



## Advice for separated fathers with children at school

### **Registering yourself as your child's parent at her school.**

If you want to be more involved in the education of your child you will need to register at the school. Schools, particularly primary schools tend not to be male friendly places. Some schools have no male staff other than the premises manager! Be prepared for a less than enthusiastic rather than a hostile response to your attempt to register yourself as the parent of your own child.

The best strategy is to remain calm, be honest and go along with any security checking the Head may want to do.

There are a number of reasons why a Head may be reluctant to recognise you as the parent.

- They are worried there may be a court order preventing you from contacting your child or her mother.
- They are not sure who you are.
- They are worried there may be a confrontation between you and the mother at the school during pick up time, in front of children and staff.
- Your ex has told lies about your intentions eg you will kidnap the child, you are a drug addict/violent/a wife beater, you are banned from seeing the child.

Prior to accepting any of these reasons, the Head should investigate. Here is the most effective strategy.

1. You phone the school and make an appointment with the Head and explain it is to register as the co-parent of your child.
2. Take with you your child's birth certificate, your passport and proof of your address such as a gas bill or Council Tax bill and any court orders that have been issued with. You can obtain copies of the birth certificate from the place your child was registered. In the absence of a passport you can take your driving license.
3. Explain that you wish to register and offer the documentation as evidence of your honesty. The Head will (or should) make copies and arrange to check them out, or, with luck, they will take them at face value.
4. Arrange another meeting to talk to the class teacher or SENCO about your child's progress.

### **What could go wrong?**

Remember you should be grateful the Head is checking your credentials prior to allowing you to register as the child's parent. This is in the best interest of the welfare safety and security of your child.

- The Head may delay checking your details. This is why you should make arrangements for a later meeting to talk about your child's education. It gives them a target date to get things done by. If they insist on contacting you once the information is confirmed you will need to give it a week and then start phoning daily... not angry but just leave messages.
- The Head is unsure how to confirm the absence of court orders. You can assist the Head by providing the CAFCAS case worker's phone number, the details of the Child Protection Unit at the local Town Hall or the child's social worker if there is one.
- The Head may ask your ex about court orders rather than checking. Without getting angry point out that

if there are orders she will have copies of them or can tell you at which court they were issued. The Head can then check with the court. Remind them of the above phone numbers and ask them to phone while you wait. Do not make disparaging comments about your child's mother to the Head.

- The Head may believe your ex regarding the violence/kidnap/aggression stories. If you have managed to be calm, relaxed and smile throughout your interview you will not have reinforced this wrong impression. If the Head is still reluctant provide them with a copy of the Guidance for Headteachers Information leaflet published FNF.
- Some Heads say they don't get involved with divorce and separation. Point out that refusing you the opportunity to take your parental responsibility seriously IS getting involved in a way that Government advice and guidelines say they should not and could well harm your child in the long term.
- Heads might say they don't want confrontation in the school. Point out you don't want it either and she/he can be reassured you will do everything in your power to prevent it and the school might like to help with some advice or assistance.
- If you are still unable to resolve the issue of your parenthood you can send a letter to the school addressed to 'The Chair of the Governors' asking for your right to be recorded in the school records as your child's co-parent. The Governors will then ask the Head what has been done regarding this at the next Governors meeting.
- If you still do not get satisfaction you will need to start a Stage 1 complaint procedure. See How to make a Complaint, also published by FNF.

### **What should you expect**

Once you are registered you should write to the school confirming that:

- the child's name CANNOT be changed (without consent of all PR holders)
- you need to be consulted on medical emergencies, trips
- you need to be informed of child's absence from school
- any correspondence between you and school must not be given/divulged to the other parent
- ask that this letter be put in the child's school file.

Expect to be invited to parents evenings, receive copies of reports (including SEN statements) be invited to consultations, be asked about school journeys, injections, be informed about any special educational needs and extra help being provided (dyslexia etc). You should receive Governors reports and be kept informed about any illness, or accident, or emergency medical treatment. The school should let you know about unexplained absence from school.

It would be wise following your interview to provide a small number of stamped addressed envelopes for sending you copies of notes which are usually put in the school bag.

Now get involved, volunteer, help to read, play Santa and fix the school garden. Your child will benefit enormously from what you do with a growth in self esteem, reduction in bullying, more confidence and a growing determination to do well.

### **What schools should not do**

They must not allow a change of name, medical treatment, school journey etc. without the permission of both parents. However do not make an issue of medical treatment or school trips and journeys if it means your child will be disadvantaged.

They must not give copies of letters you write to the school to your ex without your permission, this includes your address and phone number.