

# National single parent day

By [Amy Beddis](#)

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3PB Barristers

As a family law barrister, I meet single and separated parents on a daily basis. It is incredibly hard to raise children at the best of times, particular in the current economic climate. However, it can be even harder when you are doing this either entirely on your own, or as a separated parent.

Unfortunately, I often meet parents in circumstances where things have reached rock bottom, communication is poor, morale is low, and emotions are high. It is vitally important for children that after separation, parents work together (where safe to do so) and ensure that they can work positively together for the benefit of the children. This is, however, often easier said than done.

It is incredibly important as a society that we support single parents and separated families as best we can. As with all services, there is a huge gap at present in practical support for parents. There is much to do to educate children from school age about safe relationships, the make-up of different families and provide emotional support for children when families do separate. I often hear how relationships are staying together *“for the children’s sake.”* However, this is not always the healthiest option for anyone in the family, and as a society we need to learn to encourage and support families who want to separate and provide them with the tools to do this safely and supportively. We spend a great deal of our young adult lives thinking about how we will meet someone, but no time is spent on considering healthy separation.

One of the concerns, which will be exacerbated at the moment, is finances- often people ask, how will I manage to support my family if I leave? The National Audit Office has recently published a review of the Child Maintenance Service - <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/child-maintenance>. This report shows that there is work to be done to ensure that it is fit for purpose. In the courts, we rarely deal with the issue of child maintenance, but we do see the issues that it can cause for families, and the impact it can have on the relationship between separated parents. This research shows that arrears continue to build and that the rate of families who do not have an arrangement in place has almost doubled, since the old Child

Support Agency was in place. There is clearly work which needs to be done. Gingerbread (the leading charity for single parents) said of the report that *“Single parents need to be able to access a service which they trust can work and can keep them safe – both as a parent in receipt of maintenance and a parent paying.”* This is reflected by the concerns found within the review that there was both a real and perceived significant problem with customer service. There were also concerns that parents were given hope that they will receive money that will never likely be paid. Overall, it appears from the report conclusions, that whilst the CMS is saving the Government money, it has so far not increased the number of effective child maintenance arrangements across society. Getting CMS right is one of the tools which will no doubt help support single parents and separated families.

Gingerbread have carried out a study into job loss and job seeking for single parents after the pandemic - <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/news/interim-report-the-single-parent-employment-challenge-job-loss-and-job-seeking-after-the-pandemic/>. Their interim report flags concerns regarding a lack of flexible jobs, lack of back to work support and raising costs of childcare. There is a real need for back to work support for single parents and more flexible working patterns.

As a working parent, I rely on a supportive work environment and the ability to work flexibly to ensure that I can balance my work as well as taking care of my children. I have recently come back from a short period of maternity leave. At 3PB there is a real drive to ensure that parents are supported back into work, whilst enabling them to continue to grow their practice at a pace which suits them and their family's needs.

I have spoken with single parents who are studying to become barristers, and they are concerned about the challenges they face. The Bar now has a number of initiatives to encourage people to join the profession and to retain female carers (who are more likely to leave the profession than their male counterparts). However, there is much more work to be done. I have spoken to and often see on social media, single parents who are concerned about embarking on a career in law, not because they do not believe they can achieve it, but concerns over whether it will be sustainable. The ability to study, work and bring up your child is no mean feat and dedicated individuals in that situation can only be an asset to our profession. But our profession needs to continue to find better ways of working to encourage diverse individuals to stay within the law.

So, it is important to reflect today on National Single Parent Day as to what more we can do as a society to educate and support all families within our communities and celebrate the resilience, creativity and sheer hard work that goes into raising a family as a single parent.

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