

1GC | Family Law

John Thornton MCI Arb

Year of Call: 2002



Practice Overview

John is described in the Legal 500 2025 as **“a resolute advocate with a charming manner before the tribunal”**.

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 recent cases attracting media attention.

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.

John is connected to the Kent Law School at Kent University. He is regularly involved in supporting law students to develop their advocacy skills through mootings and competitions. He recently judged at the 2025 National Law Student Triathlon involving Universities from across the country.

Children (Private Law)

In the Legal 500 2024 he was described as “having a blunt style that is powerful and effective”.

John regularly represents parents in all aspects of private law children cases including fact finding hearings, alienating behaviours, relocation and intractable contact disputes. He also represents children via rule 16:4 appointed Guardians.

Some recent cases John has been involved in the 2024/2025:

- Acting for the father of two children where the mother relocated the children without his consent and made serious allegations including harming the children through ‘black magic’. At the final hearing the court found the allegations to be false and decided against the evidence of three social workers transfer the children to the care of the father. A s.91(14) order was made against the mother for 5 years.

- Acting for three children in a case involving serious allegations made by the mother against their father. The allegations included the father sexually abusing the children as part of a paedophile ring, bestiality and marital rape. The court found the children to have been subjected to alienating behaviours by the mother.
- Acting for a father who had no contact with his child due to allegations of domestic abuse. At the final hearing the court dismissed all the allegations of domestic abuse and made an order for the father to spend regular unsupervised contact with his daughter.
- Acting for a father in long running proceedings where contact had been repeatedly stopped by the mother with multiple and repeated allegations of abuse. At the final hearing, overnight weekend contact was re-instated with a final order including equal share of school holidays.
- Acting for the child in a long running case where the mother had mental health problems resulting in hospitalisation. She made allegations of serious abuse by the father including rape, drugging and coercive and controlling behaviour.

Children (Public Law)

He has been described in the legal 500 as “Pragmatic, forthright and intelligent”.

John specialises in representing parents, wider family members and intervenors in often complex 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.

Some recent examples of cases John has been involved in in 2024/2025:

- Acting as junior counsel for a maternity nurse accused of inflicting multiple fractures to premature twins. The matter was complex arising from the prematurity of the twins and nature of their conception. The court made the groundbreaking decision to name the maternity nurse in a published judgment having made findings against her.
- Acting for a severely unwell child whose aetiology is described by treating clinicians as ‘one of the oddest cases we have seen in 20 years’ where his sibling had died due to malnutrition.
- Acting as leading counsel for a mother who was an approved foster carer and subsequently adopted 5 children. The local authority sought findings of physical and emotional abuse including factitious illness.

- Acting as leading counsel in a complex case for a grandmother accused of physical and emotional abuse over many years of her grandchildren with multiple allegations from various family members and children.
- Acting as leading counsel for a father in a case involving allegations of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of his teenage daughters by the mother and her new partner. One child had committed suicide. The court made findings of abuse against both the mother and stepfather.
- Acting as leading counsel for a father in a case involving significant burns to the feet and legs of a young child inflicted by the mother and her intervener.
- Acting as leading counsel for a stepfather with learning difficulties accused of causing multiple fractures and bruising to a baby.
- Acting as leading counsel for a mother in proceedings involving 44 cross allegations including physical & sexual abuse of two children and the mother along with parental alienation. The mother suffered with significant mental health issues and substance misuse arising from the trauma. The court made findings against the father and his partner of physical and emotional abuse against the children and the mother. No findings being made against the mother.
- Acting as junior counsel for an intervener accused of causing two bleeds to the brain and extensive bruising to a small child.
- Acting as junior counsel for an intervener accused of shaking a baby resulting in life changing head and spinal injuries.
- Acting as junior counsel for a mother accused of inflicting a skull fracture along with arm and leg fractures to her young child.
- Acting as Junior counsel for a neurodiverse father accused of fracturing a recently mobile child's arm and inflicting significant bruising to his sibling.
- Acting for a father imprisoned for possession of firearms and ammunition as well as facing

allegations of involvement in supplying Class A drugs and significant domestic abuse against the mother.

- Acting for a mother accused of non-fatal strangulation and physical abuse of her teenage daughter resulting in injuries.
- Acting for a mother of two severely disabled children who entered a relationship with a man who had inflicted serious injuries to a baby. John successfully argued that the case should be dismissed at the first hearing.

Family Finance & Property

Notable Cases

A Local Authority v MA & Ors [2026] EWFC 130

Kent County Council v M & Ors [2025] EWFC 155 (B)

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

"John is a silk in waiting; over the years his talent as a barrister has grown and matured, he is exceptional at advocacy and is a master at cross-examination, but a kind and caring barrister when cross-examining clients and can carefully tease out information from them in a direct and sensitive way. John is very good with vulnerable clients and listens to them and provides robust and thought-provoking advice."

Leading Junior - Legal 500, 2026

"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