

Taking the fight out of family separation

Finding safe and supportive solutions for all



**family
solutions
group.**

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The Family Solutions Group is a multi-disciplinary group set up in 2020 by Sir Stephen Cobb, chair of the Private Law Working Group, to consider the needs of families following separation. Its report “What About Me?: Reframing Support for Families following Parental Separation” was published in November 2020.

[#whataboutme](#)

Key Statistics

- Every year in Britain around **280,000** children experience parental separation. ¹
- Frequent, intense and poorly resolved **parental conflict** is harmful to children, with potential life-long consequences. ²
- The cost to the taxpayer of family separation is large and growing - **£51billion** in 2018, up from **£37billion** in 2009. ³
- Government has not adopted a coordinated Family Policy fit for the 2020s despite a commitment by the former Lord Chancellor in the 3rd reading of the Divorce Bill.

“My commitment is that, as a government, we will work harder to coordinate, to bring together the strands of policy, that sit with various departments, and to ensure that we have a Family Policy that is fit for the 2020s.” ⁴

- The primary reason for children being referred to counselling is the effects of family separation. ⁵

1. “What About Me?: Reframing Support for Families following Parental Separation” (2020), p.54.
2. Inter-parental conflict and youth psychopathology: evidence review, Harold and Sellers (2018).
3. Relationships Foundation, 2018 update.
4. Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill [Lords] Robert Buckland: Committee stage & 3rd reading: House of Commons & Committee: 1st sitting & Committee: 1st sitting: House of Commons, Wednesday 17th June 2020.
5. Fegans (2020).

Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division

“The task of identifying, developing and then funding a better way to achieve good enough co-parenting between separated parents is a matter for society in general, policy makers, Government and, ultimately Parliament; it is not for the judges. My purpose today is, therefore, simply to call out what is going on in society’s name, and at the State’s expense, and invite others to take up that call.”

Keynote Address, Resolution Annual Conference

The FSG’s Call to Action

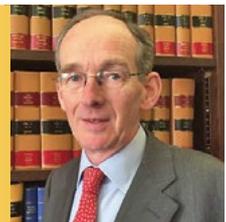
- Government must focus its policy and funding on keeping child welfare at the centre of any family separation. A ‘family solutions system’ is long overdue, so only those who need a court order access our ‘family justice system’.
- Parents and children should be offered early information and support at the start of the separation process, so needs can be assessed and the right route chosen.
- Wider society should be persuaded to dial down combative and ‘fighting-talk’ language when describing family separation.

Tonight's Panel



Paddy O'Connell, Moderator

Paddy O'Connell is the award-winning host of Sunday's biggest news programme, **Broadcasting House**. Paddy has worked around the dial and around the world from Wall Street to the Eurovision Song Contest. He was brought up by his mum Betty, who was a Bletchley Park veteran, and he has worked for military charities in honour of the wartime generation, including his late father Guy, a D-Day Royal Marine Commando. His fee for his work with us today is going to The Royal Marines Charity. We are very grateful for his support.



Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division

Sir Andrew McFarlane is President of the Family Division and Head of Justice, and Chair of the Family Justice Council. Sir Andrew has been a trustee of YoungMinds (the national young person's mental health charity) and is Patron of HOPE Family Centre (Bromyard).



Siobhan Baillie, Conservative MP for Stroud

Siobhan Baillie is the MP for Stroud. A former family solicitor, Siobhan worked as Head of Policy and Communications for OnePlusOne before standing down in 2018 to dedicate her career to parliamentary politics. Along with her other parliamentary appointments, Siobhan has served as Co-Chair of the APPG for Relationships.



Dr Jan Ewing, Research Fellow, University of Exeter

Dr Jan Ewing is a Research Fellow in the Law School at the University of Exeter. Jan is currently working on the Wellcome Centre-funded Healthy Relationship Transitions (HeaRT) project, looking at the role of child-inclusive mediation in the mental health and wellbeing outcomes for children whose parents separate.

Tonight's Panel



Helen Adam, Chair of The Family Solutions Group

Helen Adam has worked with separating couples for over 30 years, initially as a family solicitor and, for the last 15 years, as a family mediator. Helen was the mediator representative on the Private Law Working Group and is chair of the Family Solutions Group. Their report 'What About Me?' was published in November 2020. Helen will address the Family Justice Council in April 2022 on "*Time for Climate Change in the Family Justice System*".



Angie Moxham, CEO and Founder, The Fourth Angel

Angie Moxham is one of the most successful women in PR over the last 30 years. Despite her business acumen and financial means, Angie's experience of the "system" following separation was overwhelming and anxiety-inducing. The brutality of the system and the way issues were resolved have left a lasting damage in the family. Thanks to counselling and three wonderful children, Angie is back on her feet and leaving behind those dark days.



Nav Mirza and Adam Colthorpe, Dads Unlimited

Dads Unlimited have pioneered a holistic approach to supporting parents which includes, amongst other services, early-intervention workshops, one-to-one mentoring and mental health support. Suicide prevention is a key feature of their work. Their 'whole-needs' approach, plus a commitment to ensuring a positive difference to co-parenting, results in improved outcomes for thousands of children. Dads Unlimited have just won a prestigious GSK Impact Award in recognition of the outstanding impact the charity has made on the UK's health and wellbeing.

A New Language for Family Separation

First and foremost, if there are safety concerns,
the Family Court is there for your protection.
Wherever it is safe...

Instead of...	Think ...	Why this matters...
Custody	Parental responsibility and child arrangements (Never say "custody")	"Custody" suggests ownership and control. It was removed by the Children Act 1989. The law gives parents 'Parental Responsibility' for their child and expects them to make arrangements centred around their child's needs.
Access	Family time, or time with a parent	Access is too impersonal. We're talking about the time that a child has with a parent. Children need time with parents, whether they're together or apart.
50:50	A child's right to have close relationships with both parents	This isn't about parents asserting their "right" to a percentage of the child's time. It's about arrangements which enable a child to develop an equally close and nurturing relationship with <u>both</u> parents.
Fighting for my rights	Cooperating over shared responsibilities	Parents have responsibilities for their child (not 'rights' over the child); this includes an expectation that they cooperate with the other parent and promote their child's relationship with the other parent.
Having "sides"	Parents may have different perspectives but there are no sides	Children want to be free to love both parents. Criticising the other parent or being on opposing "sides" is unhelpful and possibly harmful.
Warring parents or a custody battle	A family in crisis	Continued conflict puts a child at risk of harm. Any family in crisis needs tailored support to help them agree arrangements and parent more cooperatively.
The end of the family	The family lives on, but as a differently shaped family	Childhoods continue following separation. This is not the end. Family life continues and will settle down in a different shape.



“What About Me?: Reframing Support for Families following Parental Separation”

“a blueprint for radical change”

Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division

Download at kn.legal/fsgreport

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With thanks to our speakers: **Paddy O'Connell, Sir Andrew McFarlane, Siobhan Baillie, Dr Jan Ewing, Helen Adam, Angie Moxham, Nav Mirza and Adam Colthorpe**

Our press team is available to provide further information, expert commentary and case studies for you to use. If you are a member of the press, please get in touch at press@familysolutionsgroup.co.uk



SCAN ME

#whataboutme