



NSPCC

Policy Practice Research Series

**Executive
Summary**

Your shout too!

A survey of the views of children and young people involved in court proceedings when their parents divorce or separate.

**By Judith E Timms,
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Research summary

Your shout too! reports the findings from a research study that sought the views of children and young people involved in court proceedings following the separation of their parents. The research is particularly timely given current public debate about the need to open up the family courts to greater scrutiny, consultation about the separate representation of the interests of the children at the centre of the proceedings and the developments in private law practice.

The policy context and legislative provisions

The following statistics illustrate why the position of children whose parents separate or divorce has risen up the public and political agenda in the last few years.

- Some 3 million of the 12 million children in the UK will experience the separation of their parents during the course of their childhood.
- Every day approximately 650 children see their parents separate or divorce.
- Two-thirds of divorcing couples have dependent children under the age of 16.
- Between 25,000 and 30,000 children a year are experiencing the divorce or separation of a parent for a second or subsequent time.
- In 2005, there were 151,654 divorce petitions received by the courts and 85,835 applications to the court concerning disputes about children's residence and contact arrangements.

The complex range of emotional, economic, educational and social problems, which may be experienced by young people before, during and after the breakdown of their parents' relationship, cannot be resolved merely by legislation. Nor is it suggested that every child will, in the longer term, as a corollary to divorce or separation, be disadvantaged or otherwise harmed in the process. What does seem clear, however, is that the separation of their parents is experienced by most children as a crisis, which makes them more vulnerable to a range of social, emotional, psychological, educational and financial difficulties. In addition, concern has been expressed by government and non-government organisations that the voices of children in the proceedings are still being muffled by the noise of parental disputes.

The main legislation covering arrangements for children when their parents divorce or separate is the Children Act 1989, which has been amended in some important respects by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and the Children and Adoption Act 2006. Section 8 of the 1989 act provides for residence, contact and other orders to be made if the court considers that an order is necessary to promote and safeguard the welfare of a child. This is almost always in cases where the parents, or others with parental responsibility, are in dispute about the post-separation arrangements for their children. Section 7 provides for the court to be assisted in reaching its decision to make or vary a section 8 order by the provision of a report, either by a local authority social worker or by a Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) family court adviser (FCA).

Since its formal establishment in April 2001, from an amalgamation of the former Divorce Court Welfare and Guardian ad Litem services, together with the children's work from the Official Solicitor's department, CAFCASS has been the body charged with the statutory responsibility both to report on and to represent the interests of children involved in a wide range of public and private law proceedings. In carrying out their duties, court rules

require CAFCASS officers to have regard for the requirements of the welfare checklist as set out in section 1(3) of the Children Act 1989. These include the requirement to “give due weight to the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned in the light of their age and understanding”. The importance of hearing the views of children was further strengthened by the provisions of rule 9.5 of the Family Proceedings Rules (FPR) 1991, which allows the court to make a child a party to the disputed section 8 residence and contact proceedings.

In 2005/06, CAFCASS responded to 26,144 requests for private law reports (which may involve more than one report prepared under section 7 of the Children Act 1989). In the same year CAFCASS children’s guardians represented children in 1,035 cases in which the child was made a party in section 8 residence or contact proceedings, under the provisions of rule 9.5.

For the majority of children in private law disputes about their residence and contact, who are not parties to the proceedings and usually have no involvement in court hearings, the traditional emphasis has been on achieving an agreement between the adult parties. Children are thus dependent on their parents to consider and protect their interests, a position based on two assumptions, which might be unrealistic or indeed potentially dangerous:

- provided the separating parents agree, the arrangements will always be in the best interests of the child
- parents will act reasonably and always in the best interests of their children at times of maximum stress and family disruption.

There is an extensive body of research on the consequences of divorce and parental separation for children and their families, mostly seeking the views of parents, but with some more recent UK, Australian and US studies seeking the views of the children themselves. However, the number of children involved in these studies is still small, and with a small number of exceptions, the way in which children experience the court processes has not been a major focus. The *Your shout too!* research sought to build on this body of research, and to focus directly on the views and perceptions of the young people themselves regarding the decisions made by the courts and their parents on their behalf.

