

## Reframing Support for Families following Parental Separation

### Early Information and Assessment

Families need information and assessment of issues at an early stage to access the pathway best suited to their family's needs before issues escalate. Families at risk of harm or abuse or who have particular challenges may need the family court; most other families need high quality, holistic and affordable support away from court.

- Widespread dissemination of information, to include basic training and resources for 'touchpoints' for the family (GPs, schools, health visitors, CABs, Family Hubs) to signpost appropriately at the earliest signs of family breakdown.
- Establish an authoritative website for separating adults (cf DVLA for drivers), to become known as the go-to site for clear and reliable information.
- Via touchpoints or the known website, newly separated adults will hear that they are expected to attend an early Information and Assessment Meeting (IAM). This would be conducted by a family separation specialist and free to those financially eligible (as currently with the MIAM). The family separation specialist would triage needs and direct parents to the right pathway for their situation. IAMs could take place at Local Authority Early Help Hubs / Family Hubs / Mediation Services / Legal Services. The family separation specialist will be required to have core training in screening for domestic abuse and child protection, in the psychological issues faced by those going through relationship breakdown, and in the differing pathways and local services available to parents and children/young people.
- The IAM could lead to several different pathways: in cases where risk may be an issue, signposting to the family court and domestic abuse support services may be needed. In the absence of safety concerns, other options would be parenting support / therapeutic support / mediation, including child-inclusive mediation / legal support / child consultation.
- Research is needed to gather and coordinate local information about existing services available to the separating family, with signposting to those services and ongoing input to keep information up to date. This could be undertaken by Local Authorities and delivered through Family Hubs or through coordinated local 'Support for Separating Families Alliances' (SSFAs) as recommended by the PrLWG.
- Establish pilots to evaluate the effectiveness of an early IAM, specifically the benefit to children of early intervention following parental separation.

Parents need early access to services which are flexible, responsive, less expensive than pure legal support, and will help them to address emotional issues and reduce conflict.

The aim is that families access the right services to meet their needs at an early stage.