# Hearing from children: Kids Talk

## Information for parents

### What is Kids Talk?

You may have heard about FDRS’s Kids Talk program, as part of family dispute resolution. It gives parents (or other significant caregivers) a chance to hear about their children’s feelings and experiences before parenting decisions are made. The information gathered through the Kids Talk process is confidential and cannot be used in court, unless this is required by law.

Kids Talk is designed to:

* give children the chance to talk about their family in a safe and supportive way, without them feeling pressured to make decisions, and
* allow parents to hear what is important to their child from an independent professional, the child consultant.

### How it works

An FDRS case manager or chairperson may raise Kids Talk with you. If you and the other parent (and your lawyers) agree and FDRS decides it is appropriate, Kids Talk will go ahead and a child consultant will be booked. A child consultant is qualified in social science and is trained and experienced in interviewing children after their parents have separated.

### Speaking with parents

After the referral, the child consultant will talk to each parent and then make appointments for one of you to bring the children to an appointment with them. They will also make a one-hour appointment with both you and the other parent, together or separately, to give feedback and talk about the children’s interviews, usually by phone.

### Meeting the children

The child consultant will meet with each of your children separately, usually for less than an hour per child. The child consultant uses different methods to allow children to comfortably express their thoughts and what is important to them. How they do this depends on your child’s age.

### Feedback appointment

The child consultant will speak to you directly about the children’s meeting, to give you a sense of your children’s wishes and how the family situation is affecting them, from their observations. You can talk openly with the child consultant about their meeting with your children.

*This is not a decision-making session - you will have time to think about the feedback.*

### A report of the Kids Talk meeting is given to conference participants

The child consultant then writes a brief confidential report, to provide a clear point of view of the needs of the children. The report is sent to the parents, lawyers and the chairperson booked for the conference. The Kids Talk report does not give specific recommendations about what decisions should be made but sets out the key issues from the children’s perspective to be considered by you and the other parent at the conference. The child consultant is not involved in the conference.

### The FDRS conference

Your conference can be held a few weeks after the child consultant first speaks with you, depending on availability. We will send you a letter to confirm conference arrangements. The chairperson will use the Kids Talk report in the conference to help build a list of child-focused topics to discuss, and test proposals against the children’s wishes and experiences.

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## Preparing your children for Kids Talk

It is important that your children get the same information from both parents, including that you each encourage and are positive about their participation in Kids Talk.

### Tell them why they are meeting the child consultant

You can use the following as examples of things you can say to your child, in language you feel is appropriate for them:

* *We think it will help you to talk with a professional called a child consultant about how things really are for you since we separated and how things might be made better for you.*
* *This person’s job is to listen to you. If you agree, they will tell us both how you feel.*
* *We have been having trouble working out what are the best arrangements for you, so you can spend time with each of us.*
* *After you have spoken to the child consultant, we will have a meeting and try to reach an agreement about arrangements for you. What you have said to the child consultant will help us to make decisions.*
* *We are your parents and we will make the decisions. While you don’t make decisions, we will listen to what you have to say.*

### Questions and worries the child may have about the interview

You might want to reassure your child, using some of the following:

* *We won’t make you go, but we really think it would help you to talk with someone, to help us decide what is best.*
* *One of us will take you to meet the child consultant and be nearby. The child consultant usually sees all the kids together for a while and then each of you on your own. The interview with you won’t go for long. You might do some drawings or activities, to help you to talk about things. What happens depends on your age, and what you are ok with.*
* *The child consultant is a social worker or psychologist with experience in helping kids whose parents don’t live together any more. The consultant is there for you.*
* *We won’t ask you what happened in your meeting with the child consultant. We will talk to them after they have met with you, so we can understand how you are feeling and what you need.*
* *You can always talk to us, or anyone else you feel comfortable with, about your meeting with the child consultant, or about anything. Even though we don’t agree about everything at the moment, we will make sure you are not caught in the middle.*

**If you have any questions at all about Kids Talk, please call FDRS on 9269 0500 and ask to speak to your case manager, or email** [**fdrs@vla.vic.gov.au**](mailto:fdrs@vla.vic.gov.au)