

Can the Divorce Process Really be ‘Civilised’?

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The answer is a resounding ‘Yes’ from Debrett’s, which has just launched itself into the world of family law advice with its new publication, Debrett’s Guide to Civilised Separation. The self-styled ‘modern authority on all matters of etiquette’, Debrett’s latest venture aims to turn the traditionally acrimonious and unpleasant divorce process (<https://www.co-operative.coop/legalservices/Family-Law/Divorce-or-ending-a-civil-partnership/>) into something much politer and more refined.

The book has been produced in partnership with Mishcon de Reya, the law firm which handled the Prince of Wales’ divorce. And its target market becomes clear with Debrett’s calm assertion that the average divorce costs around £13,000. With its longstanding associations with wealth, aristocracy and the establishment, you could be forgiven for challenging Debrett’s description of itself as ‘modern’. But, in principle, by advocating a civilised and responsible divorce, it is in fact right up to date.

Recent Government proposals set out in the Family Justice Review share the same core theme of encouraging separating couples to maintain good relations with each other and their wider families during the divorce process. Both publications emphasise that this is particularly important where children are involved, with Debrett’s acknowledgement that: ‘...the impact (of a separation) spreads far beyond the couple involved, with damage and hurt being wreaked on immediate family and all manner of friendships.’

However, the Family Justice Review’s suggestions for achieving an amicable separation are rather more practical than some of those listed in Debrett’s, which include sending handwritten letters to family members about the separation, rather than emails. The Government’s ideas run more along the lines of setting up a central family law advice network that all separating couples can access, and promoting family mediation and collaborative family law (<https://www.co-operative.coop/legalservices/Family-Law/>) as alternatives to court proceedings.

Despite its traditional approach in some areas, the Debrett’s book does offer some valuable advice about how to behave during a divorce. Like the Government’s Review, it recommends resolving money and property issues privately with your partner if possible, and urges separating couples with children to maintain contact with their former in-laws.

A family law expert at the Co-operative Legal Services comments: ‘My answer to the question: “Can the divorce process really be civilised?” is also “Yes”. It’s much better for everyone involved if amicable agreements about children, money and property can be made outside the Courtroom. And with the recent Government push on mediation and collaborative family law, this will be easier for more couples to achieve in the future.’

Family law advice from the Co-operative Legal Services

At the Co-operative, we offer free, no obligation family law advice on all aspects of the divorce process, from family mediation to parental responsibilities. We will explain your options and put you in touch with specialist organisations if necessary.

ENDS

Notes to editor

The Co-operative Legal Services provides a range of legal services that are designed to make it easier for people to access high quality legal provision. Our services include will-writing, Probate and estate administration, conveyancing, personal injury, family law and employment law. Free, no obligation legal advice is provided with all these services. We operate nationally and, in the last year, have given legal assistance to more than 160,000 people. You can find out more at www.co-operative.coop/legalservices. (<http://www.co-operative.coop/legalservices>)

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