

1GC | Family Law

John Thornton MCI Arb

Year of Call: 2002



Practice Overview

John is described in the Legal 500 as having a “blunt style that is powerful and effective”. He has extensive experience in both public and private law children’s cases and is regularly instructed by solicitors for parents and Children’s Guardians. He has been involved in several cases that have attracted media interest.

John specialises in representing parents, wider family members and intervenors in complex public law proceedings and multiday fact finding hearings. His case load includes the particularly vulnerable, along with those facing the most serious of allegations such as physical and sexual abuse, non-accidental injury, factitious illness, and cases involving child fatality. He has been described in the legal 500 as “Pragmatic, forthright and intelligent”.

John regularly represents parents in all aspects of private law children cases including complex fact finding hearings, alienating behaviours, relocation, domestic abuse, and intractable contact disputes. He represents children via rule 16:4 appointed Guardians. He has recently been described in the Legal 500 as **“a resolute advocate with a charming manner before the tribunal”**.

John will accept instructions through Direct Public Access and has developed a website to assist members of public with access to justice (www.barristerfamilylaw.co.uk).

John is a qualified child Arbitrator and member of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

Area of Expertise

John’s early years of practice at the Bar were a mixture of criminal and family law. He developed extensive experience of Crown Court trial advocacy during this time in a wide range of offences including the most serious violent and sexual offences.

Since 2009 his focus has been on family law and he is regularly instructed in fact finding hearings as both leading and junior counsel. John has been successful in persuading the court that different experts have ‘overreached’, ‘provided inadequate analysis’ or that the evidence was ‘finely balanced’ and pointed away from their opinion.

He regularly works with King’s Counsel on complex matters in the High Court. Examples include representing a member of the Roma community in a four-week fact finding which involved allegations of child trafficking, rape and the supply of illegal drugs and representing a teenage mother where the father murdered their child. He has acted on behalf of the child in parental homicide cases.

John is connected to the Kent Law School at Kent University. He recently Judged at the National Law Student Triathlon involving Universities from across the country. He is regularly involved in supporting law students to develop their advocacy skills through mootings and competitions.

Children (Private Law)

Children (Public Law)

Family Finance & Property

Notable Cases

Re XY Twins Inflicted Injury [2024] EWFC 413 (B)

Re XY Twins Inflicted Injury (Naming Perpetrator) [2024] EWFC 414 (B)

Z (A Local Authority) v C (Mother) & Ors [2022] EWFC 207 (01 September 2022)

O v B-M [2019] EWFC B23 (16 February 2019)

KCC v A & Ors (Progress by adults with large family over 12 months. Finely balanced departure from experts' opinions) [2017] EWFC B95

KCC v D & Ors (5) (Re-hearing) [2015] EWFC 96

KCC v D & Ors (4) (Re W) [2015] EWFC 94

KCC v D & Ors (3) (Application for Re-hearing) [2015] EWFC 94

KCC v D & Ors (2) (Fact Finding) [2015] EWFC 93

KCC v D & Ors [2014] EWFC 59

What the Directories Say

"A resolute advocate with a charming manner before the tribunal." Legal 500, 2025

"A strong advocate who has a no-nonsense approach. He is particularly strong at representing fathers accused of posing a significant risk. His blunt style is powerful and effective." Legal 500, 2024

"Very experienced in public and private child law." Legal 500, 2019

"Pragmatic, forthright and intelligent." Legal 500 2018

Education

BA (hons) Law & Criminology (2:1)
Bar Vocational Course (Nottingham)

Memberships & Associations

The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn
Association of Lawyers for Children
Chartered Institute of Arbitrator
Family Law Bar Association
Liberty