

by women for women

Some practical pointers and suggestions of how to deal with issues that affect you

The rights of a child

Returning to school for the new school year is not the only matter on some children's minds. All too many children are caught up in the upheaval of the breakdown of their parents' relationship and the turmoil this often brings. Divorce can be a very traumatic time for families and sadly it can be the children who suffer more than anyone.

'Deciding how best to look after the children, therefore, should be one of the over-riding priorities for any couple going their separate ways,' says specialist family lawyer, Clare Kirby of Kirby & Co. 'This involves minimising the impact upon the children's daily lives where possible, ensuring they are provided for financially and making sure they continue to benefit from being with both parents wherever possible. We encourage parents to reach an agreement about contact and residence arrangements for their children amicably. However in some cases agreement on these key issues can not be reached and the parents have to resort to the court for assistance.' Clare Kirby

School and showbiz – a double combination?

Many talented kids dream of being on stage, but most parents will ask themselves - can my child really combine an entertainment career with a good education? The case of actress Emma Watson, first cast in Harry Potter aged 9 and currently studying at prestigious American university Brown, clearly shows that the answer is a resounding 'yes'. Parents should be aware that the law requires paid child performers under 16 to first obtain a licence from his or her Local Education Authority, which the LEA will only grant if it considers that the child's education will not suffer. In practical terms, this often means that onsite tutoring must be provided. In fact a plethora of laws exist to protect a child's education setting out, amongst other factors, the times, total number of continuous hours and number of days per week a child can legally work. Showbiz can, after-all, be a short-lived career, but a child's education will stay with them for life. Victoria Botsoff

Returning to school and employment

With the children about to go back to school, you may have time on your hands and want to position yourself to get back in the job market. Think about trying to make it easier for employers to want to hire you. Belinda Eriksson of SW19Lawyers says: 'You could try to make it more likely an employer will prefer you, instead of other candidates who are thinking along more traditional lines. It is more attractive for the employer if you offer to work on a short term fixed contract (say 3- 6 months) rather than insisting on an indefinite full or part time arrangement.' Belinda adds: 'Whilst this wouldn't give you full job security (protection from unfair dismissal is after one year's employment) or make you a permanent employee (at least to begin with), it would provide you with some form of work which an employer might find more palatable. You would still be given the right not to be treated less favourably than the permanent employees. This means, broadly, that you can, receive the same contractual benefits as the permanent staff.' Belinda Eriksson

Who'd look after the kids?

If something happens to you and your partner, who'd look after your children? The last thing your family would need, on top of the trauma of bereavement, is an argument about who brings your kids up. You should appoint guardians, usually in your will, just in case something happens to you when your children are still young. It makes sense for you and your partner to appoint the same guardians, even if you've split up. Your will can set money aside for your children's education or, if they're older, to help them buy a property. Many parents also do a 'letter of wishes'. This is a private document, giving guidance to your guardians on how you want them to bring up your children. And you can change this letter of wishes whenever you like, without having the expense of changing your will. Jo Summers



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