

## **NOWELL MELLER SOLICITORS LTD FAMILY LAW SERVICE**

### **LEAFLET NO.2B – UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILDREN’S BEST INTERESTS**

Children are entitled to a relationship with both their parents, whether or not they are living together.

Research shows that it is normally best for children if:

- Children are raised by both parents, whether or not they live together, as long as it is safe
- Each parent supports their children to enjoy a positive relationship with the other parent
- Children are clear about the arrangements for spending time with each parent
- Children should not be exposed to sudden changes in arrangements unless it is unavoidable
- Children should not be exposed to continuing conflict as it can harm them
- Parents support children to keep in touch with important people in their lives, such as wider family members and close friends
- New partners support the arrangements and have good relationships with your child. They can help to make things work without replacing you as a parent.

#### **Putting your children first**

When parents separate, emotions often run high. Whatever your feelings, it is really important to put your children’s needs first and avoid them being caught up in conflicts and arguments.

**Do** be honest with your children about what is happening and what is going to happen. Trying to hide conflict or the fact that you are separating does not help them. Instead, it may drive them away if they think that their parents lie and are not to be trusted.

**Do** reassure your children that it is not their fault and that they are loved by both their parents.

**Do** allow children opportunities to talk about how they feel and be aware that mood and behaviour changes may be their reaction to the situation.

**Do** allow time for everyone involved to adjust – some arguments between adults may not be resolved and children may need time to get used to their parents not getting back together.

**Do** sort out details of contact, residence and finances calmly so that you all know what is happening – it will make it less painful for your children. If you need help to reach agreement on these things, find out about local family mediation services.

**Do** encourage and help your children to be in contact with their other parent through face-to-face contact and by phone, post, email or text. It will be reassuring for them.

**Do** ask for help early on – family, friends and professionals can help you and your children adapt to changes in your family.

**Don't** lean on your children and expect them to be confidants, allies or friends. They will still have feelings of affection for both parents

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NOTE: The above is intended as a general guide for your information. It is NOT intended as a substitute for proper legal advice. Each case is different and advice cannot be given without a proper analysis of your own circumstances.

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