



## **Statement in Support of Family Mediation Week 2021**

With the rise in domestic abuse and in family breakdown during this pandemic, there's a renewed urgency to offer families who separate safe pathways to resolve issues. Research clearly shows that parental conflict is harmful to children and many families want to avoid a difficult adversarial process. Family mediation enables parents to prioritise child welfare, and to work together to resolve the legal and practical issues which follow separation.

**Family Mediation Week** is all about getting a message out to those who are struggling to say we are here. There's increasing recognition that family breakdown is not just a legal issue; parents move from being a couple to being separate individuals who have to continue parenting with each other for the years which follow. This transition is not easy, especially in the aftermath of relationship breakdown. Family mediators are here to help, to support parents in understanding the long-term needs of their child, and guide them towards a cooperative parenting relationship which works well for the whole family.

Relationship breakdown is a scary and stressful time, for many reasons. On top of the difficulty of the breakdown, there's a fear of what next and of the legal and adversarial backdrop if issues can't easily be agreed between them. **Family Mediation Week** is about saying there's another way. Rather than being set against each other, mediators help separating couples to work together in a safe and bounded way; rather than focus on the upsets of the past, mediators help couples to look to their future and make choices for what comes next; rather than focus on the two adults, mediators help couples to put their child's wellbeing first. Mediators are here to support families in the transition which follows relationship breakdown.

In this exceptionally difficult time, many families are struggling and relationships are being put under strain. There's a rise in domestic abuse and also in relationship breakdown. Amidst the turmoil and upset, it can be hard to know where to turn or what to do. **Family Mediation Week** is about getting a message out to families who are struggling with relationship breakdown or separation, to say 'We are here, come and have a private, confidential meeting on your own, to understand your options and decide on next steps'. It doesn't have to lead into mediation although, for many, that may be a helpful process. At this initial meeting, the mediator will consider a number of areas, whether there's been domestic abuse, what do the children need, are there any particular vulnerabilities, and whether mediation or some other option is suitable for resolving the issues. This meeting is free for anyone who is eligible for legal aid.

The family mediation profession has, like so many other professions, had to adapt in this pandemic. Mediators are offering online mediation with parents and, as part of the process, offering online consultations to children of an appropriate age. Family mediation provides a child-inclusive and holistic response to families in crisis when relationships break down.

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