

Separation and divorce

Some couples find that as they get older and their children have left home or they retire from work, that they no longer have many things in common. There may also be tension when they are spending more time alone together than they would previously have done. Although many couples will choose to stay together, some may decide to try counselling, and for some, separation or divorce may be the only option.

Counselling

If you feel that you and your partner would benefit from counselling, either together or separately, one of the following organisations may be able to help you.

Relate can offer counselling if you want to talk about your relationships past, present or future, how your family is affected by your relationship, how you can improve your relationship, how you can manage a separation constructively or how you can get over a break up.

Marriage Care provide marriage preparation, relationship counselling, relationship education, a telephone helpline. They also offer general support and advice to those who want to marry or enter long-term relationships.

Caring Hands run a Counselling Service. The service is free and is available to anyone over the age of 50 living in the east end of Newcastle. Counselling offers a safe and supportive environment in which you can talk through any issues/feelings that cause you difficulty or concern. The service is completely confidential and can help with issues such as bereavement, anxiety, loneliness, stress or relationship difficulties.

North East Counselling Services delivers counselling services to carers and veterans across the North East.

[Read more about family and relationship problems and where to find local support on InformationNOW](#)

Separation

Many couples separate without actually getting a divorce. There are different ways of doing this depending on the situation and the nature of the relationship. Separation can be formal or informal:

Informal Separation

If you and your partner are married, you can separate by an informal arrangement. If you and your partner agree, you can make arrangements about children, money, housing and other property without going to court. However, any informal arrangement made when you separate may affect future decisions if you do ever go to court.

Formal Separation

A formal separation agreement is a written agreement between a couple who intend to stop living together. It sets out how they wish to sort out financial arrangements, property and arrangements for any children. The advantage of a written agreement is that it's easier to make sure that you both understand what has been agreed. It also means that either partner can go to court to change the order in the future. It is advisable to consult a solicitor when drawing up a separation agreement, but you should work out in advance the general areas you want to cover. This will reduce the legal costs.

Getting a Divorce

The law changed on 6th April 2022 under the The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act (2020). The changes remove unnecessary conflict to ease stress on couples and children with a new minimum wait of 20 weeks between application and conditional order of divorce. The changes mean that a spouse, or a couple jointly, can now apply for divorce by stating their marriage has broken down irretrievably. Language has also been simplified to replace the terms 'decree nisi', 'decree absolute' and 'petitioner', with 'conditional order', 'final order' and 'applicant'. This is part of a wider action to improve the family justice system.

Rights of Women have [a guide to divorce](#). It explains 'no fault' divorces No fault divorce removes some of the legal barriers that enable perpetrators to keep women trapped in abusive relationships.

[Divorce Aid](#) provides information and advice about all aspects of divorce, from the practical aspects to the emotional effects.

For details of where to go for legal advice, or how to find a solicitor, see our section on [Legal advice](#).

Who to inform

If you and your partner are separating or divorcing, you should tell the following agencies, if relevant:

- [Housing Benefit office](#)
- [Council Tax office](#)
- Mortgage lender
- [Water, gas, electricity](#) and [telephone](#) companies
- [Benefits office](#)
- [Tax office](#), particularly if you're getting tax credits
- Your bank or any other financial institution if you have a joint account. It may be advisable for you to freeze the account to prevent your partner withdrawing some or all of the money

- Hire purchase or credit companies
 - Insurance companies, particularly if you have joint policies
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Mediation

Family mediation is a way of resolving disputes after separation or divorce. In mediation, couples are helped to look for their own solutions to their disputes.

Both parties explain their concerns and needs to each other in the presence of a qualified family mediator. The mediator is impartial, which means that they are not on anyone's side. They are there to help both parties, unlike a solicitor who only works for one party in each case. Sometimes the mediator will suggest a way of solving a problem to help them to reach an agreement acceptable to both, but they will never tell either party what to do.

The mediator can give information about law but cannot give anyone advice about what to do. We would recommend that you go to see a solicitor who can give legal advice. The solicitor can help you before, in between sessions and when agreement has been reached so that you know that whatever agreed to is fair to you.

[Family Mediation Council](#) can help you to find a mediation service near you.

The Government has also introduced a [Family mediation scheme](#).

New relationships, remarriage and civil partnerships

When you're feeling ready you may be interested in meeting someone new. Read more about [Finding a partner](#) on InformationNOW.

If you're thinking about a new [Civil Partnerships](#) or [getting married again](#) don't forget to think about your financial and legal arrangements.