Methodology

The authors used a postal survey methodology to seek the views of children and young people, who had been interviewed by a CAFCASS FCA for the purposes of preparing court reports about residence or contact arrangements. The sample included young people who had been separately represented in those proceedings by both a CAFCASS children’s guardian and a children’s panel solicitor. The young people were all aged 11 or over when they received the questionnaire, although some could have been nine or 10 at the time when the initial CAFCASS court reports were prepared.

The survey addressed four key aspects of the young people’s experiences:

- their understanding of the court processes
- their satisfaction or otherwise with their level of involvement in the decision-making processes
- their satisfaction or otherwise with the professional services provided before and during court proceedings
- their satisfaction or otherwise with the residence and contact arrangements made.

A total of 71 area offices of CAFCASS participated in the research, by sending out the survey on behalf of the researchers. A package containing a questionnaire and explanatory leaflet for the young person, and an explanatory letter to the parent, was sent by a CAFCASS administrator to the resident parent of 1,552 children and young people about whom a section 7 report had been prepared within a six-month period in 2005. In addition a survey was sent to 138 (70 per cent) of the 198 young people, as identified by the participating area CAFCASS offices, who had been represented under rule 9.5 (Family Proceedings Rules 1991) by both a solicitor and a children's guardian over a 12-month period in 2004/05. (There was provision for the FCA to decide that a young person should not be written to if he or she was considered "to be at risk of undue distress if they were to receive the survey", and some of the larger offices selected a random sample of section 7 cases.) A large proportion of the parents in whose cases a report was prepared were therefore invited to ask their children if they wished to take part. It is impossible to know how many did in fact pass on the questionnaire to their child, and therefore the proportion where it was the parent rather than the child who decided against taking part. Whichever is the case, the 141 young people who returned the (anonymised) questionnaires are an 8 per cent sample of those to whom a questionnaire was sent. The response rate for the subset of rule 9.5 cases was slightly higher at 10 per cent.

The returned schedules indicate that the young people who completed them had a good understanding of the questions the authors were asking, and found them relevant to their experiences. In one or two cases the authors picked up signs that a parent might have been looking over a shoulder or "helping" with responses, but the overall impression was of young people expressing their often strongly held opinions. It should be borne in mind that, because FCA reports are only ordered in more complex cases, the responses may not be typical of children involved in contact and residence proceedings, and even less so of those where the court does not become involved.

Findings

The young people

- Ninety-three (two-thirds) of the 141 respondents were female and 48 were male.
- Their ages ranged from 11 to 18 with an average age of 13 years and one month. The girls were on average six months older than the boys.
- There were three Asian respondents and three of mixed heritage.
- Ninety per cent had a half or full sibling and 13 said that they were an only child.
- The children's parents had separated at some time between less than one year and 13 years before the questionnaires were completed, the most usual period being two years.
- Eighty-six respondents (61 per cent) had their main residence with their mother and 40 respondents (28 per cent) with their father. Ten respondents (7 per cent) had shared residence and five were living with another relative.

Services and support

- Just under half (43 per cent) of respondents had seen one or more other professionals in addition to their CAFCASS worker, whose involvement triggered their inclusion in the survey.
- The other professional was most likely to be a solicitor, a social worker or a counsellor, and of these the solicitor was rated the most highly.
- Teachers and other school staff were an important source of help and support.

- No one mentioned accessing telephone helplines or relevant websites.
- Sixty-one per cent of the young people considered that, taken as a whole, the services provided by professionals in response to their parents' splitting up had been very helpful (16 per cent) or quite helpful (45 per cent). However, 11 (8 per cent) ticked that it had "made it worse".
- Informal support came from parent(s), friends, grandparents and siblings (ranked in order of frequency of mentions).

