

Scotland's Leaders urged to support Scotland's children affected by divorce and separation

Leading US parent educator comes to Scotland to back proposals

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Scotland's politicians, including the First Minister, Alex Salmond, were today (29th May) called on to protect the tens of thousands of Scotland's young people affected by divorce and separation each year.

Leading politicians were urged by family mediators and leading family law experts to pilot a new child-friendly approach to marriage and relationship break-ups, with parent education classes replacing the current damaging adversarial system. They were joined at the Scottish Parliament by leading expert parental coach from the US, Christina McGhee.

Relationship Scotland and the Scottish Collaborative Family Law Group, comprising Scotland's leading family law exponents, have supported in their aims Christina, who has helped raise the profile of the parent education in the US.

Christina is the leading exponent of the parental coaching in the US, and presented a Channel 4 series entitled "How to Divorce Without Screwing up your Kids". She has devoted her career to help children and families manage the challenges of separation, and along with specialists from law firms HBJ Gateley Wareing and Lindsays, met up with politicians including First Minister Alex Salmond at the Scottish Parliament today.

It is estimated that around 13,000 couples divorce each year in Scotland – more than 35 every day of the year. More than a third of marriages now end in divorce, with more than 15,000 children in Scotland affected each year. In addition, it is now known that around half of all children are born to unmarried parents. Within Scotland it is not possible to track the success or failure of these relationships and therefore it is estimated that many more thousands of children are being adversely affected by relationships breaking up than is currently known.

Increasingly, research shows that the fallout from parental acrimony can lead to behavioural problems in children, lower levels of attainment and higher levels of smoking, drinking and drug use.

Now Relationship Scotland is hoping to offer Parental Education classes, and they would like to see Scotland's law-makers make attendance the norm for parents who are separating.

Rosanne Cubit of Relationship Scotland said: "We believe that parent education works best when it is enshrined in law, and that ultimately the best option is that parents who

are separating should be made to attend these classes to ensure that they are aware of how best to handle the welfare of their children during this traumatic time.

“We have expert counsellors who are specially trained to deliver these classes, and it is our view that any costs involved would have to be off-set against the huge savings that would be made across a range of other sectors, including legal, health, social work and education.”

Leading Family Law specialists are also anxious to pilot the new approach. Cath Karlin, who heads the Family Law team at HBJ Gateley Wareing and is immediate past convener of the Scottish Collaborative Family Law Group, and Lesley Gordon, her counterpart at Lindsays, are two of Scotland’s Family Law experts.

Cath said: “We know from experiences in other parts of the world that this approach does work, and that couples and their children benefit from it. As lawyers we would like to see this approach piloted and tested, normalising it and giving parents the opportunity to see for themselves the positives that it brings and allow lawyers to make use of it with confidence.”

Lesley added: “Increasingly family law specialists are seeking to encourage clients to adopt a collaborative approach to marital and relationship break-ups. This approach can greatly reduce any conflict encountered, and certainly helps to reduce the risk of children being unnecessarily hurt though being caught up in the break-up.

“With increasing divorce rates – almost half of marriages now end in divorce – we need to move to a less adversarial system and encourage the legal profession to seek to embed a more solution focussed, child friendly approach.”

The Scottish Collaborative Law Group have already recommended that Scotland needs to look to modernise the way children are treated during divorce proceedings, as a part of their response to the review of the Scottish civil court system led by Lord Gill. The Group advocates a range of alternate dispute resolution efforts.

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Further information:

David Forsyth, Benchmark Media (for Lindsays) 0131 225 0780

Gordon MacRae/Alex Orr, Indigo PR (For HBJ Gateley Wareing) 0131 554 1230