

FAMILY CONSULTANTS

help with innovative approach
to divorce and separation



Collaborative law is increasingly an option requested by clients seeking an alternative way to deal with separation and divorce. It involves a commitment not to go to court to resolve any difficulties that a couple or family might be facing after making the often painful decision to separate

The process focuses on finding solutions in a way that suits the needs of that particular family, allowing clients to control the pace and content of any discussions that need to take place. Each spouse will have a collaborative lawyer and discussions take place in a series of four-way meetings where everyone is present to work towards finding solutions and reaching agreements.

DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

As collaborative lawyers we recognise that the discussions that may need to take place between a separating couple can stir up difficult emotions. Often one partner in the relationship may be more able to deal with the emotional aspects of the divorce and separation than the other. This can affect the ability to have proper discussions or make decisions which may have far-reaching consequences for them and their families.

Within the collaborative process there is the option to involve other professionals and a Family Consultant can become involved, often early on in the process, to help a couple deal with the emotional aspects of the separation. Addressing these issues can make a real difference to the effectiveness of the four-way meetings. As collaborative lawyers in the North East, we are fortunate to have a number of highly skilled family consultants within our group, making a fantastic alliance and offering a specialised, holistic service to clients choosing to resolve matters collaboratively.

WHO ARE FAMILY CONSULTANTS AND WHAT DO THEY OFFER?

Family Consultants are a group of professional individuals from a range of disciplines including family mediation, counselling



Working it out – attendees at the Resolution Family Consultants Training Programme in Newcastle.

and psychotherapy. In June 2012 the group were trained as family consultants and are now working as part of a team with solicitors and separating couples, enabling them to reach the best solution for themselves and their children.

This is an innovative and exciting development in the North and is the first time such services have been offered outside London.

Within the collaborative process, a family consultant can provide short term help and support to the separating couple, where unresolved emotional issues are preventing them and their lawyers from reaching a satisfactory mutual agreement. These issues are often connected to dealing with the end of the relationship and what can often be the highly charged and emotional decisions couples have to make about parenting their children after separation. A family consultant will have a sound understanding of the potential emotional and psychological impact of family conflict on both the adults and their children.

The decision to involve a family consultant as part of the process is taken on an individual basis and will be decided as part of a discussion between the lawyers and their clients and between the lawyers and the family consultant. The consultants offer a flexible approach, tailored to the individual's need. What involvement the couple want and what issues they wish to deal are agreed directly with the family consultant. The idea is that meetings are arranged either individually and/or together.

It may be that feelings of loss, grief and anger at the end of their relationship hinder a couple's ability to reach agreement. Working with a family consultant can assist a couple in finding ways of dealing with these emotions. If appropriate, assistance can be offered to help identify alternative ways of dealing with conflict and improving communication. Additionally, a couple can be offered time and space to agree an effective parenting plan and reflect on ways of parenting their children co-operatively in the future.

HOW DO FAMILY CONSULTANTS FEEL ABOUT THEIR ROLE?

"We all feel very optimistic and excited about this new development and anticipate that our involvement in the collaborative law process will facilitate couples to reach agreement successfully. When negotiations falter due to unresolved issues between the couples, the planned and agreed intervention of the family consultant can only have a positive impact."

The North East group of collaborative lawyers and Family Consultants are looking forward to a creative and constructive relationship going forward, working to provide a unique service for our clients.

If you are interested in collaborative law you can find your nearest collaborative lawyer on the website www.collabfamilylawnortheast.co.uk