

## REFERRER BRIEFING NOTE



Feb 2026

Re: Impact of the May 2024 Family Law Amendments on the Use of Children's Contact Services

Prepared by: Coffs Coast Contact Services

Purpose: To outline how the 2024 amendments to the Family Law Act influence referral pathways, supervised time, and the evidentiary relevance of Children's Contact Services (CCS).

### 1. Legislative Shift – From Parental Entitlement to Child-Centred Assessment

The amendments effective 6 May 2024 removed the presumption of Equal Shared Parental Responsibility and the associated requirement to consider equal or substantial time arrangements.

The Court now applies a simplified framework focused on:

The child's safety (including protection from exposure to conflict or harm)

Developmental, psychological and emotional needs

Each parent's demonstrated capacity to meet those needs

Practical arrangements that support stability rather than theoretical equality

Implication: Parenting outcomes are no longer driven by progression toward shared care, but by risk-managed, child-specific arrangements.

### 2. Increased Judicial Reliance on Structured Contact Environments

Courts are more frequently utilising CCS to:

Facilitate safe parent-child time where risk remains under assessment

Provide a neutral environment in matters involving family violence, AVOs, or high conflict

Enable continued relationship-building without compromising protective concerns

Stabilise arrangements while litigation progresses or therapeutic work occurs

Supervised time is increasingly viewed as a protective and functional intervention, not merely a transitional step.

### 3. Observational Evidence Now Carries Greater Weight

With the removal of presumptive shared arrangements, the Court is placing greater emphasis on:

Behavioural observations rather than competing allegations

The child's presentation and regulation before, during, and after time

A parent's attunement, responsiveness, and ability to follow boundaries

Capacity to prioritise the child over conflict dynamics

CCS session reports provide contemporaneous, non-partisan observations that align closely with the amended "best interests" considerations.

### 4. Risk Management and Graduated Parenting Pathways

The amended legislation supports incremental parenting structures where appropriate, including:

Supervised visits

Supported changeovers

Staged progression contingent on demonstrated capacity

Long-term supervision where risk mitigation is required

This approach assists the Court to avoid premature escalation of time arrangements.

### 5. Alignment With Harmful Proceedings Provisions

New powers enabling the Court to limit vexatious or harmful applications reinforce the utility of CCS as a practical mechanism to:

Reduce parental interface

Contain conflict exposure for children

Provide predictable, structured contact without repeated litigation

## 6. Role of Coffs Coast Contact Services

Our service provides:

Professionally supervised contact and monitored changeovers

Objective session summaries suitable for evidentiary use

Child-focused practice consistent with ACCSA Guidelines

Structured environments designed to support safe relationship maintenance

Clear behavioural documentation (not therapeutic or forensic opinion)

We do not undertake family reports or assessments; our role is observational and facilitative.

## 7. Appropriate Referral Scenarios

Referrals are particularly suitable where there are: ✓ Allegations of family violence or coercive control

✓ Interim parenting arrangements requiring safeguards

✓ Children re-establishing contact after separation

✓ High-conflict matters where direct parental interface is detrimental

✓ Court-directed graduated time frameworks

✓ Concerns regarding parental capacity requiring observation in practice

## 8. Engagement Process

Separate intake appointments conducted with each parent

Risk assessment and suitability screening

Structured visitation plan implemented in accordance with any Court Orders or legal agreements

Session reports available upon request or direction

Contact for Referrals or Discussion

## Coffs Coast Contact Services

 0423 533 364

We welcome liaison with solicitors to ensure arrangements align with Orders, risk considerations, and the intent of the amended legislation.