

# Victoria Legal Aid

## Family Dispute Resolution Service

### How much does it cost?

Our service is free. However, you may have to pay your lawyer's fees.

### Can I get an interpreter?

Yes. Ask us for an interpreter in your language. You can also ring the Translating and Interpreting Service on **13 14 50** and ask to be put through to Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution Service.

### How do I contact you?

For more information about Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution Service please contact us directly on **(03) 9269 0500** or **1800 136 832** (toll free) or call Legal Help on **1300 792 387**.

### How can I provide feedback or make a complaint?

If you would like to provide feedback or have a complaint about Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution Service you can contact us on **(03) 9269 0500** or **fdrs@vla.vic.gov.au**.

If we are unable to resolve any complaint you may contact Complaints and Statutory Compliance at **complaints@vla.vic.gov.au** or write to **GPO Box 4380 Melbourne Vic 3001**

### Where to get help

#### Victoria Legal Aid

For free information about the law and how we can help you, call Legal Help on **1300 792 387**.

Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm.

#### Do you need help calling us?



Translating and Interpreting Service

Tel: 13 14 50



National Relay Service

TTY: 133 677

Speak and listen: 1300 555 727

See [www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au) for more information.

### More information

More information is on our website at [www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/fdrs](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/fdrs)

### Our offices

Melbourne	Dandenong	Ringwood
Bairnsdale	Frankston	Shepparton
Ballarat	Geelong	Sunshine
Bendigo	Horsham	Warrnambool
Broadmeadows	Morwell	

All offices are accessible to people with a disability.



## What is Family Dispute Resolution?

It is a process where a trained family dispute resolution practitioner helps parties to a family law dispute isolate the issues, develop and consider options, and work towards an agreement.

In most cases, you can only apply to a family law court for an order about your children if you have a certificate from a family dispute resolution practitioner. The certificate will say one of the following:

- one party did not attend family dispute resolution
- the case was not appropriate for family dispute resolution
- all parties attended and made a genuine effort to resolve the dispute
- all parties attended but one or both parties did not make a genuine effort to resolve the dispute
- family dispute resolution started but part way through the practitioner decided it was not appropriate to continue.

If you apply to the court for a parenting order, the judge may take the certificate into account when making decisions in your case, including whether one of you should pay towards the other party's legal costs.

## What is Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution Service?

We are the family dispute resolution service run by Victoria Legal Aid. We can organise a family dispute resolution conference to help you:

- develop a parenting plan which sets out arrangements for the care of your children
- sort out financial issues, such as the division of the property of a relationship, spousal maintenance and maintenance for children over 18 years old.

## Who can use Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution Service?

To use our service at least one party must have a lawyer and a grant of legal assistance from Victoria Legal Aid.

We strongly encourage all parties to get legal advice and can help you find a lawyer.

## How does it work?

A case manager will speak to each party individually and decide whether our family dispute resolution service is right for you. Our case managers are trained to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment in every case. They need to make sure everyone is safe and can negotiate freely. If your case is suitable for our service, your case manager will choose the most appropriate format for your conference.

Our conferences are run by experienced family dispute resolution practitioners registered with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. We call them 'chairpersons'. The chairperson will not give anyone legal advice.

Please refer to the Victoria Legal Aid Family Dispute Resolution section on the Victoria Legal Aid website [www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/chairpersons](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/chairpersons) for each chairperson's individual qualifications and experience.

## What if I do not feel safe?

Tell us if you are worried about your emotional or physical safety. We want you to feel safe.

We will only book a conference if we consider it safe to do so. Our conferences can be set up in different ways. You and the other party may be in the same room, different rooms or on the telephone. We will not force you to be in the same room as the other party. We can also arrange for you and the other party to arrive and leave the conference at different times so you do not see each other.

## Is the conference confidential?

All discussions that take place with your case manager or during your conference are confidential and cannot be used as evidence in court. It is a serious offence to disclose any confidential information from the family dispute resolution process to any other person or body, including a court, and penalties apply.

This rule does not apply where we:

- are concerned a child has been abused or is at risk of harm
- believe that there is a risk of harm to a person or their property
- become aware of a fraud or criminal act.

## Are children involved?

All conferences are focussed on the best interests of the child or children. Children do not attend conferences. However, where the case manager decides it is appropriate and all parties agree, we can arrange for children to speak to a qualified child consultant before a conference takes place. We call this Kid's Talk.

You will need to make your own childcare arrangements for your conference as we do not provide childcare.

## Where can I attend a conference?

We use many venues throughout Victoria. If we do not have a venue near you, we can also arrange a telephone conference.