Relationships Scotland’s network of 22 affiliated Local Services provide family mediation, child contact centres, relationship counselling and other family support services across all of mainland and island Scotland. The national office of Relationships Scotland provides ongoing training, development opportunities and a quality assurance scheme to the local services. We are a national voice for relationship services and we influence political and legislative policy development in the area of family support.

One in five children from a broken home loses touch with a parent within three years and never sees them again. (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1346603/Britains-fatherless-families-1-5-children-lose-touch-parent.html#ixzz1lDeNbfdy; Daily Mail 2011). Our work supports individuals, couples and families experiencing relationship breakdown or difficulties. Around 20,000 people have contact with our Local Services each year to use one or more of the following services.

**Family Mediation**

Family Mediation is a voluntary process in which a trained, impartial mediator helps family members to communicate more effectively and to make their own arrangements for the future, particularly for children. Mediation can benefit families by minimising conflict, improving family life and helping to avoid long, painful and expensive legal battles. Family Mediation supports parents, children and the wider family through family change, particularly where this has occurred as a result of separation, divorce or family restructuring.

Family mediators work with adults to help them to understand and work through the issues arising from separation or divorce. This can lead to improved communication, prevention of more serious conflict, and in many cases a decision to work together in the best interests of their children. The most damaging symptoms of family breakdown can be prevented and conflict can be reduced.

Family Mediation has a vital role to play in the life of Scotland’s people. Whilst the family has proven to a most resilient and enabling institution, there are times when people’s intimate relationships require the help of others. Research has shown that family mediation is an effective support that enables separating couples and families to work out the best way forward for their future, and to work together in bringing up their children in an environment free from damaging conflict.
Feedback from fathers attending Family Mediation:

“I can’t thank this Service or recommend it enough. It has really been a god-send. I tell everyone that is in a similar situation to go for mediation. It’s the only way forward in my opinion”.

“Please contact my ex-partner and ask her to reconsider mediation. I am happy to carry on with mediation”.

“I am happy with my outcome, but I would have liked to have been placed in a room with a mediator at start of breakdown with kids involved. I believe the court should make couples with children do this to put their thoughts and feels first”.

“At the moment my son and daughter need mediation to cope with their mother’s attitude towards them both and their choice to live with me”.

“Very enlightening process. Learnt a lot about myself. Good and bad”.

“Very pleased with the Service and support provided”.

Child Contact Centres

The following research highlights the significance of fathers maintaining contact with their children after separation or divorce:

The first issue concerns the contact between children and their fathers following parental separation. Earlier studies have reported some inconsistent findings on the significance of contact. Our results were unequivocal: more frequent and regular contact (which included communication by telephone) was associated with closer, more intense relationships with non-resident fathers (relationships that were both more positive and more conflicted), and fewer adjustment problems in the children. (Children’s perspectives on their relationships with their non-resident fathers: influences, outcomes and implications; Judy Dunn, Helen Cheng, Thomas G. O’Connor and Laura Bridges; Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College London, UK; 2University of Bristol, UK; Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 45:3; 2004); https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/rferrer/VisitationSchedule/Various%20Topics%20Articles/DunnChildPerspective.pdf

Child Contact Centres play a key role in helping children affected by family breakdown to maintain relationships with the parent they do not live with. In most cases, the non-resident parent is the father. The central concept of a Child Contact Centre is to offer a safe, friendly, neutral, child-centred environment for children to meet with their non-resident parent or other family member e.g. grandparent.

Child Contact Centres work with separated couples to help facilitate ongoing contact between children and their non-resident parent or other family member. This can lead to improved communication between the non-resident parent and his or her children, reduction of ongoing conflict, prevention of more serious conflict and in many cases an ongoing decision by the separated couple to work together in the best interests of their children. As a result, the most damaging symptoms of family
breakdown can be prevented by using Child Contact Centres. Overall, parents are generally satisfied with the service provided by Child Contact Centres.

