically it will include:

- Some background information, e.g., dates of marriage, names and ages of children, dates of mediation appointments.
- Underpinning principles of your decisions, e.g., the best interests of your children and reasonable fairness to each other.
- A list of the issues discussed.
- Details of decisions reached. This will often include a detailed parenting plan. It may also include your financial plans for the future with a clear and comprehensive rationale set out together with an open financial summary and evidential documentation.
- Any unresolved issues with clarification of the stumbling blocks to reaching a joint

understanding, or the respective positions regarding these.

- How the wishes and feelings of the children or teenagers were addressed, e.g., by direct or indirect consultation.
- How future misunderstandings or conflicts are to be addressed.
- The agreed sharing of the Memorandum of Understanding and any further action by the family mediator, e.g., provision of a review appointment.
- Date of completion.

The Memorandum of Understanding may, with your consent, be sent to respective solicitors to become legally binding; may become the basis of a court order; or remain a private agreement between you.

How much does Family Mediation cost?

Costs vary according to the number of appointments; whether more than one family mediator is working with family members; and which provider of Family Mediation you decide to use. It is well recognised to represent value for money.

Government, in recognition of the benefits of Family Mediation, has made grant aid or legal aid available to some providers to keep client cost to a minimum. Further information is obtainable from the Family Mediation provider (see "Sources of Helpful Information").

How long does Family Mediation take?

Appointments will be offered as soon as possible and will be arranged at times to suit both parties and the family mediator. Family Mediation regarding parenting arrangements will typically take up to 3 months during which you will have attended one individual appointment; possibly 4 joint appointments; and drawn up a Memorandum of Understanding.

Where the Memorandum of Understanding includes decisions regarding finance and property, mediation will take longer.

What is a Parenting Plan?



A parenting plan is a detailed outline of negotiated and agreed arrangements for the care of children and teenagers following parental separation.

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What is a Parenting Plan?

A parenting plan is a detailed outline of negotiated and agreed arrangements for the care of children and teenagers following parental separation. It is a schedule which states clearly how time will be shared with your children; how to manage responsibilities; and how to share decisions.

Misperceptions, misunderstanding, and miscommunication abound.

The plan covers more than the contact, residency and maintenance issues which are usually the subject of court proceedings. It includes as many as possible of the subjects normally addressed by all parents, whether separated or together, e.g., school arrangements, holidays, pocket money, health care, child care costs.

Your family mediator will assist you in suggesting topics to include in a parenting plan but

each plan is unique to your family and takes into account the needs of each member of the family.

One area for discussion is likely to be **COMMUNICATION**. Sometimes parents are resistant to introducing formality into how, when and what they will communicate with each other. Instead they look forward to communicating “as friends”, i.e., with spontaneity, flexibility, respect, openness and so on. Your family mediator is likely to explain just how difficult this is at this time of uncertainty, loss, conflict and a myriad of other strong emotions. Misperceptions, misunderstanding, and miscommunication abound.

The basis of your relationship has changed from being a couple to being co-parents and, as such, should be regarded more as a business like contract between you including rules of how you are going to respectfully

communicate. None of the previous expectations and assumptions are now valid. With time, a more relaxed and trusting relationship between you may be possible. However, now is the time to include, in your detailed parenting plan, clear expectations for communication between you.

Once you have together agreed your parenting plan: Tips

1. **Stick to it**, however formal and restrictive it may feel initially. Consider having a calendar for all to see – children and extended family also.
2. **Allow confidence to grow** in the possibility of however negatively you feel about each other; that you will both commit and manage to co-parent. Perhaps your partner has been less hands-on with the children

than you. Now is the time to consider the possibility of you both becoming hands-on and the possibility of real advantages to both your children and yourself. This is enormously difficult especially while one parent may be feeling betrayed or abandoned. However, the alternatives may have negative consequences for all which may continue for months and years. As in the workplace, there is no expectation that you like each other; but that you will manage a practical co-parenting contract.

The completion of a parenting plan has many benefits:

- It lends structure and stability for all concerned. Children and teenagers, as well as adults, can anticipate with confidence the agreed arrangements.

