

# Child Consultation

- > **Child Consultation can help parents learn about what their child might be thinking or feeling during a family separation.**

Parents often find it useful to hear what the world really looks like through their children's eyes. It helps them to address their children's needs and make insightful choices about their future.

Child Consultation also assists children to cope with separation. Children can talk about their thoughts and feelings, say how it feels to be them and share information about what they want.

It provides children with an opportunity to ask their parents questions, voice concerns and clear up misunderstandings.

Children feel supported when they are given a chance to talk in this safe way, because adults are listening to what they have to say.

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## Before the consultation

School aged children whose parents are using (or are about to use) Family Dispute Resolution are invited to talk to a child consultant about their experience of the separation.

It is preferable that both parents are involved in the Child Consultation process. Where one parent is unavailable for some reason we will seek their written permission.

Child Consultations only take place when the children agree to participate.

## During the consultation

We can see children either all together or on their own, depending on the how many children there are and their ages.

We do activities that are age-appropriate, such as drawing, talking, using picture cards, imagining and other forms of play.

We ask children for their opinions but don't pressure them into giving them to us.

## Child consultation (*continued...*)

After the session, the child consultant will meet again with the parents to give them feedback about what their children had to say. The feedback may include:

- Insight into their children's view
- How they seem to be coping
- Whether they have strong wishes about certain decisions
- Any questions or worries that need to be sorted out.

Children are assured of confidentiality when requested. It is essential that the children can control what information is shared with their parents. The only exception is in cases that require duty of care where the law requires actions to be taken.

The consultant may suggest to the parents counselling or other assistance may be useful for the children. However it will be up to the parents to decide about any further action.

### Introducing the idea to your children

Reassuring and helping children to feel positive about coming to the session is important. To encourage children, parents could say:

- *'Mum and I have organised for you to have some time with Tracey – to talk about how things have been for you.'*
- *'Dad and I would like you to have the opportunity to talk about anything that worries you or anything that you like.'*
- *'Mum and I would like to try and understand what it's like to be you right now and we think that this will help. So let's try to work together to make things better.'*

This helps children to see that their parents have joined together in their decision and that they are willing to listen.

### Following the child consultation

We like to send a follow-up letter to the children to see how they are going. In some cases we may see them after Family Dispute Resolution.

It is important to listen to your children if they choose to speak of how the Child Consultation was for them. Be patient and let them speak when they are ready, pushing for information will not be helpful.

### More information

Call the Salisbury/Elizabeth Family Relationship Centre on (08) 8255 3323.