



Australian Government

family safe help
emotions feelings confidential
children support
progress

Family Counselling

Where families want to build better relationships with each other and their children, the Australian Government has funded specific services to provide family counselling to these families in need.

What is family counselling?

Family counselling is the name for counselling under the Family Law Act. It helps people with relationship difficulties better manage the personal or interpersonal issues to do with children and family during marriage, separation and divorce.

Family counselling may be about hurt feelings, problems between you and your partner or another person in the family, new living arrangements and issues relating to the care of your children and financial adjustments.

Why go to family counselling?

Relationship problems can arise at various stages of our lives. Keeping relationships on track is not always easy. Having a shaky moment does not mean your relationship is in trouble but it may be a sign that you could do with some help. Family counselling can guide and support couples to meet the challenges of life.

Family counselling can help maintain valued family relationships even after separation. At this time, parents need to focus on what is best for their children. Children will have feelings and emotions that they may not be able to understand or deal with.

Who can go to family counselling?

A family counsellor can help adults, young people, couples and their children. You can go to family counselling as an individual or a couple or a family.

What if you are feeling unsafe?

Funded services that provide family counselling have arrangements in place to protect the safety of clients and staff. If you have concerns about your safety or the safety of your children, you should let the service staff know as soon as possible.

What's the point of counselling if you don't want to get back together?

Family counselling can help couples come to terms with the many changes that happen when a relationship breaks up. It can help parents make decisions about arrangements for their children and how they will share parenting after separation. The Family Law Act encourages parents to sort out differences over their children themselves instead of going to court.

Family counselling can also help where there are disagreements about the division of property.

Courts and family counselling

If you decide to go to court for a decision about your children, you may still have to see a family counsellor. A court can order you and your spouse or partner to see a family counsellor at any time during legal action to discuss and try to resolve differences about the care, welfare and development of your children. Generally, the court will not make a parenting order unless you have seen a family counsellor. This may not be required in some circumstances (such as in urgent cases).

Is counselling available for children?

Yes, family counselling is for the whole family, including children.

The Family Law Act allows for children affected by separation or divorce to be helped by a family counsellor. A family counsellor needs to have special skills for counselling children.

When do I see a family counsellor?

You can try family counselling at any time. The earlier you see a family counsellor, the more likely that the counsellor can help you.

It can be before marriage, during marriage or a de-facto relationship, after separation or divorce or when you re-marry. You can see a family counsellor about issues affecting your children whether or not you have ever married or lived together. If you are separated, you can see a family counsellor whether or not you have started court action. Family counsellors can help you work through emotional problems with your spouse or partner or reach agreement about your parental responsibilities.

What happens in family counselling?

A family counsellor will listen to your worries and problems and help you find your own answers.

What information will a family counsellor provide me with?

You may receive information and referral to services that can help your situation. This will depend on where you are in the relationship — are you in a new relationship; building your relationships, in a blended family; trying to reconcile or separate? If you are married and considering divorce, the family counsellor must give you information about services available to help with reconciliation (unless they think that there is no reasonable possibility of a reconciliation).

If you are separated and have children, the family counsellor must give you information about parenting plans and other services (such as family dispute resolution) available to help you.

Are things said at family counselling confidential and can they be used in court?

What is said during family counselling is confidential and cannot be used as evidence in court. However, there are exceptions to this if a counsellor identifies concerns about a person's safety or criminal behaviour. A family counsellor must report child abuse or anything that indicates a child is at risk of abuse, and this may be used as evidence in some circumstances.

What will it cost?

Funded services that provide family counselling will charge fees according to your capacity to pay. Let the service know if you are on a low income or experiencing financial difficulties as the service will have arrangements in place to ensure you can access family counselling.

How do I contact a family counsellor?

For more information and contact details for these services call the Family Relationship Advice Line on **1800 050 321** between **8am to 8pm Monday to Friday** and **10am to 4pm Saturdays** (except national public holidays). You can also visit Family Relationships Online at www.familyrelationships.gov.au