

Divorce and teenage children

Sarah Beskine

divorce solicitor and family mediator

If parents separate they make arrangements for their children to spend time with each parent. For younger children the plans take into account events such as after-school activities, but primarily it is the convenience of the parents which is considered. All this changes as children get older and by aged 13 or 14, social life outside the family becomes very significant and has to be factored in to any shared care arrangement.

Your child might become reluctant to commit a weekend with one parent if it means they are being taken away from their social life. This is an aspect of separating and divorcing with which I often assist clients in my work as a divorce lawyer and family mediator:

The courts assume that the continued involvement of both parents is beneficial to a child. That involvement can be direct or indirect but it doesn't refer to any particular division of the child's time. This will be decided using a complex analysis to work out the benefit to the child.

It is easy to imagine that a child's reluctance to spend time with you is the fault of the other parent. Sometimes it might be. It might also be your child's own growing independence, either because there are other things to do, or because a parent has failed to keep up with their child's changing activities and they just don't want to do what is usually on offer anymore.

If your child is very social and wants to be out with friends, or wants to be holed up in their own room, you can't compete with this. However, what you can offer is a very comfortable and welcoming base for your child and their friends, including sleepovers. Once exams kick in, it becomes even more

complicated as the young person is probably going to want quiet time to study in the place where this is most conducive, followed by time out with friends.

You can stay involved with your teenage children through their chosen social networks, or for example consider setting up a family WhatsApp group. When they are going through important school assessments or exams you can give support to them

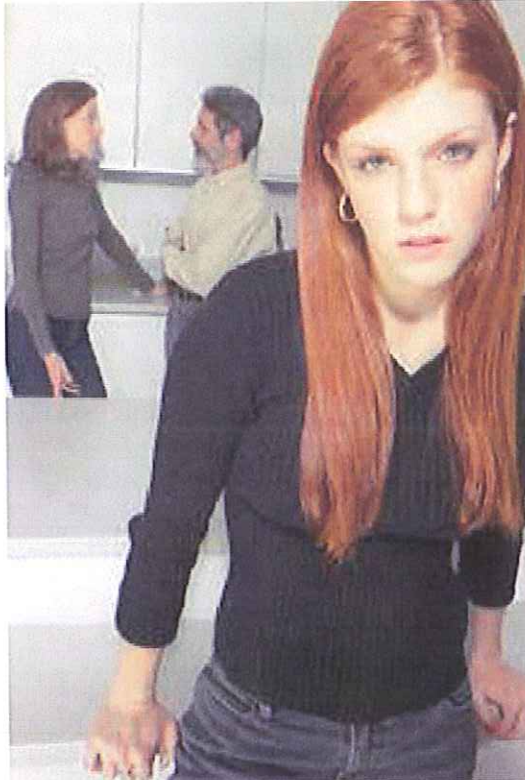
if you know what is going on and if they want it.

When teenagers are away from home it is vital to have communication between separated parents so someone knows where they are, and ensures they are not out of control or staying with people who will lead them astray.

The court should not usually be the first place to go if there is a conflict about arrangements with children, but sometimes is it necessary especially if there are safety concerns or if one parent is being pushed out of the child's life. Parents often find mediation helpful. Such mediation can also include the

child, as long as it is a mediator trained to work with children. The aim is to develop a more collaborative and agreed plan on how to go forward so that the child's relationship is secured with both parents.

If you have any questions on this or any of my other editorials, all of which are on Hopkin Murray Beskine's web site at www.hmbsolicitors.co.uk, please email me at sb@hmbsolicitors.co.uk.



Hopkin Murray Beskine
www.hmbsolicitors.co.uk

Please see inside front cover for further details