- It provides a means of addressing difficulties as they arise and before they become sources of conflict.
- Its completion gives confidence to parents and children at a critical period in their lives.
- It assists parents, children and teenagers to come to terms with their changed circumstances.
- It allows for re-negotiation as the need arises. A parenting plan is likely to include opportunities for regular reviews.
- A mediated parenting plan will become part of a Memorandum of Understanding. This, with your consent, can be sent to your respective solicitors who can arrange for it to become legally binding.
- Negotiation of your own parenting plan does not take away your legal right to

revert to a court process should it be necessary.

- It demonstrates your commitment and ability to continue the practice of parental responsibility.

After some months of adherence to the agreed plan, you will each be in a better place to renegotiate appropriate changes.

Further information and a sample template of a parenting plan are available to download from the internet www.dca.gov.uk/family or from any Family Mediation provider.

Parenting Children and Teenagers

Following Separation And Divorce



Splitting up is very stressful for both parents and children. The way you handle this can have a lasting effect on children.

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Parenting Children and Teenagers Following Separation And Divorce

Splitting up is very stressful for both parents and children. The way you handle this can have a lasting effect on children.

Tips

1. *If at all possible, children need to go on seeing BOTH their parents.* This cannot be overemphasised. The child may fear that, if parents can stop loving each other, they may stop loving the child.
2. *The continued expression of anger* or bitterness towards your former partner can damage your child far more than the separation itself.
3. *If appropriate, children should have a say* in how, when and where visits take place with the parent who is no longer living with them.
4. *Northern Ireland research revealed the importance of having other concerned adults* in a child or teenager's life when parents are splitting

or have split up, e.g., grandparents, aunts and uncles.

5. *Give your child appropriate information about what is happening.* Even young children understand more than their parents think.
6. *Create opportunities for your child to express his/her feelings.* All children are affected although some do not show it. An extra ten minutes spent at bedtime or other opportunities for routine one to one companionship may be worth considering at this time.
7. *Never push or encourage your child to take sides.* Always speak respectfully of the importance of the other parent to your child.
8. *If you have started a new relationship think very carefully before introducing a new partner to your children.* If possible, keep a new

relationship on the back burner as far as your children are concerned, until they are moving confidently between mum and dad.

9. *Try and establish or re-establish routines as soon as possible:* make sure the children are going to school and seeing their friends as usual.
10. *Children adjust best when the resident parent is coping in general.* The emotional adjustment within the home to the loss of a couple relationship is a greater determining factor of a child's adjustment than the separation itself.

MYTH: All children and teenagers fare worse following separation or divorce.

The happy two parent family provides the optimum environment for children and teenagers. However, research evidence indicates consistently that a well functioning one parent family can provide a stronger home base than a highly conflictual or unhappy two parent household.⁽¹⁾

(1) See "Resolving the tensions in parenting policy" Clem Henricson 2003, "Children's Perspectives on Families" Virginia Morrow 1998, "Review of Experiences of Children whose Parents Divorce" Joseph Rowntree Foundation 1998, also Emery 1988, Hetherington 1989, Amato 1992, "Good Divorce-Bad Divorce", keynote address by Janet R. Johnston at the all Ireland conference "An Eye to the Future: Accepting the changes to Family Life in the New Millennium", November 1999, Co Cavan, Ireland.

Separation is stressful and can be more so for teenagers. They are already in a process of transition, experiencing change in almost all areas of their life as they move towards responsible young adulthood.

Tips for parents of teenagers

1. *Parents to stop fighting.*

If the anger is not settled early on, it can go on for years. It helps teenagers immensely if the separation/divorce can truly be seen as a way of settling feelings and closing the door on the dashed hopes of the relationship.

2. *Parents to feel sorry* that the marriage didn't work out and be able to say so to their children.

3. *The teenager needs to think of their parents as reasonable, rational people* whom they can respect, emulate and admire. Mum

and Dad have made mistakes about the marriage but they are dealing with it in as adult a way as possible and are seriously concerned about their children.

4. *Parents to support each other.*

This one thing will do more to promote the mental and emotional health of our teenagers than anything else. The loving permission from each parent to their child to have the best possible relationship with the other parent, despite their own feelings, is crucial. If a teenager is allowed to or finds himself aligned with one parent, the chances are high that this situation will later "boomerang". The teenager may align at some later stage with the other parent and remember with anger and mistrust the first parent.

5. *All children have rights, parents have responsibilities.*

Teenagers have the right to be consulted and their views listened to carefully and taken into account. However, parents have the responsibility regarding final decisions and supporting each other in these.