CAFCASS services

- Fourteen respondents (10 per cent) had been represented under rule 9.5, and the report for the others was prepared under the provisions of section 7 of the Children Act 1989.
- Approximately half the respondents thought that their CAFCASS worker had been helpful or very helpful.
- Sixty-two per cent thought that their CAFCASS worker had explained their options and the changes that were occurring or might occur in their family really well or quite well.
- All of the rule 9.5 group had understood the explanations given by the CAFCASS worker about court procedures and the changes that might take place in their lives.
- The question of whether their CAFCASS worker had spent enough time with them elicited a large number of "don't remember" or "not sure" responses (38 per cent of the total). Of the remainder there was a 60/40 split between "sufficient time" as opposed to "not enough time".
- Fifty-seven per cent thought that the input from the CAFCASS worker had made the situation better.
- The younger age group, 11–13-year-olds, were more likely to think that their CAFCASS worker had helped "to make things better" for them. Boys were more likely than girls to think that their CAFCASS worker had helped "to make things better" for them. However, since more boys were in the younger group, it is not clear whether it is gender or age that is the relevant factor.
- Respondents thought that the main ways in which their CAFCASS worker had helped were (ranked in order of frequency):

1. "By helping me to say what I wanted"	43 per cent
2. "By helping me to live with those I want to"	36 per cent
3. "By helping other people to listen to me"	21 per cent
4. "By helping me to feel safe"	13 per cent
5. "By helping my family talk to each other"	8 per cent
6. "By helping me to see the special people in my life"	6 per cent

(Respondents could tick as many statements as they wished, hence these percentages add up to more than 100 per cent.)

- There were differences between the older and the younger respondents, and between the girls and the boys, in terms of the above aspects of the service they most appreciated.
- However, 24 per cent of respondents judged that their CAFCASS worker had not helped in any of the above six ways.
- The respondents to *Your shout too!* ranked the six aspects of help in an identical manner to the young people who had participated in CAFCASS's own *Viewpoint* survey in 2006.

- Among the critical comments made about the CAFCASS service were:
 - not being listened to properly
 - issues around trust and confidentiality
 - pressure to see a parent who the young person was reluctant to see
 - on occasions feeling patronised, or being told things that the young person already knew.

“Having a say” and views about going to court

- Seventy-four per cent of respondents thought that they had been able to “have a say” about the arrangements being made for them after their parents’ separation.
- Fifty-five per cent thought that having the opportunity to give their opinion and state their wishes had made a difference to the outcome.
- Very few of the respondents had attended court (10 young people, representing 7.5 per cent of those who had answered the question).
- Two of the 10 who did attend court would have preferred not to.
- Of those who did not attend court, 60 per cent would not have wanted to.
- Of those who did not attend court, 40 per cent would have liked the opportunity to do so, and to have talked to the judge.

Satisfaction with residence and contact arrangements with the non-resident parent and other relatives

- There was a higher level of satisfaction with residence arrangements than with contact arrangements. For 85 per cent of the respondents, their residence arrangements were satisfactory, and mostly satisfactory for another 10 per cent. There were only four respondents for whom residence arrangements were not satisfactory.
- In general, contact arrangements for seeing the non-resident parent and/or other relatives were satisfactory for 62 per cent, and mostly satisfactory for a further 24 per cent. The remaining 14 per cent were dissatisfied with their contact arrangements.
- One in eight of those living with their mother did not see as much as they would have liked of their father, and one in four did not see as much as they would have liked of their paternal grandparents.
- One in four of those living with their father did not see as much as they would have liked of their mother, and one in three did not see as much as they would have liked of their maternal grandparents.
- Overall, 30 per cent of all respondents did not see as much of their grandparents (on the side of their non-resident parent) as they would have liked.
- Sixteen per cent of the respondents did not see enough of a sibling living elsewhere. Among these, the “write in” comments indicated that for an important minority this was a cause of sadness, anxiety and/or frustration.
- More of the boys appeared confident (than was the case with the girls) that their views had made a difference to the outcome: 48 per cent of boys as compared to 27 per cent of girls. This was particularly apparent in the younger set of boys. Similarly, respondents aged 13 and under were more positive than those aged 14 or over that voicing their opinion and wishes had made a difference to the decisions (38 per cent as compared with 28 per cent).

