

# Family violence – how Roundtable Dispute Management (RDM) can help

This fact sheet is for people who have separated, or are thinking about separating and have experienced family violence. It has information on:

- what family violence is
- how the children are affected
- how family dispute resolution can help
- where to get help.

## What is family violence?

Family violence is when a family member makes you feel fearful for your wellbeing or safety. A family member is anyone you have a family relationship with, including your partner, ex partner, children, relatives, carers and anyone you treat as family. It does not matter whether or not you are married. Family violence is sometimes called domestic violence.

Family violence is not just physical violence, for example hitting and pushing. It includes a range of other behaviours, such as when someone:

- threatens you, for example threatens to hurt you, another person or your pet, or to damage property
- forces you to have sex or do sexual acts
- calls you names or puts you down
- controls all the household money, or pressures you for money or property
- stops you from seeing friends or family
- prevents you from practising your religion or culture.

Family violence can happen at any time and is never okay. Family violence is against the law.

You can get help to deal with family violence. Perpetrators of family violence can be charged by the police.

## How are children affected by family violence?

Children can be affected by seeing, hearing, experiencing or being aware of family violence happening, and by seeing the effects of family violence. This can include, for example, seeing bruising, crying and property damage, or cleaning up after family violence.

Children who have been affected by family violence may:

- live in fear, which can have serious long term effects
- feel responsible for violence
- try to make things easier for you or the other parent, by not saying how they really feel
- have difficulty concentrating at school or doing their usual activities and routines
- become aggressive and have difficulty with their friendships
- feel depressed, helpless and overwhelmed by anxiety.

## How can I help my children?

It is important to talk to your children and tell them the violence is not their fault. Your children need to know that they are not forgotten. You need to let them know that it is okay to feel frightened, angry or confused.

Both you and your children may need help from a professional, such as a doctor, counsellor or psychologist, to deal with the effects of violence.

## What can I do if there is family violence?

If you are experiencing or witnessing family violence or being violent yourself:

- speak to your lawyer about your legal options
- speak to your case manager, social worker or doctor about services in the community that can provide information, support and advice on your particular situation.

You can get a referral to family violence services by calling the Family Relationships Advice Line. You can also look these services up on their website. [See](#) the back of this fact sheet for details.

It can be difficult and frightening to take action when there is family violence. But there are support services that can help you with your particular situation.

If you feel your immediate safety is at risk, you should call the police on 000.

You can also apply for a family violence intervention order. Call Victoria Legal Aid or a community legal centre. We also have free publications on applying for and responding to a family violence intervention order. [See](#) the back of this fact sheet for contact details.

## What is the Roundtable Dispute Management (RDM) service?

RDM is a family dispute resolution service run by Victoria Legal Aid. Family dispute resolution practitioners at RDM (called 'Chairpersons'), help people who are separated reach their own agreement about the future parenting arrangements for their children. This happens at a family dispute resolution conference. RDM clients have a case manager who helps them prepare for the conference.

### How can RDM help when there is family violence?

Your RDM case manager will ask you about family violence. He or she will assess whether you should be using RDM, or whether going to court is more appropriate for your family situation. If RDM is suitable, your case manager will make sure the conference is set up in a safe way.

### How can I be safe at RDM?

The RDM building and rooms are designed to keep clients safe. Some of these features include:

- separate waiting areas at reception
- different arrival and leaving times for you and your ex partner so you don't see each other
- separate entry and exit points in the building, and security doors.

You can also do conferences in different ways. You do not have to see each other.

If you are worried about your emotional or physical safety, tell your case manager. They can recommend a conference type and safety plan to help you. No one will be forced to be in the same room at a conference.

You can also leave at any stage of the RDM and conference process if you want to.

### What are the different types of conference?

Conferences can happen in different ways to help you feel comfortable and safe.

These are the different types:

- **'Joint' conference:** you and your lawyer can speak with each other and the other parties around a table or over the telephone. You can also speak privately with your lawyer and the Chairperson, if you need to.
- **'Shuttle' conference:** this is where you do not have to see or speak to the other person at all. The Chairperson speaks to each party (and their lawyer) separately. Shuttle conferences can happen in the same building where you each have a safe room in a separate area, or they can happen over the telephone.
- **Flexible approaches:** sometimes conferences move from a joint format to a shuttle format if it seems like the parties will feel more comfortable doing it that way. Conferences can also start in shuttle format and move to joint. However you should never feel pressured to meet with the other party if you are afraid.

### What will happen before the RDM conference?

If you are experiencing family violence, your case manager will:

- help you to develop a safety plan for the conference, so that you feel safe and protected
- give you information and resources to help you make decisions about your physical and emotional safety.

### What other support services are available?

There are a number of other services that you may be able to access for help. These include:

- counselling
- parenting orders program
- parenting groups for after separation
- support services for children after separation.

For information and contact details of these and other services in your area, telephone the Family Relationships Advice Line on 1800 050 321 or visit [www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au)

### Where to get help

#### Victoria Legal Aid

##### Legal Help

Tel: 9269 0120 or 1800 677 402 (country callers)

Open Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

You can get legal information and help regarding separation, divorce, children, property and residency issues.

For more information about children, adults and separation, see our other information sheets:

- Being a parent after separation
- How will our separation affect the children?
- Caring for yourself after separation
- How your children's ages affect your parenting arrangements

For your nearest community legal centre:

Tel: 9652 1500

[www.communitylaw.org.au](http://www.communitylaw.org.au)

#### Women's Legal Service Victoria

Tel: 9642 0877 or 1800 133 302 (toll free)

[www.womenslegal.org.au](http://www.womenslegal.org.au)

#### Women's Domestic Violence Information and Crisis Service (24 hours)

Tel: 9322 3555 or 1800 015 188 (toll free)

[www.wdvcs.org.au](http://www.wdvcs.org.au)

#### InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

Tel: 8413 6800 or 1800 755 988, TTY: 9419 3536

[www.iwdvs.org.au](http://www.iwdvs.org.au)

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