

Press Release

9 September 2025

Children's education and wellbeing at risk as parental separation disputes spill into schools, says a survey of teachers

More than half of all teachers are being dragged into the fallout of family break-ups according to a new national survey, with teachers reporting significant disruption to children's learning, attendance and mental health.

Released today by The Parents Promise, a campaign group working to change the culture of separation in the UK and provide better support for families during and after the separation process, the survey reveals the extent to which learning environments are being drawn into family disputes.

According to the survey of thousands of teachers across the country:

- 58% say their school has been involved in disputes between separated parents.
- 61% have witnessed one parent trying to cut the other out of school communications.
- 1 in 5 have seen parents attempt to block the other parent from collecting their child.

Parental separation is a reality for nearly 280,000 children each year in the UK and when disagreements spill into school life, children often bear the emotional and educational cost.

Teachers warn that when parental disagreements follow them into the classroom, it's children who lose out. 8 in 10 teachers reported a negative impact on pupils' attendance and performance, while 9 in 10 teachers say student mental health has suffered.

Parental separation can also place a strain on staff wellbeing and school-parent relationships. However, despite the extent of the impacts, most schools are currently ill-prepared when it comes to managing parental separation issues, with limited training, policies and safeguarding protocols.

The survey also found that:

- 89% of teachers have received no training on children's needs during separation.
- Just 1 in 20 have been trained on the legal aspects around separation.
- Fewer than 4 in 10 schools have any separation policy.
- Only 8% have a nominated safeguarding lead for separation.

Lobbying for change

In 2023 the Parents Promise campaign group generated massive national media coverage by successfully lobbying large employers including Tesco, Unilever, NatWest, PwC, Vodafone and others to change their HR policies, to recognise separation as a life event, impacting at least 600,000 workers.

This latest campaign from The Parents Promise is urging schools and parents to act. It has developed new resources to help teachers and parents support children through separation, with practical guidance centred on the "Five to Thrive" – five key steps to protect children's wellbeing during changing family circumstances.

The campaign calls for:

- Parents to keep disputes away from school gates and maintain joined-up communication.
- Schools to introduce training, policies and safeguarding leads for separation.

James Hayhurst, Founder of The Parents Promise, said: “Parental separation is fast becoming a hidden child-safeguarding crisis. Schools should be safe havens for learning, not arenas for parental conflict. Yet too often, teachers and children are being drawn into disputes that don’t belong in the classroom. Every time a disagreement spills over into school, it’s the child who suffers. That has to stop. We’re calling on parents to keep conflict away from the school gates and we’re equipping teachers with the tools and training they need to protect and support children through separation.”

Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division of the High Court, welcomed the initiative: “Parental separation doesn’t have to mean poor outcomes for children, but the way separation is handled matters. If we had a blank sheet of paper and were designing a package of support for a child whose parents are separating, that child’s school would of course play a fundamental role in that plan. By providing guidance and resources for teachers and parents alike, the Parents Promise will make a real, practical difference.”

Changing the culture of separation in the UK

When The Parents Promise launched in 2021, it commissioned research which showed that whilst 95% of parents had discussed what they would do if they won the lottery, less than 5% had ever discussed separation and its possible consequences.

The mission of The Parents Promise is to change the way UK approaches separation and to create a society with more compassion, better systems and a greater understanding of what

children need. This campaign will ensure teachers have the tools, training and support they need to help children navigate the challenges of parental separation with stability, understanding and care.

Nigel Genders, CEO of National Society for Education, said: “The Parents Promise education initiative is so timely and so necessary - grounded in a simple but profound idea: that children have the right to be loved by both parents, to be shielded from conflict, and to be supported in maintaining positive relationships with their wider families.”

Catherine Roche, CEO of children’s mental health charity Place2Be, said:

"At Place2Be we see the effect of parental separation on children every day and this initiative by The Parents Promise is much needed. Educating parents how to separate in the best way for their children and providing schools with resources they need to support those children best will make an immediate impact on thousands of young people this new academic year."

Rupa Huq, Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton, said: “With schools returning this autumn, there could not be a more vital time to reiterate this call from parliamentarians and campaigners: practical support for teachers, better mediation and a common commitment to the wellbeing of every child.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The launch of The Parents Promise Education Initiative will take place on 9 September, from 1-3pm at the Houses of Parliament. The event will be the formal launch of the research and resources produced by The Parents Promise to help better support parents and teachers

manage parental separation in the school setting. The event will feature a panel of speakers including:

- James Hayhurst – Founder of The Parents Promise
- Rupa Huq – Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton
- Nigel Genders – CEO, National Society for Education
- Sally Land – Advice Page Editor, News UK (The Sun)
- Anna Machin – Author of The Life of Dad

The Parents Promise Separation and Education Survey, powered by [Teacher Tapp](#), gathered responses from 7,000 to 10,000 educational professionals.

About the Parents Promise

The Parents Promise is a campaign group of organisations including Relate, Place2BE, Only Mums & Dads, One Plus One, Asian Single Parents Network, Separate Space, Restored Lives and Spurgeons that campaigns for a more child-focused society, which includes giving children the most positive experience possible during parental separation or divorce. The Parents Promise is powered by MD Communications, an international PR agency, as a major pro bono initiative to help drive national impact. Its founder and CEO, Melissa Davis, is also a co-founder of the campaign group.

Launched in 2021, it helps parents make a positive commitment to their children today, in case of relationship breakdown tomorrow. It's a commitment from both parents to put their child(ren) first and to work together in partnership, even if the parents separate, to ensure their child(ren) has a stable and supportive family environment. The Parents Promise can be downloaded and signed at <https://theparentspromise.org.uk>