Stability and disruption

- There was likely to be a high level of disruption in the young people's lives, in addition to the divorce of the parents. Twenty-three per cent of the respondents had experienced a house move and a change of school, both into a new geographic area, since their parents' separation.
- Another 38 per cent of respondents had experienced a house move or a change of school, excluding a standard school move from primary to secondary level.
- Young people living with their fathers were more likely to have experienced house and/or school moves than those living with their mother. This might in part explain why contact arrangements were rated as unsatisfactory more often by the young people who were living with their father.
- Only two respondents expressed a wish for their parents to get back together. Eleven other respondents wanted their parents to be civil to each other, at least in front of them, and wanted them to make contact arrangements without arguing.

Key themes emerging from the research

- The survey responses revealed a picture of young people attempting to deal with changes and balance the tensions in their lives. In common with the young people in the first *Your shout!* survey, many of the respondents demonstrated remarkable maturity. Their comments showed great care and concern for their parents, coupled with a desire to protect their sensitivities, sometimes at the expense of their own wishes and feelings.
- Following on from the above, there was a strong sense of some of the children being left to "live the life" agreed for them by their parents and the courts with a sense of pragmatism and resignation.
- It was remarkable that none of the young people who responded exhibited any awareness of anything they could personally do to initiate any change in their residence and/or contact arrangements.
- Talking to others, sharing problems and being open with professionals and family members were the key pieces of advice they wanted to give others facing the separation of their parents.
- The complexity in the lives of the children and their families makes the role of the FCA a particularly complex one, requiring high levels of skill and commitment to the young people. Judging from the responses, some FCAs provided a caring and sensitive service. Others did not. The narrow focus of professional input around court proceedings left some young people dissatisfied. For others it was a case of too little too late.
- Children could be satisfied with the service received but not necessarily satisfied with the outcome of the arrangements made for them. The authors concluded from looking at the questionnaires as a whole, that it was the characteristics of the child, the parents and especially the intensity of the conflict, which had the biggest impact on satisfaction with the outcome of the court case. However, the findings indicate that the availability of support services for children and their families has a significant contribution to make to the continuing emotional wellbeing of children who have been the subject of court proceedings.

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NSPCC policy briefing and recommendations

The similarities between these findings and those emerging from other research seeking the views of children, lead us to make the following recommendations for policy and practice. Just as earlier research on children involved in public law proceedings demonstrated that professional attention and the attendant allocation of resources diminish as a function of the time that has elapsed since the court proceedings, our findings indicate that this is also the case for children involved in private law proceedings. The current system focuses on the process of separation and the regularisation of that process through the courts. Once that process is over, and the parents and the courts are satisfied – or at least resigned to the outcome – the families, and in particular their children whose problems may well be continuing, disappear from the professional radar. These findings reinforce the need for a range of integrated support services to be made available to children and their parents, and wider kinship networks before, during and after parental separation. Crucially, children and young people themselves need to understand where and what direct services are available for them and how they can be accessed.

Policy implications

1. The need for support services

There is an urgent need for a nationally coordinated range of direct support services for children and young people experiencing parental separation, familial conflict and domestic violence. An increase in resources is being promised under the general heading of “supporting families”. However, few resources already deployed under this general heading appeared to be reaching the children and their carers in our survey. The prime purpose of state intervention into private family life is to limit the collateral damage to children. There has, however, been little analysis of how effective general interventions can be for the children concerned. The lack of reference from respondents to the numerous websites or helplines designed to provide information for children and young people was, for example, conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, many young people highlighted the lack of information available to them. The findings indicate that the existing services are not easily visible or accessible to children when they need them. This may be not just at the time of parental separation and court proceedings, but later when the parental and professional agenda has moved on. As one young person put it: “The people I saw didn’t really do much for ME.”

