

Your Children's Future

"Parents facing separation and divorce are often deeply concerned about the effect their actions will have on their children. However in the emotional turmoil surrounding the end of a relationship, parents easily lose sight of their children's needs and fail to hear their concerns.

Not surprisingly children's perspectives are very different from those of their parents. Younger children will have a strong desire for their parents to get back together. Teenagers may have anxieties about their own ability to form relationships in the future, and feel ashamed about their parent's childish behaviour. Children will frequently feel rejected and blame themselves for the breakdown of their parent's relationship. They will be anxious about the future and in need of reassurance and love.

Parents can help their children by listening to them and responding to their needs, offering love and reassurance. Where possible, parents should sit down together with their children, and talk about what is happening, allowing their children to ask questions and voice their concerns. Parents need to protect their children from their own adult issues and avoid blaming each other.

Children are able to pick up on their parent's anxieties and disagreements. They will want to please their parents, and may only tell them what they think their parents want to hear, thereby inadvertently adding fuel to their parent's conflict.

Family mediation can help parents minimise the conflicts which can so seriously damage their child's healthy development. Mediators provide a safe place where parents can discuss their children's needs and make arrangements for them. Mediators are trained to resolve conflict, to offer a different perspective and help parents find creative solutions to apparently intractable problems. Disagreements about where the children are to live, when they will see their parents and other parental concerns can be resolved. In appropriate cases mediators can talk with children and give voice to their views."