

FOR PARENTS · LIVED-EXPERIENCE GUIDE

Children Safety Checklist for high-conflict co-parenting

Quick steps to reduce harm during handovers, calls and contact — written for parents who want to do their part, even when the other parent will not.

Aberdeen Ethnic Minority Women's Group CIC
aemwg.org

Read this before the next handover.

Children — including teenagers — absorb adult conflict. Suicidal thoughts, self-harm and silent collapse are far more common in high-conflict separation than parents want to believe. This checklist is for **non-abusive co-parents** trying to lower the temperature. If there is ongoing abuse, your safety and the child's safety come first — see the urgent-help section on page 4.

Use this checklist when:

- A handover, school pickup or contact visit is coming up.
- A message from your co-parent has rattled you and you want to respond well.
- Your child has shown signs of distress and you want to act without escalating.
- Family members (yours or theirs) are pushing you toward conflict.

1. BEFORE THE HANDOVER

- 1 **Regulate yourself first.** Five slow breaths. Wash your face. Your child reads your nervous system before they hear your words.
- 2 **Check the bag, not the ex.** Inhaler, comfort item, schoolbook, change of clothes. Practical readiness lowers the chance of a flare-up at the door.
- 3 **Plan a neutral handover spot** — school gate, café, supervised contact centre. Avoid each other's homes if tension is high.
- 4 **Agree the handover window in writing** (text or app). No surprises, no negotiating in front of the child.
- 5 **Tell the child what to expect**, in calm, age-appropriate language: who, where, when, when you'll see them next.

2. DURING THE HANDOVER

- 1 **Greet the child first, not the ex.** Eye contact, smile, hug. Adult business waits.
- 2 **Keep your voice flat and short.** "Bag's here. Inhaler's in the side pocket. See you Sunday." That's enough.
- 3 **No new topics at the door.** Maintenance, schedule changes, complaints — send by message later.
- 4 **If you feel rage rising, walk.** Say "I need to go — message me later," and leave. Walking away is a parenting skill, not a defeat.
- 5 **Never use the child as a messenger.** "Tell your dad..." / "Tell your mum..." — stop. Send it yourself, or don't send it.

3. AFTER THE HANDOVER

- 1 Decompress before you debrief.** Don't grill the child the second they walk in. Snack, quiet, normal routine first.
- 2 Listen without leading.** "How was it?" not "Was it awful?" Children sense the answer you want and give it to you — even when it isn't true.
- 3 Validate feelings, do not feed them.** "That sounds hard" is enough. Don't add your own anger to theirs.
- 4 Write down anything safeguarding-relevant.** Date, time, what was said, who saw it. Calm record-keeping is not bitterness; it is protection.
- 5 Reset yourself.** Walk, pray, call a friend, write it down. Don't carry it into the next handover.

4. EARLY-WARNING SIGNS IN YOUR CHILD

Early intervention is the single biggest protective factor. Watch for clusters — any two or three of these together, lasting more than a couple of weeks, mean **get professional help now**:

- Sleep changes — insomnia, nightmares, sleeping all day.
- Withdrawing from friends, hobbies, school clubs.
- Drop in school performance, school refusal, frequent "sickness."
- Risky online behaviour, secrecy about phone or messages.
- Self-harm marks, hidden cuts, scratches, eating changes.
- Talking about being a burden, wanting to disappear, "things would be easier without me."
- Anger out of proportion, especially toward the parent they feel safer with.
- Regression — bedwetting, baby talk, clinging — in younger children.

URGENT · GET HELP TODAY

If your child has talked about suicide, has a plan, or has self-harmed seriously:

- Call **999** or take them to A&E.
- **Samaritans (24/7)** — call **116 123** (free).
- **Childline (under-19s)** — call **0800 1111** (free).
- **Papyrus HOPELINE247** (under-35s, suicidal thoughts) — **0800 068 4141**.
- **NHS 24** for urgent mental-health support — call **111**.
- **Shout** — text **SHOUT** to **85258** (free, 24/7).

5. ABERDEEN — LOCAL HELP

- **Aberdeen City Council — Child Protection** · 0800 731 5520 (24/7) for safeguarding concerns about a child.
- **Police Scotland** · 999 emergency, 101 non-emergency.
- **Grampian Women's Aid** · 01224 593 381 — domestic abuse support including for women whose ex-partners are using contact to harm.
- **NHS Grampian CAMHS** (Child & Adolescent Mental Health) — ask your GP for a referral.
- **Penumbra Aberdeen** · mental-health support and self-harm services for young people.
- **AEMWG CIC** · workshops@aemwg.org — peer support and signposting for ethnic-minority mothers.

6. THINGS TO DO FOR YOURSELF

- 1 **Get your own support before the next crisis.** Counselling, GP, faith leader, peer group — pick one this week.
- 2 **If anger or addiction is yours to own, own it.** Men's behaviour-change programmes, AA, GA, anger work — these protect your child more than any apology will.
- 3 **Don't bring a new partner in too soon.** The first two years after separation need to be about the child, not your dating life.
- 4 **Don't let your family poison the co-parenting.** Grandparents' rights come after peaceful parenting, not before.
- 5 **Be a 'graduated family.'** Still a family. Just not under one roof. Love stays. Conflict goes.

THE LINE TO HOLD

You cannot make your co-parent do their part. You can do yours.

Every handover where you stayed calm, every message you didn't send, every time you put the child at the centre instead of the score — that is the work. The children we lose to high-conflict separation never get the chance to grow up and tell us we got it wrong. Do your part now.

This guide reflects lived experience and is not a substitute for legal, medical or safeguarding advice. If a child is in immediate danger, call 999. © Aberdeen Ethnic Minority Women's Group CIC. Free to share, not to resell.