2. The diversity of children’s experiences and the need for a diversity of services

The responses from the children in our survey demonstrated a wide range of situations and opinions. This diversity demonstrated the danger of making general assumptions about whether or not children want to go to court, see judges or have an input into decision-making. What is needed is a diversity of services flexible enough to meet the needs of a diverse community of children.

3. Hearing the voice of the child

The children in the survey wanted to be listened to and also to be able to see how their views influenced the outcome. While practitioners are largely united in their agreement that it is “a good thing” to listen to children, there is much less unanimity about the components of the second part of the process, namely the weight to be given to their expressed views,

the extent to which they should be allowed to influence decision-making and how they should be heard within proceedings. Private law has lagged behind public law practice in recognising the central contribution of children's views in influencing decision-making, keeping them safe and improving outcomes for them. There was qualitative evidence from the survey that some respondents felt a degree of disempowerment and that they would have liked their views to be taken into account to a greater extent. Of the sample, 45 per cent felt that they had either not expressed a view (either through choice or omission) or that their view had not affected the outcome. As one 11-year-old said: "They talked to me. However, this did not seem to make any useful difference."

Sometimes, listening to children will not be enough, and they will need an independent investigation of their situation and separate representation of their interests in court.

4. Young people's lack of ability to initiate change

None of the children in our survey exhibited any knowledge or awareness of how they could have brought about any change or review of their situation. This means that for all practical purposes, unless they could persuade both parents to agree to a change or one of their parents to initiate proceedings to vary the residence and contact arrangements, they were effectively locked into the arrangements ordered by the court or agreed by their parents. Some children were clearly struggling to manage fairly complex family situations, often with great maturity, but with no sense that it might be possible for them to have any agency in their own situation. One 13-year-old said he would like to "be able to choose when I see anyone – like have an overnight stop at Mum's one night, then choose if I want to see Dad, even if the court says I have to go".

There is provision in the Children Act 1989 (section 10) for children to seek leave to make their own applications for a variation of their residence or contact orders. In practice, this happens very rarely, and certainly none of the children in our survey demonstrated any knowledge of this possibility. Dame Margaret Booth (a former chair of the Children Act Advisory Committee) has argued that children should not be required to seek permission to commence proceedings because of the difficulties and delays this causes.¹ The *Your shout too!* findings support this view.

5. The impact of domestic violence

There is the additional question of the situation of the vast majority of children who have no contact with CAFCASS or who are the subject of agreed contact orders. Virtually nothing is known about their situation or their satisfaction or otherwise with the arrangements made for them. This is particularly relevant in relation to children who may be at risk as a result of domestic violence. In 2004, the Women's Aid Federation for England identified the cases of 29 children from 13 families who were murdered by their fathers during contact. In February 2006, Lord Justice Wall reported to the president of the Family Division on five of the cases in which there was judicial involvement. In three cases, contact had been ordered by consent. The Family Justice Council has now reported to the president on the approach the courts should adopt to proposed consent orders, in contact cases where domestic violence is an issue. The council has recommended a move away from "contact is always the appropriate way forward" to "contact that is safe and positive for the child is always the appropriate way forward".²

This is a message that also needs to be conveyed to children who are in a particularly powerless situation in relation to consent orders.

¹ See *Making Contact Work*. A report of the Children Act Sub-Committee to the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law, para 12.6. Chapter 12. DCA, February 2002

² Report to the president of the Family Division on the approach to be adopted by the court when asked to make a contact order by consent, where domestic violence has been an issue in the case. (Family Justice Council, January 2007)

6. Importance of contact with family and friends

The findings replicated those of the first *Your shout!* survey (on the views of looked-after children)³ in demonstrating the importance of contact with key family members and friends. Overall, there was a higher level of satisfaction with residence than with contact arrangements. One in eight of those living with their mother did not see as much as they would have liked of their father, and one in four living with their father did not see as much as they would have liked of their mother. There was a trend towards older children being more satisfied with arrangements than younger children. The biggest casualty appeared to be contact for the children with the grandparents on the non-resident parent's side. (One in four children did not see enough of their paternal grandparent.) Again, the question arises as to how the children could have initiated change. It was clear that children perceived contact largely as something dependent on the goodwill of adults, rather than as a right to be respected.

