

## Strength, Clarity and Compassion

With extensive experience in family law, Clare Woodhouse has built a reputation for combining rigorous legal expertise with deep empathy. As a Managing Associate in Viberts' Family Law team, she supports clients at moments of profound change — when emotions run high, certainty feels distant, and clear guidance matters most.

For Clare, family law is not simply about legal outcomes, but about people. It's about listening carefully, offering calm and practical advice, and helping clients find their footing during what can be one of the most challenging periods of their lives. She speaks with honesty about the emotional complexity of the work, the responsibility that comes with guiding families through separation, and the privilege of witnessing clients emerge stronger, more confident and ready to move forward. Clare talked to us about resilience, empathy, and why fairness, dignity and long-term wellbeing must always sit at the heart of family law.

*With more than twenty years in family law, what continues to motivate you in a practice area that is often emotionally complex and deeply personal?*

I have always been - and remain - motivated by my clients. It is not uncommon for the client who attends our first meeting to be very different from the person who emerges at the end of their family law journey. I am continually inspired by the resilience people show and their capacity to adapt, even in the face of changes they never expected or wanted.

I have great respect for how difficult it is to confront deeply personal challenges, particularly when circumstances feel out of one's control. Being able to support and guide clients through such a significant life transition is a genuine privilege and one that motivates me every day. One of the most rewarding aspects of my work is seeing former clients, months or years later and witnessing the strength, growth, and stability they have achieved after a very difficult period in their lives.

*Your work requires both rigorous legal analysis and a high degree of empathy. How do you balance those two skills when supporting clients through some of the most difficult moments of their lives?*

After more than 22 years practising in family law, I have learned that rigorous legal analysis and empathy are not competing skills - they are complementary. Clients come to us at one of the most vulnerable and emotionally overwhelming periods of their lives. The first and most important step is to truly listen and to acknowledge the impact the situation is having on them as people, not just as legal clients. Feeling heard and understood allows clients to begin to regain a sense of stability and trust in the process.

At the same time, my role is to provide clear, objective, and practical legal advice. Emotions can understandably cloud decision-making, so I focus on breaking complex legal issues into manageable steps and explaining the likely outcomes in a calm and realistic way. This helps clients move from a place of distress to one of informed decision-making.

Empathy guides how I communicate and support my clients, while logic and legal experience guide the advice I give. By combining compassion with clear analysis and a focus on practical solutions, I am able to help clients navigate their immediate challenges while keeping sight of their long-term wellbeing and, where relevant, the best interests of their children.

*As an experienced lawyer, what advice would you give to young women joining the profession?*

I would encourage young women entering the profession not to shy away from difficult conversations - whether with clients or with other practitioners. It is often within those challenging discussions that real progress is made. In family law particularly, what is in a client's best interests is not always what they want to hear. You must be prepared to provide clear, practical, and sometimes unwelcome advice when emotions and hurt are clouding judgment. Clients value honesty, transparency, and guidance they can trust.

Within the profession, I also believe women have a responsibility to support and champion those coming behind them. This includes making time to listen to younger women's career aspirations, offering guidance on best practice, and providing both constructive feedback and genuine encouragement where it is deserved.

Finally, I would say to anyone considering a career in family law that it is more than just a job - it is a vocation. It requires a careful balance of empathy and pragmatism. Family law is not about "battling it out" for the sake of conflict. A focus on fairness, practical solutions, and what is truly best for your clients - and their children - must always remain at the centre of your work.

*Looking ahead, what do you see as the most important role family lawyers can play in shaping fairer outcomes for families and children?*

I believe the most important role family lawyers can play is helping families find outcomes that are fair, sustainable, and focused on the wellbeing of the family as a whole, while still carefully protecting our client's best interests. A conciliatory and solution-focused approach - rather than adversarial litigation - gives families the best opportunity to move forward and redefine themselves as a new family unit, even when living separately.

While no one emerges from separation unscathed, family lawyers can help parents navigate this transition with dignity and respect. Our role is to assist families in finding a path forward that minimises long-term harm, preserves important relationships, and supports healthy co-parenting. The hope is that, in time, parents can stand together at significant milestones - such as a child's graduation or milestone birthday - without their child feeling caught between them. That outcome, whenever possible, should always remain at the heart of what we do.



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