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**Counselling Children when Parents are Separating or Divorced.**

This information sheet is for parents who are in the process of separating or are divorced. Children are often referred to counselling during this difficult time. This page provides an overview and example of what the goals of counselling **may** include.

In all counselling, children and young people are informed that what they say in counselling is confidential and private unless there is a belief that they are unsafe or that someone else is unsafe. Children are encouraged, if they feel **comfortable**, to talk to parents about their concerns.

**Possible Goals of Counselling. The goals depend on what is important to the child or young person and may include others not listed.**

- To help children express their feelings in a safe non-judgemental environment.
- To validate children's feelings about the situation – sadness, anxiety, confusion, grief, anger shock etc.
- To provide children with strategies to deal with feelings.
- To help children adjust to a changing family situation.
- To help children make sense of loving both parents whilst at the same time coming to terms with parents no longer loving each other.
- To help children to reflect on happier times.
- To help children develop resilience during what can be a conflictual time between parents.
- To help children develop optimism towards the future

It is important to be patient with children and young people and to acknowledge that adjusting to major changes takes time. They also need to be reassured that things will get better.

Whilst it is often difficult for parents to communicate with each other at this time, it is very important that children are not used to carry messages or implied messages to the other parent.

*Children need to be protected as much as possible from the conflict that parents are experiencing.*

This is best dealt with through *Family Dispute Resolution*.

<http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/services/familylawservices/fdr/pages/default.aspx>

Children have enough of their own issues to deal with.

**“What about the Children?”** Is an excellent publication from Relationships Australia and can be downloaded.

<http://www.relationships.org.au/relationship-advice/publications/pdfs/what-about-the-children.pdf>

Alternatively, this booklet can be purchased from Relationships Australia:

<http://www.relationships.org.au/relationship-advice/publications>