

CHARTER FOR GRANDCHILDREN

Families are important to children.

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins can all play an important role in raising children. While parents are responsible for caring for their children and making sure their needs are met, the wider family can play a vital supporting role.

Family life is usually happy but sometimes there can be difficulties. These can range from divorce and separation to ill health or death. During these times, the children in the family may need extra support. They may want someone to talk to, or simply a safe place where they can have fun. Grandparents can and do play a vital role in helping children to maintain some stability in their lives.

Sometimes, children or young people may lose contact with their grandparents. This can be for a variety of reasons. There may have been a family quarrel, a house move, or a change in who is caring for the children. Sometimes death, rather than divorce or separation breaks up a family unit. It takes time for everyone to adjust to the loss of a loved one, and people grieve in different ways. Many young people experience the loss of a grandparent who dies. A child can be helped to understand why that happens and they will come to accept the situation. If the child loses a grandparent because their parents have separated, the child may not understand why he or she cannot see that grandparent any more.

Whether the problem in your family is divorce, separation or death, it is important to look beyond your own feelings to help the children stay in touch with their family as well as to adjust to a new situation.

GRANDCHILDREN CAN EXPECT:

- To know their family (except in very exceptional circumstances).
- To know that their grandparents still love them, even if they are not able to see them at the present time.
- To be treated fairly and not used as weapons if the adults in their life are fighting.
- To know their family's history.
- To be consulted about and informed of decisions being made about them.
- Social workers, when making assessments about their lives, to take into account the role grandparents can play.

- The Courts, when making decisions, to take into account the role grandparents can play in their lives.
- Lawyers and other advisers to encourage relationship counselling or mediation when adults seek advice on matters affecting them.

Being part of a family can be fun. It can also be hard work and sometimes there are arguments. All families can face problems.

Here are a few suggestions for those difficult times:

FOR PARENTS

Bringing up a family can be very rewarding. But children can be hard work! Grandparents and other family members might be able to give you advice and support if you ask for it. They might be able to baby-sit or collect the children from school.

Relatives may feel they are helping you by offering advice, but sometimes it can feel like criticism. Try to accept it gracefully. It is up to you whether or not you follow it.

If you split up from your partner, you should consider how your children will keep in contact with both sides of their family, including grandparents and other family members. Children almost always benefit from contact with their wider family. Try not to let your difficulties with other adults interfere with your children's relationships.

If there has been a breakdown in contact, or your children cannot see their grandparents at the moment for whatever reason, try to let them keep in regular contact, by phone call, e mail or letter, so they can share in and be proud of your children's achievements. They can help your child feel important and special.

If you have a new partner in your life, consider your children's feelings. They may not feel ready to share you with someone new. Other family members may also find it difficult to adapt to the new situation. Take it slowly.

FOR GRANDPARENTS

Remember that bringing up children can be hard work. Consider offering a listening ear, or offering to look after the children for a few hours if you are able.

No one likes criticism. When you have some advice to give, try to make sure you offer it gently and with kindness but remember, just because you give advice does not mean it will be followed!

If your grandchildren's parents are having problems or split up, try not to take sides and become involved in arguments. Young people need stability in their lives, and you might be able to provide a loving and familiar environment for your grandchildren at a difficult time for everyone.

Sometimes you may offer to help and be rejected. Try not to take it personally or let resentment build up. Keep in contact and be there to listen when you are needed.

If you have not seen your grandchildren for a while, consider keeping in contact through letters, e mail or by phone. Try to be understanding, not confrontational with their parents, and slowly build up trust again.

It is likely that your grandchildren's parents will begin new relationships with new partners and this can be difficult for everyone. Try to be polite and welcoming.

FOR EVERYONE

It is important that parents, grandparents and other family members, speak to, and treat each other, with respect. You may not get on, but you can still be civil, for the sake of the children.

Try to avoid arguing with or criticising family members in front of the children. It can be very upsetting for them.

When there are problems in families, it can be difficult to see a solution. Tempers can run high, and family members may take sides. Everyone involved should be prepared to put the welfare of the child first and be ready to compromise.

Where to get help

Sometimes it can be difficult to come to an agreement. There are lots of agencies who can offer help and advice.

Relationship Counselling: Talking about a problem often helps. Relationship counselling in particular helps couples to understand each other's point of view, which is facilitated by a trained Counsellor. Most people coming for relationship counselling self-refer and others are directed from health, social services, churches and friends and family. Relationship counselling is a process of enabling couples or individuals to see their situation more clearly and to work through particular issues which impact on their relationship. Couple Counselling Scotland and Scottish Marriage Care are two specialist relationship counselling organisations in Scotland.

Mediation: This is a service for family members to help them to make their own agreed arrangements for their children through meetings with a trained mediator. Mediators can also help parents to reach agreements on property matters. Grandparents can also use mediation to address issues that have arisen between them and the parent regarding their grandchildren and in some cases are able to use contact centres to maintain relationships that would otherwise prove very difficult to do so.

