

# Child Consultation

Helping Your Child's Voice Be Heard

A Guide to Child Inclusive Mediation (CIM)



**FAMILY FIRST**

MEDIATION AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

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## Welcome

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Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We understand that separation can be one of the most challenging periods for any family. During times of change, children can experience uncertainty and emotional strain, even when parents are doing their very best. This brochure explains how Child Consultation provides a safe, supported opportunity for your child's voice to be heard, helping you make informed, child-focused decisions during mediation.

### Separation Is Hard – Especially for Children

When families change, children often experience:

- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Loyalty conflicts
- Fear of saying the “wrong” thing
- Pressure to protect one or both parents

They did not choose the separation.

They cannot control the outcome.

What they can have is a safe space to be heard.

Child Consultation (also known as Child Inclusive Mediation) provides that space.

### What Is Child Consultation?

Child Consultation is a structured, child-focused process that forms part of Family Dispute Resolution.

It provides children with a safe and confidential opportunity to share:

- How they are experiencing life between two homes
- What is working well
- What feels difficult
- What is important to them

It is **not**:

- A psychological assessment
- A parenting evaluation
- A court report
- A process where children choose between parents

It is a way of ensuring that decisions affecting children are informed by their lived experience.

## Why Consider Child Consultation?

### 1. Children Have a Right to Be Heard

Under Australian family law principles and international child rights frameworks, children have the right to express their views in matters that affect them.

This does not mean children make the decisions.

It means their perspective is respectfully considered.

When parents' consent to Child Consultation, they send a powerful message:

*“Your voice matters.”*

### 2. Better Emotional Outcomes for Children

Research consistently shows that children who feel heard during separation:

- Experience lower anxiety
- Adjust more effectively
- Show improved emotional wellbeing
- Are more accepting of family arrangements

When children feel ignored, they may:

- Resist arrangements
- Withdraw emotionally
- Develop resentment
- “Vote with their feet” by refusing transitions

Involvement supports smoother transitions and long-term stability.

### 3. Improved Parental Insight

Parents often gain invaluable clarity about:

- How conflict is affecting their child
- What transitions feel like from their child's perspective
- What reassurance their child needs
- What is already working well

This insight allows mediation discussions to remain focused on the child's best interests rather than parental positions.

## A Safe and Neutral Process

Child Consultation is facilitated by a trained Child Consultant who:

- Has specialist knowledge of child development
- Understands the impact of separation
- Is skilled in working with high-conflict family dynamics

Children are supported using age-appropriate techniques such as:

- Play
- Art
- Storytelling
- Conversation

They are never pressured.

They can pause or stop at any time.

## Confidentiality and Safeguards

Child Consultation operates within clear professional boundaries.

- The child controls what information is shared.
- Only information the child consents to share is fed back to parents.
- The Child Consultant does not prepare written reports.
- Information is not admissible in court.
- The Consultant does not make parenting decisions.

Exceptions to confidentiality apply only where there are concerns about safety or risk of harm.

## Is Child Consultation Suitable for Every Family?

Not always.

Before proceeding:

1. Both parents must consent.

2. The mediator must assess suitability.
3. The Child Consultant independently confirms appropriateness after speaking with each parent.

If mediation itself is suitable, it is generally our philosophy that children benefit from being offered participation.

## The Child Consultation Process

There are three core stages.

### Step 1: Individual Parent Appointments

(Approx. 1 hour each)

Each parent meets separately with the Child Consultant to:

- Share background information
- Discuss the child's needs
- Understand the process
- Ask questions

### Step 2: Meeting with the Child

(Approx. 1–1.5 hours)

The child meets with the Consultant in a confidential setting (in person or online).

Sibling groups attend on the same day where possible and may meet:

- Individually
- As a sibling group

Children are free to participate at their own pace.

### Step 3: Feedback Session with Parents and Mediator

(Approx. 1.5 hours)

The Consultant shares:

- Themes from the child's experience
- Identified strengths
- Areas of concern
- Matters important to the child

Parents may ask questions to better understand how to support their child.

The Consultant may suggest referrals or strategies to strengthen parenting arrangements.

## Follow-Up with the Child

After mediation outcomes are reached, a follow-up meeting with the child is conducted (at no additional cost) to:

- Share outcomes
- Provide closure
- Reinforce support

## Why Your Consent Matters

Your decision to consent communicates to your child:

- Their experiences matter
- Their feelings are important
- You are willing to listen

Child Consultation does not take decision-making away from parents.

It strengthens it.

## Fees

Item	Fee (ex GST)	Shared?
Parent appointment	\$330 per parent	No
One child meeting	\$400	Yes
Feedback session	\$330	Yes
Additional child	\$150	Yes

Total per parent (one child): \$695 + GST

## Terms

- Full payment required before appointments commence
- No refunds
- Room hire fees may apply (shared equally)
- Process must be completed within 4 weeks

## Contact Us

**Family First Mediation**

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Working in the best interests of children is at the centre of every conversation.