**Feedback from fathers attending Child Contact Centres:**

“*Without the Contact Centre it would have been improbable, if not impossible, for me to see my son*”.

“The Centre was a great starting point and I am now seeing my child weekly outwith the Centre”.

“I always felt that I could contact staff about any issues I had. They were always friendly and resolved any issue”.

“People like me and my children would have suffered very badly without this very vital service”.

“When I met my daughter at the Contact Centre, we always had great fun. I only needed a few sessions to re-kindle an already strong bond. We were always made to feel welcome and were offered kind hospitality”.

“This time 4 months ago I had no contact. The Centre has helped me dramatically. I am a small step from walking down the street with my son. I hardly knew him before and now I know him. He knows who I am and looks forward to seeing me. I think our time together has helped him with his numbers and kicking a football about. He has come on leaps and bounds. I am hoping that we can build a better relationship and that he will be able to come and stay with me at weekends”.

“Just wanted to say what a wonderful job you all do here, making life just that little bit easier for families and especially the children. You provide a friendly, caring attitude which reflects on everyone. My son and I leave our contact visits happy and content”.

**Relationship Counselling**

Relationship Counselling can be helpful at any time if communication becomes difficult or breaks down. This may be because of an affair, because of sexual problems or because of repeated rows or misunderstandings. Relationship Counselling can also help parents cope better with difficulties that may be impacting on their children.

Relationship Counselling is an effective form of early intervention in family breakdown. Counselling can minimise the negative impact of parental conflict by helping parents to communicate more effectively and to understand the impact of conflict on their children. The earlier this intervention takes place the more effective the outcomes for children will be.

Couple interventions also have a marked effect on children’s functioning (Two Central Roles for Couple Relationships, Sexual and Relationship Therapy, Cowan &
Cowan, 2005) and couple therapy is now supported in NICE guidelines on Child Depression. Where couple work takes place, there is a reduction in destructive marital conflict and improvements in family processes, including parenting and family adjustment.

**Feedback from fathers attending Relationship Counselling:**

“The Counsellor has been an amazing help and although my relationships has ended, she helped it occur amicably and as such we are able to continue and be friends”.

“The Counsellor was very helpful with certain things”.

“Interesting change in perspective from initial answers. This process must work judging by my improved answers”.

“Very helpful and supportive – made life easier. Thank you”.

“The counselling sessions were very helpful in highlighting areas that I need to change in myself”.

**Parenting Apart Groups (currently not offered by all of our Local Services)**

A Parenting Apart Group is a three hour workshop for parents to find out how to make separation less stressful for children. The group complements the other support that parents need at this time and help parents to develop insights and understanding and move on emotionally. Parents are able to negotiate more effectively having heard how separation impacts on children and how to put the children’s needs first.

The Groups create the opportunity to pass on findings from research on what children need from their parents at different ages and stages. Parents consider the impact of the separation on their lives, particularly the emotional impact, and are given tips on how to support their children. Parents are encouraged to explore ways of communicating with and co-parenting with their ex-partner. The Groups are about helping children thrive following their parents separation, not just surviving it.

Parenting Apart Groups are an effective form of early intervention in family breakdown. The earlier in the separation process when parents can develop their understanding of what they and their children are going through and how they can best help their children, the better.

This type of service provision is only being offered at this time by one of our Local Services, not all.

**Problem Solving for One**

Problem Solving for One (PS1) is used when one parent is unwilling to mediate or where mediation is not deemed appropriate. Individual sessions with a mediator is
then arranged in order to help the parent work out what they can do to influence and/or change a situation they are not happy with. PS1 uses the same model as mediation but just with one party. It can often have a major impact on the dynamics of a separated parenting relationship where one party is helped to identify the issues, think about how they would like things to be and work at what they can do to move towards that point. They can also be supported to think about how they react to the other parent and what impact a change in their own behaviour could have on the overall situation in relation to their children.

This type of service provision is only being offered at this time by some of our Local Services, not all.

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6 February 2014