6. *All teenagers have the right to explanations* and these should be agreed between the parents. These need to be age appropriate.

7. *Teenagers need to understand and be reassured that they are not responsible* for the breakup of their parents' relationship, nor are they in any way responsible for their parents' future well being.

8. *Teenagers need to feel wanted,* loved, accepted and respected in exactly the same way as younger children. They need reassurance that they are

loved and that the contact with the non resident parent will not be arbitrarily stopped nor interrupted.

9. *Teenagers need discipline.*

Setting sensible limits is important for everybody's sanity: Don't waste time thinking to yourself "what are my children turning into away from my influence and standards?" Just get on with asserting your standards in a kindly but persuasive way, taking care not to be destructive or hurtful.

10. *Be sure to listen* and acknowledge the teenager's feelings and demands.

Enjoy each other.

MYTH (most often voiced by teenage and adult children and grandparents) “if the parents both really tried, they could make it work. Separation and divorce is too easy”.

REALITY:The nicest people do get divorced. Separation is not an easy option, neither for the initiator nor the partner. Lifelong intimate partnerships in the 21st century are complicated.

Another distinction, which it is sometimes important to make, is that failure in an adult love relationship does NOT equate with failure in a parent/child love relationship. The biological and emotional love between parent and child needs to be viewed differently.

Children Caught in the Middle

Following Separation And Divorce



“We don’t like it if you criticise each other”

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Children Caught in the Middle Following Separation And Divorce

Do remember that children are not possessions to be fought over and owned. They are not yet capable of independent action and need the protection of both parents.

“Children are not possessions”

Unbalanced alliances and split loyalties between a child and one parent are unhelpful for children and teenagers.

Loyalty in extreme circumstances will result in alienation from one parent. As one young person said “We don’t have a relationship at all. I was in a really bad state. I lost everything and now I can’t even stay in the house when he (father) visits”. “We don’t like it, or you, if you criticise each other. It makes us feel bad and it affects us at school and other places too.” Only in those instances of physical, emotional or sexual abuse would the advantages

and disadvantages of contact between a parent and child or teenager need to be carefully considered.

Tips

- 1. Do not criticise each other, however tempting this is and difficult to avoid.* The parent that criticises the other parent in front of the child, is likely to be discredited, if not now, at some future time. Similarly the alignment between a child or young person and parent is likely to “boomerang” back at some future stage so that the young person becomes angry with the parent with whom they were previously aligned.
- 2. Give each child and young person loving permission to love the other parent.* However hard this may be in the midst of your own personal unhappiness, it will reap many rewards in future years.

- 3. Share with your children and hold fast to the belief that divorce does not mean goodbye between parent and child.*

We know that the enduring committed involvement of both parents contributes significantly to the well being of the child. Evidence suggests that those separations and divorces which remain highly conflictual, or where a parent “disappears” from a child’s life, are most likely to have a negative impact on learning, thriving and emotional resilience.

- 4. Establish a means of communicating with your (ex) partner* which does not require a child or young person to convey messages.
- 5. Similarly, never ask of your child that he hold “secrets”* which must not be conveyed to the other parent, as this is burdening him with unnecessary

responsibility. (It is also giving him potential manipulative power!)

- 6. Allow this respect and tolerance for the “other” part of your child’s life to stretch to extended family involvement.*

If, for any reason, this appears daunting, consider the assistance of Family Mediation.

“It is thought provoking how many children and teenagers take on responsibility and blame for parental unhappiness.”

- 7. Children and teenagers, when given the opportunity and encouragement, often express considerable concern for the well being of their estranged parents.* It is thought provoking how many

children and teenagers take on responsibility and blame for parental unhappiness. Continue to show your ability to care for yourself as well as them. Do make sure your children know that they are not in any way responsible for what happened and that they are not responsible for your well being. You are.

Coming to Terms with Separation and Divorce



Separation is messy. It often involves sadness, anger and upset. Everyday life is suddenly much harder to cope with.

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Coming to Terms with Separation and Divorce

Separation is messy. It often involves sadness, anger and upset. Everyday life is suddenly much harder to cope with. Problems and everyday chores that used to be shared may now have to be solved individually. Your standard of living, the money available and the cost of running two households have now all got to be considered carefully. There is nothing about separation and divorce which is fun. It combines huge emotional challenges and practical ones; at times it can feel overwhelming.

