Resolving a dispute about the arrangements for your child can be hard to do and at times stressful. That’s why Cafcass has worked with our partner organisations to find ways for you to resolve your dispute, and to make good decisions for your child. For many people the first step is to start a Parenting Plan.

The Parenting Plan gives you a structure in which you can make your decisions and helps to support this process. This can be much better than the court making decisions for you. The design of the Plan recognises coming to your own arrangements is not necessarily an easy thing to do – feelings can be running high and it can be easy to slip into blaming each other rather than working together for the benefit of your child/children. For this reason the Plan is supported by materials that help you develop the skills that you need, starting with staying calm and listening to each other, and providing step by step guidance that will help you negotiate constructively.

It is usually best when parents develop a co-operative parenting relationship. There are situations that need special consideration; the Parenting Plan sets these out for parents to think about in a section on ‘Staying Safe’.

The Parenting Plan includes sections on why and how you might make a Plan, other sources of support, tips on communication and sections for decisions about communication, living and childcare arrangements, day-to-day money, education and other issues. It also includes a new section to help parents to listen to their child and establish their views.

The Parenting Plan is available in a variety of formats – on paper, as a download and online as an interactive version, with links to other resources to help with communication. These versions of the Plan are available here: www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parenting-plan.aspx.

You can start work on a Parenting Plan by yourself and involve your child’s other parent when you can. The Plan is intended to help any parent, whatever your situation, and signposts other services which can help with developing skills to help you parent co-operatively, understanding your child’s needs, and getting support to make an agreement. If you do go to court, it is likely that judges will expect you to have started a Parenting Plan.

You can use the Summary of Progress (www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parenting-plan.aspx) to write down which areas are agreed, and which you might need the court’s help to reach a decision. Think again about whether a court can do this or whether there are other better routes to take away from court, some of which are outlined on the next page.
The Separated Parents Information Programme

Anyone can do this short course, which involves group work with other parents. It helps you to think about your child’s point of view, learn from other parents, find out about sources of help, and think about what you can do to improve your situation: www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/separated-parents-information-programme-(spip).aspx.

Getting it Right for Children

Getting it Right for Children is an online skills development programme specifically designed to help parents communicate better. It is a straightforward, practical programme that can help you communicate better with your ex-partner and find solutions about childcare issues as they arise: http://theparentconnection.org.uk/programmes/programmes/getting-it-right-for-children-when-parents-part.

Mediation

Available across England, with trained mediators able to help you explore the possibilities for resolving a dispute and agree – often with a structured agreement – your way forward. Many people qualify for legal aid to pay for this: www.gov.uk/looking-after-children-divorce.

Sorting Out Separation

Sorting out Separation is an easy to use web app that contains links to information, tools and services to assist with issues related to separation, including some of the money questions: www.sortingoutseparation.org.uk/en/home.