



Let's get serious

Relationships should be about romance and security. It is never a good sign when the law and lawyers become involved in your relationship but the law is there to help and protect those in relationships, especially ones with children. Here are a few tips to help you plan when a relationship becomes serious and you are moving in together.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

If you are going to buy a property together then it is extremely important at the outset that you write down your intentions for how that property should be owned, what will happen should you separate or one of you dies and how you are going to contribute towards the purchase of the property, bills and the mortgage.

WHERE ONLY ONE OF YOU OWNS THE PROPERTY

If only one of you owns the property, then unless you enter into a civil partnership or marriage, the non-owning partner may not have any legal rights in respect of a share of that property. However, as a relationship develops, if significant financial contributions are made (usually over and above a contribution to bills), then the non-owning partner may well acquire a "beneficial interest" in the property. It is always best to write down what your mutual

READY TO SETTLE DOWN WITH YOUR SWEETHEART? KIM BEATSON, HEAD OF THE FAMILY TEAM AT ANTHONY GOLD, ON SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT NEED TO THINK ABOUT

intentions are so you each know where you stand and there is documentary evidence of what your intentions were should things become rocky later on.

PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

If you are in a relationship then the law can protect you if you suffer domestic violence or abuse. Domestic abuse is now defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. Coercive and financial abuse is now more readily recognised (not least because of its recent portrayal in Radio 4's *The Arch-*

ers). Even if you are not the owner of a property in which you both live, you can still obtain protection from the court under the Family Law Act 1996.

SEPARATING AFTER A CIVIL PARTNERSHIP OR MARRIAGE

Couples whose formally registered civil partnership or same-sex marriage ends in dissolution or divorce can apply to the Family Court to resolve issues relating to financial matters and the law is the same as for heterosexual couples.

CHILDREN

Having or adopting children in a gay relationship can be wonderful but the legal aspects can also be very complicated and it is always best to be sure of your position in respect of your rights concerning the children at the outset. We'll be returning to the subject of children in a later article for *DIVA*.

DISPUTES

It is always better to resolve disputes following a relationship breakdown by out of court methods rather than in court. Collaborative law and mediation are usually the best ways. It is worth getting advice from a resolution expert in family law as early as possible. They will be able to tell you where you stand in your particular situation. ●

ABOUT ANTHONY GOLD

Anthony Gold are a law firm. Led by Kim Beatson, the family team is one of the best in the country, with specific knowledge and expertise for handling same-sex relationship issues. The team is all female apart from their very own diva, Dave!