“I live full time with my dad. Though I'm unable to see my nan (Mum's side) my dad lets me keep in contact with her through phone calls and letters. There have been times whenever she's in [name of city] he wouldn't mind her coming over for dinner. (This is something I don't want my mum finding out because she would pressure my nan.)”

The importance of friends, as well as family, is also sometimes overlooked.

“Sometimes it's difficult to see friends when it's my dad's 'time', which was frustrating when I was younger.”

7. Contact with siblings

Relationships or contact with siblings were mentioned throughout the responses. Ninety per cent of the respondents had siblings; they were mentioned as the most important source of support after parents and grandparents. There were frequent references to the importance of their relationship with their brothers and sisters.

“Someone who is in the same kind of situation, like a brother/sister, is a great help.”

“My older sister helped me and said I could go round there whenever.”

Of those with siblings, 23 per cent did not see enough of their siblings. Some had lost contact altogether. There were indications that it may sometimes be the sibling contact that is sacrificed in the interests of parity or a “trade off” between parents.

“I now hardly have any contact with my sister due to the fact that she now lives with my dad and stepmum. But the separation has made me and my mum close.”

One boy alternated a week with his mother and a week with his father in order to see both of his brothers.

One of the recommendations of the NSPCC review of legislation relating to children, based on the first *Your shout!*, was that there should be an assumption of reasonable contact with siblings. The findings from *Your shout too!* confirm the view that this is a discussion that should be revisited.

³ Timms J and Thoburn J, *Your shout! A survey of the views of 706 children and young people in public care.* (NSPCC, 2003)

8. The protracted involvement of children in court proceedings

An aspect of research and practice, which merits further attention, is the length of time children are involved in proceedings. Research by Trinder et al in 2002⁴ indicated that it was not unusual for contact arrangements to remain unresolved over a number of years. The time between the separation of the children's parents and completing our study ranged from under one to 14 years (some had never lived with the non-resident parent). We have no specific information about how satisfied or otherwise the children were with post-separation arrangements before the FCA's report was requested, but from their comments it was clear that some of the court hearings had continued over a period of years. More information is needed about the longer-term impact of a protracted process that can be chronically distressing for the children involved.

9. Disruption as an indirect consequence of separation

One aspect of the consequences of parental separation for children, which has received little attention, is the disruption children may experience as an indirect consequence of parental separation. Nearly a quarter of the children in the research sample had experienced both a change of school and a move to a new geographical area.

“I have been to four different houses. It's quite hard.”

In some cases, the move was positive, marking a fresh start, but given what research tells us about the increased vulnerability of children in the process of family breakdown and transformation, we would suggest that we need specific information about the practical impact of changes of home and school on the children concerned.

10. Confidentiality and the potential for breach of trust

The question of confidentiality of the children's views (raised in several responses) bears on the current public debate about opening up the family court to greater public scrutiny.

Achieving the right balance is particularly difficult in the case of children. Some children in the sample were angry that sensitive information given to the CAFCASS officer had been passed to the court without their knowledge or permission. They regarded this as a breach of trust.

“They said they wouldn't tell Dad some things. Then a couple of days after, Dad started asking why I said some things that I didn't want him to know.”

Children have a right to know what will and will not be shared with others, before rather than after they decide whether or not to reveal deeply personal information. Clearly there are practice issues for both CAFCASS and the courts in terms of what assurances and caveats can be given to children in order to avoid a breach of children's trust and any potential exacerbation of their family difficulties.