“like coming to terms with a bereavement”

When a significant relationship ends, it's sometimes described as similar to bereavement. Indeed, it is almost more complicated. It includes some of the same reactions, such as numbness, shock, sadness, despair, anger, loss of concentration, changes in

eating habits, sleeping habits, loneliness and, indeed, occasionally depression or other medical problems.

All of these reactions are understandable.

If you feel like crawling into a hole and hiding until your divorce is over, don't worry - life definitely does go on and things will get better. Here are some possible tips which may help.

Tips for putting your divorce behind you and moving on

1. Find an adult shoulder to

lean on. You need the support of trusted friends and family. It is inevitable that some shared friendships may be lost.

The trusted friend is one who is going to allow you to vent; is going to offer understanding and support without joining you in an attack of the (ex) partner. The trusted friend or relative is also going to keep an eye on you so that, along with your own capacity to self-monitor, you will know when you do need to get outside professional help.

2. Express your thoughts and feelings in the safest way you can.

These are going to be at times irrational, confusing,

ambivalent, overwhelming – they may include guilt, despair, fear for the future, loss of confidence, self esteem, concentration, friendships. Recognise and manage your anger and stress in safe ways. Find ways to give safe expression to these (which work for you).

3. It is a time in which you need to look after yourself and at the same time attend to your children.

You may find individual counselling assists you in managing stress. This is not a failure on your part. One family mediator suggests regarding yourself as being in a period of recovery. A convalescent, requires small meals and often, gentle exercise, fresh air and extra sleep. Reduce the expectations of self in those areas which do not involve your children. Above all, avoid loading your worries

on to your children: they have their own insecurities and you need to be strong for them.

4. Seek help if you need it.

If you are feeling very sad and tearful, harbouring a lot of anger or feeling depressed, you may need more than a shoulder to lean on.

Do consider professional counselling to assist you in coming to terms with the process of separation. If you don't already know a counsellor whom you respect, your GP or your mediator may be able to recommend someone. Separation/divorce counselling is a recognised specialism, so check experience and qualifications. (See "Sources of Helpful Information").

5. Work life balance.

Your work or professional life may have suffered while

you were going through the worst of the trauma.

See the personal testimony of Paul Glen "When Life Intrudes on the Workplace" available at www.computerworld.com.au.

Refocusing energy on your work can provide the ordered routine you need in life just now. Women, in particular, often say that work is their salvation, gives them a role in life, some stability and security when it is most needed. If you have been out of the workforce for a while and want to restart your working life, now may be the time to do it and not just for the money.

6. If employed, do let your line manager, a senior manager or the Human Resources department know of your situation. Similarly, you should let a senior member of school staff, or teacher

responsible for the pastoral care of your child, know of your situation. You may feel very reluctant to do so but you can expect understanding, sympathy and reasonable adjustments as necessary. Every schoolchild in Northern Ireland now has access to a qualified youth counsellor at school. This service is free.

7. Try to get debt free as quickly as possible.

You don't need the extra worry of dealing with unpaid bills at the moment. If you don't have a spending plan or budget make one now! If your living expenses exceed your income, carefully document your expenditure to see which items you can reduce or eliminate.

8. Try something entirely new.

Seek out new activities to enjoy as a single person, e.g., a gym or dancing classes.

If outdoor activities don't sound appealing, discover the artist within you – painting, sculpting, and photography will keep your hands and mind busy and you will have something to show for your efforts. Similarly, singing in a choir concentrates the mind, is creative and a shared activity.

9. Review what in the past may have helped you cope with stress, e.g., working out in the gym or hard physical exercise - whatever is your thing!

10. Restart your social life.

Do fun things together with others - even other divorced people. Remember, getting over a significant loss psychologically and emotionally takes at least two years, so don't expect to enter a serious relationship until you have thoroughly put the last one behind you.

MYTH: “Anything which helps me forget or escape the present torment is right for me.”

REALITY: Drowning ones sorrows will not help. Alcohol is a depressant. Be enormously careful regarding alcohol consumption - it has a negative impact psychologically, physically, socially and financially. Help is available from, e.g., your GP or Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service (see “Sources of Helpful Information” and “What is Family Mediation”).

