



Meeting with Children: A Child-Centred Approach

Information for Parents and Lawyers

What is a Child-Centred Approach?

Meeting with Children: A Child-Centred Approach is a structured method for giving children the opportunity to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their family's separation or divorce. Developed by Lorri Yassenik and Jon Graham (ICCFL), this model starts with the belief that **all children over the age of five should have the opportunity to participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes** that affect them.

This approach answers the question:

Not *whether* children should be heard—but *how* to ensure their voices are safely and effectively included.

What Does This Process Look Like?

- The process is **non-directive, unstructured, and play-based**, using expressive and experiential activities like drawing, storytelling, role play, and games to help children share their thoughts in a way that feels natural and safe.
- Parents receive a written summary that includes what the child is comfortable sharing, with the goal of enhancing understanding—not assigning blame. Parents are supported to prepare emotionally so they can receive their child's voice with openness and care.

The overall model is **highly structured and non-evaluative**, meaning it does **not assess parenting** or offer recommendations. Instead, it **captures the child's voice in their own words**—presenting **verbatim statements** shared by the child during the session(s) in a written summary provided back to the parents. The focus is on reflecting the child's lived experience, not interpreting or judging it.

Why Meet with Children Separately?

Children are deeply impacted by family separation but are often excluded from conversations and decisions.

This approach:

- Recognizes the child as central to the family system
- Gives the child a safe space to express how they're feeling
- Encourages parent-child reconnection and better-informed parenting plans

It also supports parents in:

- Increasing their readiness to hear their child's concerns
 - Understanding the child's experience without judgment
 - Responding in emotionally attuned ways
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Is This Therapy?

No. This is **not a therapy session** and does **not involve clinical assessment**. It is a communication-based process designed to share the child's voice within ADR settings such as mediation or collaborative law.

When Is This Approach Appropriate?

This approach may be appropriate when:

- A parenting plan is being developed or updated
- Parents or professionals wish to include the child's experience in their decision-making
- There are no complex clinical issues (e.g., trauma, abuse, or significant mental health concerns)

Both parents must consent, and the child must voluntarily agree to participate. If there are safety concerns or legal barriers, the process may not proceed.

What to Tell Your Child:

- Keep it simple and focused on your child's voice.
- Avoid pressuring or coaching.
- Let them know you support them expressing what *they* think and feel.

You might say:

“We’ve asked someone who works with kids to meet with you so we can better understand how things have been for you. It’s not about picking sides—it’s just a chance for you to share what’s on your mind.”

What Is Included in the Summary?

Following the meetings, parents may receive a brief written summary that includes:

- The child’s **verbatim statements** (what the child said in their own words)
 - General themes the child chose to discuss
 - Observations about the child’s communication and emotional tone
Only the content the child agrees to share is included.
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Professional Fees

- **Parent Intake Sessions (required):** \$150/hour
- **Meetings with the Child:** \$150/hour (typically two sessions)
- **Written Summary:** Preparation of a written summary following the meetings with the child will be billed at my hourly rate based on the time required to review session notes and prepare the document.
- **Feedback Session with Parents (optional):** \$150/hour

A **Letter of Understanding and Consent Form** must be completed and signed by both parents prior to scheduling the child’s sessions.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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Journey Forward Counselling

Supporting families through separation and beyond