

What is family dispute resolution?

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) provides family dispute resolution (FDR), also known as mediation, to help couples who are separating to resolve their family law disputes, including conflicts over child care, child support, financial arrangements and property settlements.

FDR focuses on the best interests of children and on safety, as well as redressing imbalances of power between separating parents.

Thinking about children

Parents who are separating or separated need to make a range of decisions about their children's needs. For example, decisions about living arrangements for children and how to share parenting after separation.

Understanding and making these decisions can be difficult. You can consider arrangements that will work for your children by hearing about their experiences of the changes in your family and their life.

As part of FDR, it can be helpful for children to talk on their own in a safe environment to a child consultant - a person trained to understand their feelings and views. This can also help you to make decisions in FDR that take into account how your children are feeling.

This process is known as child-inclusive FDR.



Hearing your child's voice

in family dispute resolution

Who we are

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is a valued provider of specialist family and relationship services. We provide services from 15 centres and additional outreach locations in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Our services include counselling, family violence prevention, support and recovery services, child and family services, family dispute resolution (mediation), relationship skills courses, mental health services, and professional development and training.

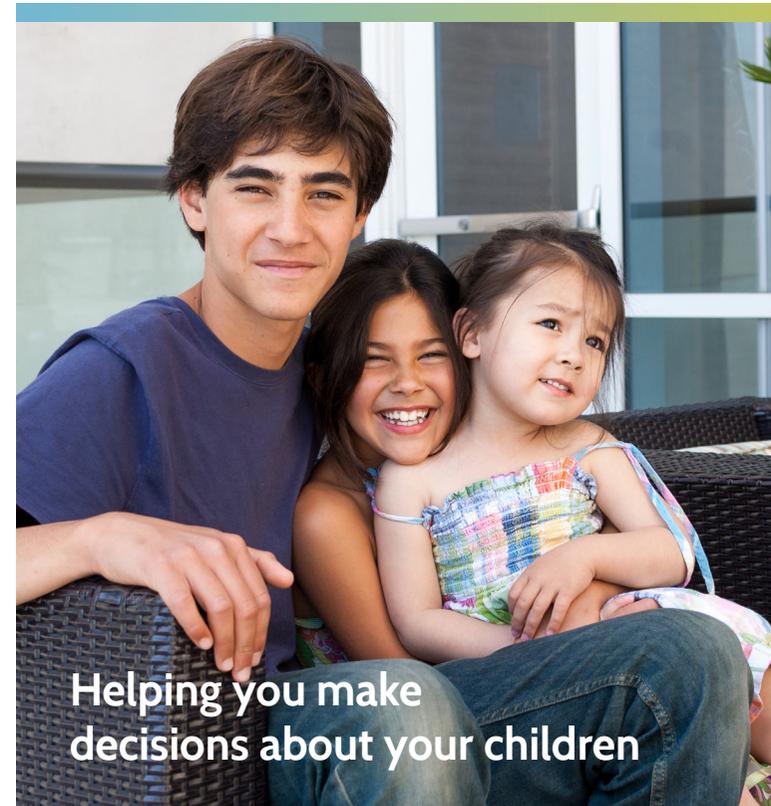
Contact us

To find out more or to make an appointment, contact your nearest centre providing FDR:

Ballarat	(03) 5337 9222
Berwick FRC	(03) 8768 4111
Greensborough	(03) 9431 7777
Greensborough FRC	(03) 9404 7800
Kew	(03) 9261 8700
Melbourne FRC	(03) 8625 3666
Shepparton	(03) 5820 7444
Sunshine	(03) 8311 9222
Sunshine FRC	(03) 9313 0444
Traralgon	(03) 5175 9500

Visit www.rav.org.au to find your nearest centre or call 1300 364 277.

Funded by the Australian Government.
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Helping you make decisions about your children

Relationships Australia[®]

VICTORIA



How can child-inclusive FDR help children?

Child-inclusive FDR gives children an opportunity to explain how things are going for them at the moment and to help you as parents to make decisions in FDR.

It can be a relief for children to express their views to a person who is not involved in any conflict that the family might be experiencing. Children often say they feel relieved and 'lighter' after having the chance to talk to someone who is not their parent.

Child-inclusive FDR is generally most suitable for children that are school aged and above, however younger children may be able to participate with older siblings.

What happens in child-inclusive FDR?

In child-inclusive FDR, children meet with a child consultant and, depending on the child and their age, express themselves by talking, drawing, playing, reading, telling stories, or participating in other activities. Each child in a family is usually seen separately, however siblings may also be seen together.

Sometimes a second appointment with the child consultant is recommended. It's important to know that these consultations are not the same as child counselling.

Children are never asked to make decisions – that's their parents' job.



What feedback is given?

During a separate FDR appointment, you can talk with the child consultant who met with your children to learn:

- what the situation is like for your children
- what is going well
- what can support your children in the future.

How can it help with decision making?

If you understand your children's hopes, worries and needs, you can keep them in mind when making agreements in FDR.

Joint decisions can then more effectively focus on:

- incorporating children's needs into parenting plans and agreements for the care of children
- maintaining relationships that are important to children
- including the things that children like to do.

What about infants and very young children?

If a child is unable to express their views or participate in child-inclusive FDR, we can provide enhanced child-focused FDR. This involves a trained child consultant providing you as parents with information about current research on children's ages and stages of development, and how different parenting arrangements may work for children at these different ages.

When does child-inclusive FDR take place?

There are opportunities throughout the FDR process to discuss whether to involve children through a child consultant. Both parents need to consent to involve children, and an assessment of suitability needs to be made with your FDR practitioner. A final assessment of suitability is made by the child consultant.

Our staff

All our child consultants are trained and qualified to work with children in divorce and separation. All of our practitioners are accredited by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department as FDR practitioners.



Are consultations and feedback appointments confidential?

As with other aspects of FDR, information provided by you and your children within the child-inclusive and enhanced child-focused FDR programs is confidential, unless we are authorised or required by law to disclose personal information, such as to protect someone from harm. For more information, please read our Client Information Statement, available from our centres.

We ask that parents do not discuss any feedback about the child-inclusive FDR session with your children.

Fees

Fees are charged for most services at Relationships Australia Victoria. All fees, however, are appropriate for the service provided and your financial capacity to pay. Where a fee is charged for FDR, the same fee will also apply for the time spent with the child.

Your practitioner will discuss any fees for this service before child-inclusive or child-enhanced FDR begins.

Information for children

Our booklet, *Why am I going to Relationships Australia?*, is written especially for children about child-inclusive FDR. It is available from our centres or can be downloaded at www.rav.org.au/booklets#whygoingrel