

## Language Matters Events 2023

The Family Solutions Group hosted three Language Matters events and conference sessions in January, February and March 2023 to explore professionals' appetite for using positive and solutions focused language, rather than combative or battle terminology following family separation. We also wanted to find which words are the most harmful and most helpful. The events were attended by 400 professionals including family legal advisors, mediators, barristers, solicitors, judges, parental coordinators, CAFCASS professionals, contact centre staff, relationship therapists and clinical psychologists.

### Barriers to changing the language of family separation

During one of the events (in February 2023) we also explored the challenges of reframing family separation away from the language of combat and adversity.

**We asked delegates what most gets in the way of progress from a lawyer's perspective.**

- 40% Habit
- 30% Client expectations
- 15% The Legal process
- 3% Lack of guidance from the judiciary
- 1% Apathy
- 11% Other reason

**We asked delegates what most gets in the way of progress from a client's perspective?**

- 44% External force (eg family members, new partners)
- 20% Fear
- 19% Expectations
- 10% Other reason
- 7% Inability to function effectively.

**We asked delegates what most gets in the way of progress from a public/media perspective.**

- 74% Lack of education about the issues
- 11% Other issue
- 7% Expectations
- 5% Habit
- 3% Status quo

Thinking about how we can improve the language of family separation by using more solution-focused language,

**We asked who is best placed to make change happen:**

- 45% Practitioners
- 25% The Media
- 18% the Judiciary
- 9% the Government
- 3% Other

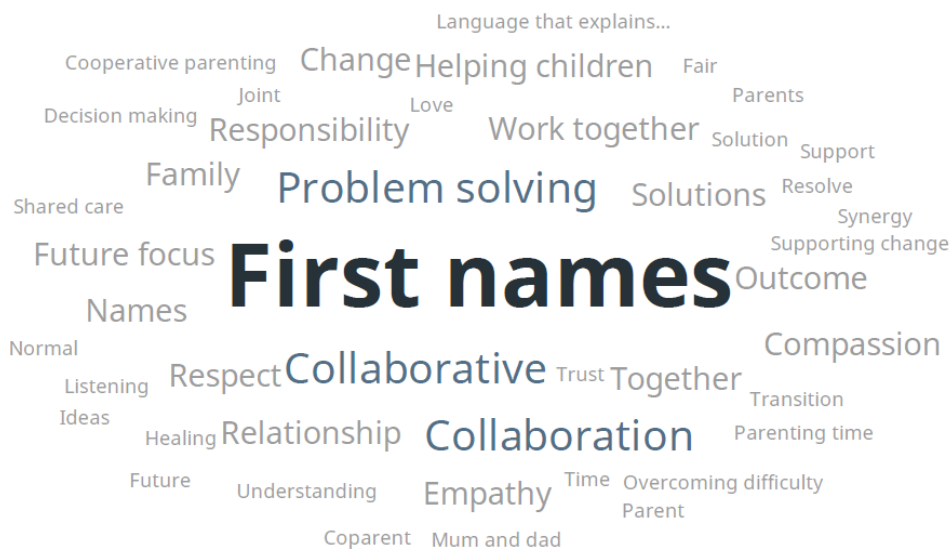
# Outputs from the Language Matters Event

## Language Matters workshop on 31 January 2023

What words are most harmful to family relationships?



What words are most helpful to family relationships, in cases wherever it is safe and, in the child's best interests?







## Family Solutions Group Language Matters Survey

*Language is undoubtedly one of the most important triggers that impacts our perceptions and responses.*

*As a mediator I become exasperated by the fighting talk that clients use that they allegedly heard from their solicitor*

The Family Solutions Group developed a survey to better understand how language impacts on separating families and their children and the professionals who support them. We wanted to explore if there was support for reframing language away from the traditional conflict-focussed language, to improve outcomes for families and their children following any separation.

228 professionals working in the family separation sector completed the survey in January/February 2023.

**99% of respondents said that as a general principle the language we use affects our clients' mindsets, which also affects their behaviour.**

- 96% said it affects them and their colleagues.
- 98% said it affects their clients.

**We asked respondents if the negative effects of confrontational language affects their parent-clients in a way which is likely to affect the experience of any child in the family**

- 56% said a strong yes
- 40% said yes, sometimes
- 4% said no.

**Looking at how different language affects families and children, we asked for views on the 5 principles (5 Ps) proposed in our Language Matters paper**

**On using plain language rather than legal jargon:**

- 86% strongly agreed that plain language would help.
- 14% people said this might have a positive impact sometimes.
- 0% disagreed.

**On using personal names, rather than terms like the applicant:**

- 76% agreed strongly that using first names would help.
- 22% said that this sometimes would make a difference.
- 2% disagreed.

**On using language which is proportionate to the family issues (ie more formal language in cases of safeguarding, and less so in cases of parental disagreement)**

- 69% strongly supported this suggestion
- 27% said yes, sometimes
- 4% disagreed

**On looking at using problem-solving language (for example, avoiding battle terminology, being respectful of different views, and finding common interests), the majority of professionals agreed this was beneficial:**

- 90% agreed strongly.
- 9% said it helped sometimes.
- Only 1% said it didn't help.

**On using future-focussed language, focussing on what a good future outcome looks more than dwelling on what has happened in the past**

- 81% agreed strongly that a future-focus will help.
- 18% said it would sometimes help
- 1% disagreed.

**We asked professionals if they were committed to reviewing the language used in client correspondence, case paperwork and marketing materials in line with the Family Solutions Group's Language Matters paper:**

- 87% agreed strongly.
- 12% said they would maybe consider reviewing language.
- 1% said they would not review their language

**We asked professionals if they would hold in-house training for members of staff dealing with family separation, to raise awareness of the impact of language on clients and their children.**

- The majority (80%) said they were committed to running training, 17% said they might consider it and 2% said they wouldn't run training.

**Exploring the greatest obstacles to changing the language around separating families, professionals cited changing habit was the greatest barrier.**

- Habit 50%
- Client expectations 22%
- Vested Interests 10%
- Apathy 5%
- It was impractical to change language: 1%
- Other reasons 11%

**We wanted to explore if professionals felt that changing the language around family separation might have financial repercussions for their practice.**

- Only 3% thought it might have a negative financial impact, and 12% were unsure, however the majority (82%) said it would not have any financial impact.

**We asked professionals if a formal guidance from the President of the Family Division or Rules Committee might be needed for language to change.**

- 73% said this would help.
- 25% said it might help.
- 2% that it would not improve language.

**We wanted to understand whether professionals thought that a positive change in the language of family separation would have the capacity to impact their clients' future parenting relationship, and impact the future childhood experience for any child of the family.**

#### **Impact future parenting relationship**

- 66% strongly agreed.
- 32% said it could sometimes have a positive impact.
- 2% disagreed

#### **Impact future childhood experience**

- 61% agreed strongly that it would have a positive impact.
- 37% said it could sometimes have a positive impact.
- 1% disagreed.

**Finally, we asked professionals if they agreed that that small changes in language could make a big difference overall to a child's experience following their parents' separation.**

- 73% agreed strongly.
- 26% said it could sometimes make a difference.
- 1% disagreed.