Family Group Conferences: The family group conference process is facilitated by an independent co-ordinator. It involves members of the extended family and other significant people who can contribute to planning for the future wellbeing, care and

protection of a child. Some local authorities offer family group conferencing, and the charity Children 1st will also be able to give you more information.

Helplines: The numbers of local and national organisations that offer help and support to families are listed in the phone book. Parentline is one such organisation. Grandparents Apart Self Help also operates a helpline. There is also lots of advice available on the internet. If you don't have a computer at home, you may be able to use one at your local library.

Citizens Advice Bureaux: Local Citizens Advice Bureaux can offer you advice on matters such as relationship breakdown, caring for children and options for resolving disputes. The details of local offices are listed in the phone book or on Citizens Advice Scotland's website, www.cas.org.uk Information about your rights is also available on Citizens Advice Scotland's public information website: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Parenting Agreements: The Scottish Executive has produced a Parenting Agreement pack. Parenting Agreements are for parents who are separating or who have separated, to help them think about and agree key decisions about the future of their children. For example, parents can consider and agree how they will both play an active role in their child's upbringing. Parenting Agreements are not legally binding, but some people find them helpful at what can be a difficult time. If you or someone you know would be interested in receiving further information, they can go to the website www.scotland.gov.uk/familylaw or phone 0131 244 3581.

Legal advice: Some people may decide to seek the advice of a solicitor. Solicitors who are members of the Family Law Association www.fla-scotland.co.uk deal with families in all forms of disputes. They will be able to refer people to mediation. They are aware of the problems that face families. A number are specialists in this field. Some solicitors are also trained as mediators themselves and can help families resolve difficult issues, They are members of a group known as CALM, www.calmScotland.org.uk. The Law Society of Scotland can also give you a list of solicitors in your local area: www.lawscot.org.uk The process of Collaborative Family Law www.collabfamilylaw.org.uk can be used where agreements are reached by round table discussions with all parties and solicitors.

Details of all these organisations can be found on websites, Yellow Pages and through Citizens Advice Bureaux. Going to see a solicitor does not mean going to court but you will be able to access advice about how best to resolve the difficulties in your family.

Many families find that making agreements outside of the court system, perhaps with the help of a mediator, works best for them. Every family is different, but one message remains the same:

Families are important to children.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Children 1st

83 Whitehouse Loan
Edinburgh
EH9 1AT
0131 446 2300
www.children1st.org.uk

Children in Scotland

Princes House
5 Shandwick Place
Edinburgh
EH2 4RG
0131 228 8484
www.childreninscotland.org.uk

Couple Counselling Scotland

18 York Place
Edinburgh
EH1 3EP
0845 119 6088
www.couplecounselling.org

Families Need Fathers

134 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3AR
0207 613 5060
Helpline - 08707 607 496
www.fnf.org.uk

Family Mediation Scotland

18 York Place
Edinburgh
EH1 3EP
0845 119 2020
www.familymediationscotland.org.uk

Grandparents Apart Self Help Group Scotland

22 Alness Crescent
Glasgow
G52 1PJ
0141 882 5658
www.grandparentsapart.co.uk

One Parent Families Scotland

13 Gayfield Square
Edinburgh
EH1 3NX
0131 556 3899
Helpline - 0800 018 5026
www.opfs.org.uk

Scottish Child Law Centre

54 East Crosscauseway
Edinburgh
EH8 9HD
0131 667 6333
Helpline - 0800 328 8970
www.sclc.org.uk

Scottish Marriage Care

72 Waterloo Street
Glasgow
G2 7DA
0141 222 2166
www.scottishmarriagecare.org

Scottish Women's Aid

Norton Park
57 Albion Road
Edinburgh
EH7 5QY
0131 514 9981
www.scottishwomensaid.co.uk

Stepfamily Scotland

18 York Place
Edinburgh
EH1 3EP
0131 514 9981
Helpline - 0845 122 8655
www.stepfamilyscotland.org.uk

The Law Society of Scotland

26 Drumsheugh Gardens
Edinburgh
EH3 7YR
0131 226 7411
www.lawscot.org.uk

The Scottish Legal Aid Board

44 Drumsheugh Gardens
Edinburgh
Eh3 1AP
0131 226 7061
www.slab.org.uk

BBC Parenting Homepage

www.bbc.co.uk/parenting

Citizens Advice Scotland

Find your nearest Citizens Advice
Bureau at: www.cas.org.uk
Find general advice online at:
www.adviceguide.org.uk

The Family Law Association

www.fla-scotland.co.uk

Parentline: 0808 800 222

Childline: 0800 11 11

The Scottish Executive produces a range of documents about family law that can be obtained from the following address:

The Scottish Executive Justice**Department**

Civil Law Division
St. Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG
0131 244 3581
www.scotland.gov.uk/familylaw