



Kids Talk: Hearing from children

For parents

What is Kids Talk?

Kids Talk is a program that gives children the opportunity to be heard in family law decisions. Kids Talk is part of Victoria Legal Aid's mediation service, Family Dispute Resolution Service.

How can Kids Talk help my family?

You and your children's other parent or carer might have different views about what your children think and feel about their family situation. Your children will have their own thoughts, feelings and opinions.

Kids Talk helps children share their thoughts in a supportive environment. Kids Talk can help you and the other party make decisions at mediation that best meet the needs of the children.

Why do we offer Kids Talk?

The law says that children have the right to be heard and have their wishes considered in family law decisions.

We want to:

- give children the chance to talk about their family in a safe and supportive environment, without pressure to make decisions
- give you the opportunity to hear what is important to your children from a neutral and independent professional.

How Kids Talk works

When we decide whether your case is suitable for mediation, we will also consider Kids Talk. If we decide Kids Talk is safe and appropriate for your family and each parent or carer agrees to participate, the Kids Talk team will assign a child specialist. A child specialist is an experienced professional with qualifications in social work or psychology. They specialise in working with children and young people who have experienced family separation. Child specialists have experience in creating safe spaces for children to express how they truly feel.

The usual process is that the child specialist will:

1. Speak with you to arrange a meeting

The child specialist contacts you to arrange a meeting with your children (at a venue close to the children). They will also arrange to speak to you after meeting the children.

2. Meet your children

The child specialist meets with the children as a group first and then individually. The child specialist will help the children explore and explain their family situation through drawings, toys and activity cards. They will tailor their approach to suit your children's age, interests, needs and comfort levels. How long the meeting takes depends on how many children there are, and their needs. Meeting one child may take 45 to 60 minutes.

3. Provide you with feedback

The child specialist will speak to you after meeting your children. They will help you understand your children's thoughts and feelings about their family. This is a time to consider your children's views before mediation.

4. Provide a written report of the Kids Talk meeting for mediation

The child specialist then writes a brief report suggesting topics to be discussed at mediation to support the support the children's needs.

The report is sent to you and the other parent or carer, your lawyers and the mediator who will run your mediation. The mediator will use the Kids Talk report during the mediation when discussing the children's needs.

This report and any notes of meetings are confidential and cannot be used in court.

How old do children have to be to do Kids Talk?

Our child specialists usually meet children aged between 5 and 17. Sometimes younger children and young adults in sibling groups may also be included.

If your children are too young, or it is not safe or appropriate for them to take part in Kids Talk, there are other ways a child specialist can help.





Kids Talk: Hearing from children for parents continued...

Other ways child specialists can help you

In some cases, the child specialist can provide tailored information to you about the likely developmental and other needs of your children, without meeting them.

They can do this based on information gathered from you and the other parent or carer as well as on evidence-based research.

The child specialist will talk to you and the other parent or carer separately. The child specialist then writes a brief report for mediation. This can help you prepare for mediation and make decisions that meet your children's needs.

More information

If you have questions about Kids Talk, please call our Family Dispute Resolution Service on **9269 0500**, email fdrs@vla.vic.gov.au or visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/kids-talk.

If you are going through mediation at our Family Dispute Resolution Service you can ask to speak to your case manager, or the Managing Child Specialist.

How are lawyers involved?

Most participants have a lawyer to support them, as we provide lawyer assisted mediation.

If you have a lawyer, they can go through the Kids Talk report with you when it is released, as well as attending mediation.

Preparing your children for Kids Talk

We recommend speaking with your children before their Kids Talk meeting. This helps them know what to expect. The child specialist can give you advice about how to approach this conversation. You can use these examples to explain the process:

- (Other parent/carers name) and I will meet with a mediator, who is an independent person helping us make decisions. Together we will make a plan about how to best care for you.
- There is another meeting where you can talk with a professional person called a child specialist. This meeting will only happen if you want it to.
- At your meeting, you can draw, play games, or chat about family, friends, and school.
- If you agree, the child specialist will talk to us and share some of what they talked about with you.
- Hearing from the child specialist can help us decide what plan will work best for you.
- Afterwards, I can check in with you, too.