11. Implications for CAFCASS and for future evaluations of practice

Private law practice is in a period of rapid change and transition, and CAFCASS practice is changing with it. In such a period of rapid change in both attitudes and practice, there is a danger of practice innovations outstripping research in terms of the commitment to, as yet, unevaluated models. From the child's perspective the agenda is still very much that of the adults and the courts. The findings from this study clearly confirm that different children require a range of different services. Younger children in particular were more satisfied with the service they received than were older children, who wanted more information and more proactive help in achieving satisfactory residence and contact arrangements.

⁴ Trinder et al. *Making contact* (page 44, 2002). In 34 per cent of families in the sample, the separation had occurred within the last two years; in 33 per cent, three to five years previously; and in 33 per cent, six to 15 years previously.

The children and young people valued particular aspects of the CAFCASS service. They appreciated a CAFCASS worker who:

- listened
- showed understanding
- was friendly
- was supportive
- enabled the young person to express their views
- facilitated contact with a parent with whom the young person wished to keep in contact
- assisted the young person with their decision with whom to live
- respected their confidentiality and privacy.

For a service to be seen as satisfactory by children and young people, it should be composed of a number of elements, for which listening to children is a valued prerequisite, but is not sufficient on its own. Other elements of the task are:

- to give the child accurate information about their situation
- to inform and facilitate family communication
- to negotiate on the child's behalf
- to represent their views and interests effectively and accurately, both in court and within their families
- to achieve the best possible outcomes for them.

Finally, the HMICA (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration) inspection of CAFCASS private law front-line services in 2006 recommended that "CAFCASS should develop a longer-term research strategy with a clear child-focus outcome in partnership with other family justice agencies, relevant organisations and departments". We hope that this study and its findings will make a contribution to the development of that longer-term strategy.

Recommendations

1. Urgent consideration should be given to the need to support CAFCASS in developing a range of direct services for children and young people experiencing the negative effects of family breakdown. The services should be clearly signposted and accessible by the children, not just at the time of parental separation, but afterwards as well. (Policy points 1 and 2.) In particular, we would like to see a much more targeted use of all existing helplines, such as ChildLine, and those provided by the NSPCC. What is needed is a coherent information and support strategy to ensure that children and young people are not only aware of the services that are there to help them, but also how they may be accessed directly.
2. In cases where the court considers separate representation of the child is necessary in order to safeguard the rights and welfare of the child concerned and to ensure that their voice is heard in the proceedings, adequate resources should be made available to those children who need it. (Policy point 3.)
3. The rules governing children's own applications to initiate proceedings of their own volition, in order to review or vary residence and contact orders made under the Children Act 1989 (section 8), should be amended so that children are not required to seek permission to commence proceedings. (Policy point 4.)
4. There is a need for a specific review of arrangements for hearing children's voices and protecting the welfare of children who are living, or who have lived, in violent households. (Policy point 5.)
5. There should be a presumption of reasonable contact between children and their grandparents. This could be achieved through an amendment to the Children Act 1989 (section 34). (Policy point 6.)
6. There should be a presumption of reasonable contact between siblings. This could be achieved through an amendment to the Children Act 1989 (section 34). (Policy point 7.)
7. Research is needed into the satisfaction, or otherwise, of children whose parents have agreed the arrangements for residence and contact without the involvement of CAFCASS and the courts. (Policy points 4, 5, 6 and 7.)
8. A study is urgently needed to identify those children who have been the subject of more than two welfare reports prepared under the Children Act 1989 (section 7). (Policy point 8.)
9. Specific information is needed on the extent of disruptions at home and school and their impact on children whose parents have separated. (Policy point 9.)
10. The need to respect the confidentiality of the children involved should be fully taken into consideration in any proposals to open up the family court to greater public scrutiny. (Policy point 10.)
11. A coordinated programme of evaluation of current practice initiatives is needed to ensure the development of a coherent and effective pattern of service delivery at a time of rapid change. (Policy point 11.)

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