

NEWS RELEASE

Four out of five people in the South East say children should come first in divorce

- **Survey reveals attitudes to separation and divorce as new advice guide launched**
- **Two thirds of people in the region have a divorced family member**
- **43% assume divorce can never be without conflict**

The overwhelming majority of people in the South East believe that putting children's interests first or avoiding conflict are the most important factors if going through divorce, according to a new survey from Resolution, the national family law association.

Four out of five (81%) say that putting children's interests first would be their first or second most important consideration in a divorce, and half (51%) would prioritise making the divorce as conflict-free as possible.

Despite this, four-fifths of people (80%) believe that children end up being the main casualties of divorce, and 43% believe that conflict is inevitable in separation and divorce. Despite the increasing availability of non-court alternatives, nearly half (47%) think that most divorces involve a visit to court.

In stark contrast to some of the high-profile divorce cases in recent years, financial factors are not seen as particularly important, with only a small minority (2%) saying that being financially better off than their partner would be the most important consideration should they divorce.

The survey was conducted to mark Family Dispute Resolution Week, starting today and being held to raise awareness of non-confrontational methods of resolving family breakdown, such as mediation, collaborative law and arbitration.

As part of the week, Resolution is launching a new advice guide, 'Separating Together: Your options for separation and divorce', designed to help separating couples understand and explore non-court based methods of resolving issues arising on the breakdown of a relationship.

Jackie Mensah said: "These findings highlight how people have good intentions to prioritise the well-being of children and to avoid conflict during separation, but this can often be derailed by a lack of knowledge of non-court based options and an exposure to the adversarial nature of courts. Something is going very wrong, and often the result is emotionally and financially drained parents, and deeply distressed children.

"However, there is another way. We've launched this guide because we want separating couples to know about non-confrontational alternatives to court. These methods can help prevent separation and divorce from being needlessly adversarial, and often can benefit the whole family through fairer settlements and by prioritising the interests of children."

The survey results come at an important time for family law in England and Wales. The most recent statistics show a rise in divorce rates; and the family courts are facing the strain.

Jackie Mensah added: “The courts are already struggling to cope, and are likely to be even busier when the legal aid cuts take effect next year, with more people trying to navigate the family justice system on their own as a result. The system is under huge pressure, and couples who use alternatives to court are much more likely to achieve swift, fair outcomes.”

Resolution is an association of 6,500 family lawyers and professionals committed to taking conflict out of family disputes. Resolution members abide by a code of practice which encourages solutions based on the needs of the whole family, and particularly the best interests of children.

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Survey Summary

ComRes interviewed 2018 British adults online between 29-31 August 2012, including 303 people in the South East. Results were weighted to be demographically representative of all British adults. The results in the South East showed that:

- Aside from ‘putting the children’s interests first’ (81%), ‘ensuring that the divorce is as conflict-free as possible’ (51%) is most likely to be seen as the most or second most important factor to consider when going through a divorce.
- Only 4% of respondents believe that “ensuring I am financially better off than my partner” was the most or second-most important consideration.
- 80% of respondents agreed with the statement “Children are usually the main casualties in divorces.”
- 47% agreed with the statement “Most divorces involve a visit to court.”
- 43% agreed with the statement “Divorces can never be without conflict.”
- 89% say that they know someone close to them who has been divorced.
- Two thirds (66%) say that a member of their family (parents, children, grandparents or another close family member) has been divorced.

Full national statistics are available on request.

ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full tables at www.comres.co.uk

Notes to editors

1. Resolution promotes a non-confrontational, constructive approach to resolving family disputes: www.resolution.org.uk/.
2. Family Dispute Resolution Week is the national awareness raising week designed to make the public aware of the alternatives to court for separation and divorce. More information on these alternatives, including mediation, collaborative law, and arbitration, is available on the Resolution website: www.resolution.org.uk/editorial.asp?page_id=19.

3. As part of the week, a new guide to dispute resolution has been made available. Entitled “Separating Together: Your options for separation and divorce”, it is available online here:
<http://www.resolution.org.uk/separatingtogether/>
4. The guide includes contact details for other organisations which can provide useful information around separation and divorce. These include: Citizens Advice Bureaux; Family Lives; Fatherhood Institute; Gingerbread; Money Advice Service; One Plus One; Only Dads; Only Mums; and Relate.
5. The week will culminate with Resolution’s annual conference for Dispute Resolution practitioners, taking place in Oxford on 28th September.
6. The most recent figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that the number of divorces in England and Wales in 2010 was 119,589, an increase of 4.9 per cent since 2009.
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/2010/stb-divorces-2010.html>

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Spokespeople are available for interview on request.