



# Help for parents after separation

Where separating families are in high conflict over parenting arrangements, the Australian Government has funded the Parenting Orders Program and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting services across Australia to help parents focus on their children.

## What are Parenting Orders Programs and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting services?

Parenting Orders Programs and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting services are post separation parenting programs under the Family Law Act. They help separated parents, who are in high conflict, learn how parental conflict affects children and why children need parents to be supportive of their relationship with the other parent. They help parents focus on the needs of the child, instead of on the conflict, and work out arrangements that allow parents and other family members to spend time with the child.

## Why go to a Parenting Orders Program?

Sometimes families who are separated are not able to agree about arrangements for seeing their children and cannot make parenting orders work. Parents may have been to court to have parenting orders made but have had trouble complying with those orders. A Parenting Orders Program can help parents hear about what children want and need at different ages and stages of their development.

## Why go to a Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service?

Many separated parents know that conflict between them is making their child unhappy but feel that there is nothing they can do. Children may be struggling emotionally even when they seem fine on the surface. A Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service can help you learn what children need after their parents have separated and find ways to help your child.

Post Separation Cooperative Parenting isn't about resolving the conflict with the other parent. It's about how conflict between separated parents affects children and what you, as

an individual, can do about it. It can help you find out how you can help your child, whether or not he or she is living with you.

## **How long is a Parenting Orders Program?**

Parenting Orders Programs can work with families for as long as they need. This might be three months or it could take up to two years.

## **How long will Post Separation Cooperative Parenting take?**

The educational seminar will usually take about half a day. After that, a Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service can provide further counselling and support. This might be a few weeks or many months.

## **What if you are feeling unsafe?**

Parenting Orders Programs and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting services have arrangements in place to protect the safety of clients and staff. If you have concerns about your safety, or the safety of your child, you should let the Service staff know as soon as possible.

## **Will my child be safe?**

The safety of all family members is very important in the Parenting Orders Program and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service. If you are concerned about your child's safety, discuss this with the staff.

## **Who can go to a Parenting Orders Program and Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service?**

Separated parents who are not talking or are having trouble with parenting arrangements or court orders may go to a Parenting Orders Program. You can attend some Programs on your own or you can attend as a couple or as a family. Your children can also be involved.

Separated parents who can't communicate without fighting may also go to a Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service. Services will arrange for parents to attend at separate times so that they don't have to meet. The program is aimed at both parents individually and is helpful even if only one parent attends.

## **What happens during a Parenting Orders Program?**

There are a number of things that can happen as part of a Parenting Orders Program. These include talking with a family counsellor, attending an information seminar, taking part in an education group with other parents who are having similar issues and, if both parents are willing, trying family dispute resolution.

## **What happens at a Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service?**

There are many things that can happen as part of a Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service. There will always be an educational seminar with other parents who are having similar issues. A family counsellor will also offer other support depending on your needs. The Service will explain what to expect when you speak to them.

## **What help is there for my children?**

Children can talk to a family counsellor as part of the Parenting Orders Program. They might also be able to attend a group with other children whose families are experiencing similar problems. This helps them understand what happens in families.

Post Separation Cooperative Parenting is aimed at helping children through their parents. Some organisations may be able to offer counselling or other specialised assistance for children under a different program; or they may suggest other local services. You can discuss your child's needs with the Service at any time.

## **When do I use a Parenting Orders Program or Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service?**

The court may encourage or order parents to attend a Program or Service. You or your child's other parent may be referred to a Parenting Orders Program or Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service by a Children's Contact Service, Family Relationship Centre, a family counsellor or any other service helping your family after separation. Sometimes, parents make their own decision to go to a Parenting Orders Program or Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service by themselves.

## **Is what I say confidential?**

Yes, under the Family Law Act, everything you say in a Parenting Orders Program or Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service in front of a family counsellor or family dispute resolution practitioner is confidential – except in certain circumstances, such as to prevent a serious threat to someone's life or health or to prevent the commission of a crime. A family counsellor and family dispute resolution practitioner must report child abuse, or if there is a risk of abuse, to the authorities and this may be used as evidence in some circumstances.

## **What will it cost?**

Sometimes you will be charged a fee to go to a Parenting Orders Program or a Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service. The amount of money you need to pay will depend on your financial circumstances. If you are on a low income or experiencing financial difficulties, let the Service know as it will have arrangements in place to make sure you can still attend the program.

## Going to Court

If you decide to go to court for a decision about your child, the court may recommend or order you or the other parent, or both, to participate in a post separation parenting program. A court can order attendance at these programs at any time during the court process. The court may also order you and the other parent to participate in supervised changeovers or contact visits at a Children's Contact Service.

If you, or the other parent, have not complied with a parenting order, a court may make a further order for you to attend a post separation parenting program. The court may order the person who does not comply with the order to pay the legal costs of the other party to the proceedings.

## How do I find a Parenting Orders Program or Post Separation Cooperative Parenting service?

You can call the Family Relationship Advice Line on **1800 050 321** between **8am and 8pm Monday to Friday** and **10am to 4pm Saturdays** (except for national public holidays). They can help you find the nearest Program or Service or suggest another appropriate service close to you.

You can also visit Family Relationships Online at [www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au) to find out about other Family Relationship Services.