



Equal Parenting

About half of all children now born in the UK are to unmarried mothers. A report published in 2013 by the Centre for Social Justice < > said that lone parent families are increasing by about twenty thousand a year, and will top two million in about two years time. At least one million children are growing up without a father and some of the poorest parts of the country have become “men deserts”. The report accused the Government of turning a blind eye to its commitment to promote family stability, and warned that father absence is linked to higher rates of teenage crime, pregnancy and disadvantage.

Each year sees tens of thousands of divorce applications in England and Wales, together with parental breakdown and separation in an unknown, but probably larger, number of cohabiting relationships. Tens of thousands of dependent children are affected annually as a result. In about three-quarters of divorce cases, the application for divorce is brought by the woman.

Fortunately, the majority of separated parents are able to come to amicable arrangements for the care of their child(ren) without resorting to a family court. In such circumstances, each parent has an equal legal status, providing they **both have full parental responsibility**. The problems arise in contested cases, especially when there are allegations of domestic violence or child abuse against one partner, when resort has to be made to law to decide who cares for the children, or indeed on the need for criminal charges.

Basis of family law

The **Children Act 1989**, and subsequent rules, regulations and case law, underpins the application of family law relating to children in England and Wales. However, the more recent **Children and Families Act 2014**, which came into effect on the 22 April 2014, changed procedures and terminology across a wide range of areas including family law, children in care, and education. Since November 2013, all cases of child maintenance have been administered by the Child Maintenance Service (CMS).

The main features of the 2014 Act related to a Single Family Court system, Mediation, Child Arrangement Orders, and the Presumption of Parental Involvement < > .

A Single Family Court

This provided for a single network of application points for parents who need to go to court, the intention being to make it easier for parents to navigate the court system and to reduce delays created by the court system rather than the parties applying.

[See Next Page](#)

PARITY

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