

Child-Inclusive Mediation and Child-Informed Mediation



Sometimes it is important to hear about how a child or adolescent is experiencing their parents' separation. In this instance, we use a *child-inclusive mediation*.

If the children are younger than 4 years of age, or are otherwise not to be involved in the process, a *child-informed mediation* is used. This process will inform decisions about the development of an age, and stage-appropriate parenting plan or Order

What is Child Inclusive Mediation?

Child Inclusive Practice is a mediation process where the voices of children from four years of age are included in the mediation process. The children themselves are not present at the mediation, and do not have the burden of being asked to be involved in adult decisions. Rather, they separately meet with a qualified Child Consultant who then attends the mediation on the children's behalf and reports back about how the child is experiencing their parents' separation. This process is particularly useful when separated parents cannot agree on what they believe to be in the best interest of their child or children.

Following this session, and with your child's permission, their views and feelings will be conveyed to the parents in a separate session. The child consultant will then make recommendations to the parents about how to proceed with parenting arrangements. *The children are not involved in this session.*

What is the process for Child Inclusive Mediation?

Our child inclusive process follows the following steps:

- 1.** Each parent meets individually with the mediator, Dr Anne Purcell for a confidential intake/pre-mediation session. Dr Purcell specialises in family mediations, parenting plans, child development, and achieving optimal outcomes for children after divorce or separation. The purpose of this session is to assess the matter for suitability for family dispute resolution (FDR) and to discuss the potential of a child-inclusive process;
- 2.** The Child Consultant – a doctor of clinical psychology, specializing in families, children and adolescents, and separation – will meet with the parents to gain their perspectives about their child or children. Then, they meet with your child or teenager to gain an understanding of how the separation affects them. Age and stage appropriate play and discussion are used. Sometimes, psycho-metric tests or assessments are made of their general wellbeing and functioning. That is the extent of the children's involvement in the process.

These sessions take about 45 minutes – 1 hour each. The children are not needed after this step, so parents often arrange to have them collected and taken back to school, where appropriate;

- 3.** Child inclusive mediation occurs. This involves both parents, the child consultant and the mediator (noting the child *do not attend*). The Child Consultant delivers feedback about their session with the Child/children, makes recommendations to the parents about the child or children's needs, and provides options for co-parenting. During this session, our Child Consultant will discuss how your child or children are coping with the separation and any key messages your child would like you to know.

Mediation then follows. The purpose is to commence the development of a child-focused parenting agreement, in light of the information gleaned from the children's feedback, and the recommendations from the child consultant.

Further Information

How can Child Inclusive practice assist in the Mediation process?

- Gives your child/children a voice where they are able to safely express their thoughts and feelings on how the separation affects them
- Assists your child/children with their post separation journey
- Allows your child/children to inform a decision-making process without placing the burden of decision making on them, or creating worry that what they say may hurt the feelings of their parents
- Helps parents to understand and consider their child's/children's position and supports the parents to be child focused
- Ensures that the Mediation process is guided by the best interests of the child/children



Some important things to know about the Child Inclusive session:

- The session is confidential and permission is needed from your child before their views and feelings are conveyed to you. The Child Consultant will ask your child what they would like Mum and Dad to know.
- Children are told that even though they tell our Child Consultant what they want, it doesn't guarantee it will happen. Some decisions are for parents to make but young people's feelings are considered in this process.
- The children are told that they are included in this process because their thoughts and feelings are important, and that their parents will not be hurt or angry by anything they wish to share.

Child-Informed Mediation

Child-informed mediation differs from a child-inclusive mediation and is an option when the children are too young, or it has been decided that the children will not be involved in the process.

The process is otherwise the same as a child-inclusive mediation but in step 2 (above), only the parents are interviewed by the child consultant.

A child-informed mediation be of benefit if:

- Parents disagree about the timing and onset of the introduction of new, or increased parenting time and schedules but their children are too young, or it is not appropriate for them to be part of the process;
- Separated parents want information education, research, opinion and/or recommendations about their children's ages and stages of development to inform their decisions about how they develop a parenting plan or Order;
- The impact of separation on the children is exacerbated by conflict or poor communication between the parents and they need assistance understanding the impact of this on their children; and
- Parents are seeking research-informed advice on how to appropriately structure a parenting plan for their particular circumstances, including the children's individual stages, needs and temperaments, and the status of the parents' co-parenting relationship

Timeframes and Fees

A full list of fees and charges will be provided once we understand the complexity of the matter and how many children there are in the family. The first step is for parents to book and Intake sessions with Dr Purcell to assess if this process is suitable for your situation. We can offer immediate appointment for intake sessions and mediation within a few weeks of an enquiry.

This is a brief overview, only. For more information, please contact us at 07-3113 3700

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