Introduction of New Partners and Step-Parenting

Following Separation and Divorce



Some tips on the introduction of new partners into a child's life and living in a step-family.

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Introduction of New Partners and Step-Parenting Following Separation and Divorce

Introduction of new partners into a child's life.

Tips:

1. *As a rule of thumb, keep all third party relationships on the back burner until your child or children are moving confidently between mum and dad.*

This will take at least several months and sometimes longer.

2. *Do remember that the children have and still need two parents.* Children and teenagers require time and reassurance to regain confidence in the loving relationship between them and each parent. Do not expect your children or (ex) partner to share your joy in finding love again.

3. *Do discuss the introduction of a third party with the other parent first.* If this does not happen, the contact arrangements

which have been running smoothly may collapse. Do expect a period of adjustment for all concerned.

4. *Do reassure both your children and (ex) partner* that their mother/father will always be their mother/father and are not going to be replaced and will never be replaced.

If discussion with your (ex) partner seems daunting or impossible, consider the possibility of Family Mediation.

Stepfamilies

Many children in Northern Ireland live in stepfamilies. In 2001, 10% of all families with dependent children in the UK were stepfamilies (www.statistics.gov.uk).

Stepfamilies take many forms - they may be first or second marriages; they may be full-time (when a parent is providing residence for his or her children); part-time (when

a non-resident parent is providing contact time with their children), involving parents or grandparents. However, for the children concerned, they all share the challenge of coping with change of family structure. These include changes in role; changes in position in the family and changes in membership of the family.

Coping with these changes is difficult. A stepfamily will already have experienced one relationship and family structure which has ended unexpectedly and prematurely: those stepfamilies resulting from separation/ divorce may fear another failure. Assistance is available - see useful contacts, e.g., Family Mediation, Parents Advice Centre, Relate.

Tips:

1. *One of the pressures on a stepfamily is lack of time.* Stepfamilies need time to adjust. Expect to go slowly.
2. *The step-parenting couple need time and care to nurture their couple relationship.* Keep talking to each other about being a couple and being parents.
3. *Find time to get to know each other's children as well as giving your own children some extra time.* All may be feeling uneasy or threatened by the changes. Make sure all the extended families are included in some way.
4. *All stepfamilies have a past which was not shared.* This continues into the present and the future, e.g., a new partner will continue to have a relationship with an (ex) partner because of their children. This is not easy but needs to be respected. Accept that you

There are many myths about stepfamily life.

REALITY: Don't let what other people think rule your lives! Acknowledge that you will make mistakes, all of you.

will have problems from time to time and find out where you can get support if needed.

5. Be reassured. Hearing about memories and shared stories of the past is not a threat to present or future stepfamily life.

6. Feelings of split family loyalties are common. Children sometimes feel they are letting the absent parent down if they are too happy in the stepfamily. Parents often feel guilty for the changes they have brought into their children's lives. Respect everyone's different loyalties.

7. Stepfamilies tend to be bigger than other families and so more expensive. Maintenance money can be coming in for one set of children and an equal or different amount going out for another set of children. Adolescent stepchildren can be particularly sensitive

over money as it emphasises yet again their dependency on the different adults around them. They often want to know exactly how much is allocated as maintenance for them.

Try to keep your sense of proportion about what is really important, i.e., the continuing involvement of BOTH parents and extended families in the young person's life. He may need reassurance that the amount of care and love is infinite, unquantifiable and available from BOTH parents even when the financial provision for step siblings is different.

8. Stand united and firm as parents with children and stepchildren. Don't expect love to happen instantly or even at all, between step-parents and stepchildren. Aim to be good friends.

9. Never try to be a replacement parent. Be an additional parent.

Sources of Helpful Information



For all parents and couples in Northern Ireland considering the effects of separation and divorce.

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A few of the many Sources of Helpful Information

Family Mediation

Family Mediation NI. Family Mediation service provider and Northern Ireland based training and supervision provider in Family Mediation. Individual initial information appointments are offered to discuss your situation and any concerns, prior to arranging any mediation appointments.

www.familymediationni.org.uk, telephone 028 9024 3265.

