

Information programmes for separating parents – a guide to accessing the service.

Background. From 8th December 2008 Contact Activities and Orders were enacted. Relate Solent and Winchester was appointed to deliver one of these activities – the Separated Parent Information Programmes (SPIP) – across the local CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) region. There are leaflets available from CAFCASS which detail the whole range of contact activities and where they are available. www.cafcass.gov.uk

What is SPIP? It is a four hour workshop, normally delivered in two sessions of two hours, which is aimed at separated parents (or involved extended family) and it aims to:

- Make the parents aware of the effect of separation on the child.
- Make it clear that continued conflict over contact is not ‘in the best interests of the child’.
- Give options and ideas about how to change things for the better by improving communications skills and promoting workable solutions.

What is it not? The course is not a counselling medium or mediation. It is also not about parenting a child per se – it is entirely focussed on the issues we all know families face post separation when they are in or likely to enter into conflict over the child(ren).

Do Ex-partners attend together? No, the courses are delivered to each party individually. Clients attend in groups with other parents (applicants and respondents) from other families so there is an opportunity for one parent to see the impact of a mirror of their behaviour on a peer. This is one of the most powerful learning mediums for the participants.

Who can attend? It is intended that both parties will be ordered to attend. Any magistrate or family judge working with contact issues can make an order and, usually, parents will have to have such an order to attend the course. However, we are able to offer the course on a self-referral basis as part of a current pilot scheme on receipt of a payment of £150 per person.

It is the view of Relate that any parent who has resorted to court action to resolve child contact would benefit from the course. We are keen to have as many parents as possible referred at the first hearing so that we can try and nip the presenting issues in the bud at the earliest opportunity.

What does it cost? From 1st April 2010 all SPIP courses will be free to parents who are ordered to attend.

Is the course suitable for parents with special needs? If clients have special needs – e.g. literacy issues – we will try to meet the clients’ needs.

If a client is not able to comply with the order because of capacity or behaviour we will advise the court and ask them to reconsider the order.

If parents have mental health problems, drug or alcohol issues or are known to be extremely violent then a 4 hour training session is not in all probability going to help.

Does it work? We have been delivering these courses at Relate Solent and Winchester for 8 years. Outcomes show changes in parental behaviour, demands and ability to negotiate. From the Relate perspective, what was exiting is that parents appear to shift towards understanding the child’s needs rather than their own needs in relation to contact.

What feedback does the court get? A Certificate of Attendance is issued to those who complete the training course to present in Court. The Court is advised of non-attendance. Should there be an issue, such as a disclosure of a Safeguarding nature, this will be raised and acted upon if appropriate and in line with Relate’s policies.

What if they don’t attend? The court will be advised and will take appropriate action as allowed under the law.

When do the courses take place? Relate Solent and Winchester are offering several courses per month for clients to attend in groups. We can also work with parents individually if their needs dictate this.

Where do the courses take place? Separated Parent Information Programmes are delivered by Relate Solent and Winchester at locations in Eastleigh, Southampton and the Isle of Wight.

What if the other party is not local? Not a problem – there will be a provider in their locality and the order for them should be sent to the provider direct. Please click on the CAFCASS website for more details. www.cafcass.gov.uk

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