

Minimum Standards Compact

Often, the feelings of hurt that divorce or separation brings can be pretty intense, especially in the early days. This can not only make it difficult to work together but can lead to tension and arguments. However, it's important for your children that things don't get out of hand.

All of the research shows that high levels of parental conflict have a damaging effect on children and makes it more difficult for them to adjust after separation. As well as the anxiety that it produces, it can cause some children to 'act out' their feelings through behavioural problems, increased anger and disruptive or violent behaviour. Others respond to parental conflict by turning inward. They may become depressed, develop physical problems such as headaches and stomach aches or show their distress through self harming behaviours such as eating disorders or drug and alcohol dependency.

Children who are exposed to high levels of parental conflict tend not to interact well with others and often have poorer social skills, low self esteem and can find relationships difficult when they become adults. It has even been shown that the brain functions of children who are exposed to high levels of parental conflict are changed.

A Minimum Standards Compact is a very simple contract between the two of you that establishes the basic rules of behaviour that you both agree to work to. It can protect your children from the worst aspects of any ongoing conflict in the short term and provide the foundations for a more stable future over time.

The compact should be written down and signed by both of you as a commitment to your children. You might decide to ask a professional, such as a mediator, to help you manage the process. You can include anything you want in your compact, but keep it short and to the point.

What to include in your compact

The following is an example of what you might choose to include in your Minimum Standards Compact:

We agree, on behalf of [insert the names of your children], to abide by the following rules and undertakings:

1. We will not allow our feelings about each other to prevent us from providing for the well being of [children's names].
2. We will allow [children's names] to have a relationship with both of us.
3. We will allow [children's names] to love both of us.
4. We will not criticise each other in front of [children's names].
5. We will pass all important information about [children's names] between us.

Signed by [both sign it and retain a copy].