Family Mediation Helpline. A government helpline and website, are staffed by specially trained operators to provide general information about Family Mediation, to discuss whether your case would be suitable for Family Mediation and to provide contact details for suitable family mediators in your local area.

www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk, helpline 0845 6026627

Mediators Institute Ireland (MII). One of the approved registration bodies of family mediators in Ireland, both for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Contains advice and information on mediation and a list of MII registered mediators.

www.themii.ie

UK Family Mediation Council. The approved professional bodies of Family Mediation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, listed below, together form the UK Family Mediation Council. Each website provides further information about Family Mediation.

www.collegeofmediators.co.uk, www.nfm.co.uk,
www.thefma.co.uk, www.adrgroup.co.uk and
www.resolution.org.uk, www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk

Other

Action for Children. A child friendly site. Colourful engaging material and resources can help your children feel normal and not alone, but there is much included for parents too.

www.itsnotyourfault.org

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy

provides a list of registered counsellors in the UK.

www.bacp.co.uk

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division. This replaced the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency. The website has much useful information including a user friendly calculator of child maintenance.

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/csa,
telephone 0800 028 7439.

Children's Law Centre. They provide information, advice, training and research on children's rights and the law.

www.childrenslawcentre.org, telephone 028 9024 5704

Citizens Advice Bureau. Information regarding legal and financial matters including debt management, benefits and tax credits, which may be applicable following separation.

www.citizensadvice.co.uk

Collaborative Law Association of Northern Ireland.

It's website explains the process of collaborative law and provides a list of solicitors who practise collaborative law near you.

www.afriendlydivorce.co.uk

Contact Centres. The Northern Ireland Network of Child Contact Centres provides a service for those families where contact between a parent and child has completely broken down. A child contact centre provides a safe, supported environment for a child or children to begin to re-establish contact with a non resident parent. It is sometimes used prior to mediation.

www.contactni.org, telephone 028 9080 6091

Gingerbread has a useful handbook - The Gingerbread Loan Parents Handbook – which as well as parenting issues, addresses the emotional challenge, work issues and financial practicalities of separation.

www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk, with helpline 0800 018 5026 and www.gingerbreadni.org

Hidden Hurt provides information for male and same sex victims of domestic violence.

www.hiddenhurt.co.uk

Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy provides a membership list of registered counsellors and their qualifications.

www.irish-counselling.ie

Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service (NICAS) provides a service for people who are abusing alcohol and/or drugs and for people who are concerned about alcohol or drugs. Telephone 02890 664434.

Parents Advice Centre provides accessible, local, confidential advice and assistance to parents including a free telephone helpline, one to one appointments, a mens project and parent education specifically on the issues arising from separation and divorce.

www.parentsadvicecentre.org, telephone 0808 8010 722

Parent Line Plus. It provides a reading list of material suitable for children and adults as well as information or advice about parenting including parenting post-separation.

www.parentlineplus.org.uk, telephone 0808 800 2222

Relate NI. A useful source of separation/divorce counselling as well as relationship counselling, family counselling and

Relate teen - a counselling service specifically for teenagers who have experienced the separation of their parents.

www.relateni.org, telephone 028 9032 3454

Womens Aid provides support and information about the incidence of and protection of adults and children from domestic violence.

www.womensaid.org.uk and www.niwiaf.org, telephone 0800 917 1414

www.divorce.co.uk. This is a user friendly site compiled by an English family law practice which provides guidelines to managing a separation. However be mindful that although Northern Ireland and England share similar principles and procedures, there are differences in the detail.

Books which Family Mediation NI find have stood the test of time include:

Divorce for Dummies by Elizabeth Walsh, Thelma Fisher, Hilary Woodward, and John Ventura (John Wiley & Sons)

To and Fro Children: A Successful Guide to Parenting After Divorce by Jill Burrett (Allen & Unwin)

Children Don't Divorce by Rosemary Stones (Happy Cat Books)

Uncoupling by Diane Vaughan (Cedar)

The Good Divorce by Constance Ahrons (Bloomsbury)

Relate Series: Guide to Starting Again by Sarah Litvinoff (Vermillion),

Guide to Second Families by Suzie Hayman (Vermillion),

Guide to Better Relationships by Sarah Litvinoff (Vermillion)

Rebuilding by Bruce Fisher and Robert Alberti (Impact Publishers)

Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families by Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown (Little, Brown & Co).

What Children Say, a pocket sized leaflet published by Kent Family Mediation Service, available to purchase from Family Mediation NI.

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AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MANNYSTRE O

**Poustie, Resydënter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**