Children

When a relationship breaks down and children are involved, you need to make some formal or informal plans with your ex partner to arrange:

- who the children live with
- when each parent looks after the children if you are sharing custody
- money to cover the living costs for your child or children. This is known as Child Maintenance

Gov.uk has more information about [making arrangements for your child when you divorce or separate](#).

[Separating better](#) is a free app for separating parents to help you self-manage your separation. It has practical tools to help with budgeting and legal arrangements. You can use it to create a personalised parenting plan to make co-parenting arrangements that work for your children. In the app, you can watch a series of videos which shows typical co-parenting scenarios. To help you to

improve your conflict resolution and communication skills. There's articles with expert advice on separation and co-parenting. You can download it for free from the app store.

Child maintenance

Child maintenance is paid to cover the living costs of a child that you care for. It's usually paid to the person the child lives with and carries out most of the day to day care. The parent (or parents) who doesn't live with the child usually pays child maintenance.

[Read more about Child Maintenance from Citizens Advice](#)

[Child Maintenance Service \(CMS\)](#) is a government service for separated parents to make financial arrangements for their children. Both parents are responsible for paying for your child's living costs, even if they don't live with or see their child. The website explains your options and includes information about family-based arrangements. The CMS can:

- [work out how much each parent pays](#)
 - [arrange payments](#) and take action if a parent does not pay
 - sort out [disagreements about parentage](#)
 - try to find the other parent if you do not know where they are
 - keep your location and personal information private, for example, if you've [experienced domestic abuse or controlling behaviour](#).
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Other useful organisations

[North East Law Centre](#) is a not for profit legal practice that offers free family law advice to Newcastle residents.

[Advicenow](#) produce guides that are easy-to-read and practical. They explain what you need to know, where you need to go, and what you need to do to solve your problem.

[Families Need Fathers](#) is a charity that supports dads, mums and grandparents to have personal contact and meaningful relationships with their children following parental separation. They offer information, advice and support services helping parents to achieve a positive outcome for their children.

Where to get legal advice

Local support is available in Newcastle if you need legal advice. You can read more about [Where to get legal advice on InformationNOW](#).

Last updated: July 30, 2024

Useful Organisations

Shine On (formerly Caring Hands)

Email: contact@shineoncharity.org.uk

Website: <https://www.shineoncharity.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0191 261 5234

Address: Shine On, NE6 5QN

Citizens Advice Newcastle (CAN)

Email: citycab@newcastlecab.org.uk

Website: <http://citizensadvice-newcastle.org.uk>

Telephone: 0808 223 1133

Address: 4th Floor, City Library, NE1 8AX

North East Law Centre

Email: reception@nelawcentre.co.uk

Website: www.nelawcentre.co.uk

Telephone: 0191 230 4777

Address: 2nd Floor, 10 - 13 Saville Row, NE1 8JE

Solicitors for the Elderly

Email: admin@sfe.legal

Website: www.sfe.legal

Telephone: 0844 567 6173

Address: Studio 209, MillStudio Business Centre, SG12 9PY

Family Mediation Council

Website: <http://www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk/>

Telephone: 01707 594 055

Relate Northumberland and Tyneside

Email: northeast@relate.org.uk

Website: <https://www.relate.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0191 232 9109

Address: MEA House, NE1 8XS

Divorce Aid

Email: office@divorceaid.co.uk

Website: www.divorceaid.co.uk

Telephone: 0191 232 9109

Address: 38 York Road, PR8 2AD

Marriage Care

Email: connect@marriagecare.org.uk

Website: www.marriagecare.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 389 3801

Address: 3rd Floor, NE1 8XS

Advicenow

Website: www.advicenow.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 389 3801

Address: Law for Life: the Foundation for Public Legal Education, SE1 7NJ

North East Counselling Services

Email: info@necounselling.org.uk

Website: www.necounselling.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 466 1314

Address: HLF House, NE21 5NJ

Families Need Fathers

Email: admin@fnf.org.uk

Website: www.fnf.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 466 1314

Rights of women

Email: info@row.org.uk

Website: <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/>

Telephone: 020 7251 6577

Address: 52-54 Featherstone Street, EC1Y 8RT

Child Maintenance Service (CMS)

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/child-maintenance-service>

Telephone: 0800 171 2345

Separating better

Website: www.oneplusone.org.uk/separating-better

Telephone: 0800 171 2345

Related Articles

[Where to get legal advice](#)

[Family and relationship problems](#)

[Finding a partner](#)

[Finding friends and Befriending services](#)

[Sex in Later Life](#)