**Research findings on children’s experiences of talking with a mediator**

1. An early study in Scotland found that, despite their initial uncertainty, almost all the children who had met with a mediator spoke positively about their experience. The benefits they described included:
* Feeling 'relieved’, ‘much easier’, less anxious about being pulled between parents.
* Better communication between children and parents.
* Better contact arrangements, feeling happier about contact visits.
* More understanding of their situation.
* Having the opportunity to express their own feelings.
* Realising they were not alone in their feelings.
* Being able to keep out of issues between parents that did not concern them.
1. In Norway, mediation is mandatory for separating and divorcing couples with children under sixteen. Children do not always take part directly but in a follow-up study of 250 mediations, the great majority of the children said they had wanted to be included. There were only three mediations in which the children who took part did not have a message they wanted shared with their parents. Another study found that most children wanted to have a say in matters affecting them and even young children could understand and talk about the notion of being listened to.
2. A research study on the views of nearly 400 young adults who had experienced parental separation during their childhood showed that contact arrangements made by separating parents affect children’s long-term relationships with their parents throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

Although some separating parents involve their children in discussion over their future upbringing, the accounts of the young adults who took part in the study suggested that many parents seemed unaware of their children’s new found independence and assumed that they would fall in with whatever arrangements were put in place for their future upbringing.

The responses showed that being involved in making decisions about contact was associated with positive experience of contact...there was strong advice to all future separating parents that they should routinely consult their children before organising residence and contact arrangements.

(Fortin, Scanlan and Hunt: *Taking a longer view of contact: the perspectives of young adults who experienced parental separation in their youth.* Sussex Law School, University of Sussex, 2012)

1. Children's phone calls to Childline have shown that they are '*perfectly able to enter into discussions about the future, so long as they are not being asked to choose in an atmosphere of acute conflict where they feel caught in the middle …These calls are a very persuasive argument in favour of a mediation service which includes children … an outside person to help everybody talk … could be of considerable help to children, as well as to parents, in managing the feelings that threaten to overwhelm them.’*

(Childline: *Unhappy Parents, Unhappy Children* 1998, p.25)

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