



Australian Government

Help for parents after separation – a program to make parenting orders work

Courts and Parenting Orders Programs

If you decide to go to court for a decision about your children, the court may recommend or order you or the other parent to participate in a post separation parenting program. A court can order attendance at these programs at any time during legal action. 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 can also make an order to compensate a parent for time not spent with their child or for expenses incurred when unsuccessfully attempting to spend time with their child. The court may also order the person who did not comply with the order to pay the legal costs of the other party to the proceedings.

If you have been ordered to attend a post separation parenting program, the court will be informed if you are unsuitable to attend or if you fail to attend. The court may then make further orders.

If you and the other parent agree in writing to new arrangements for spending time with your child (which may be set out in a parenting plan), you may return to court and ask the court to make consent orders that set out the new arrangements. The court will only make a consent order if it is in the child's best interests to do so.

What will it cost?

Sometimes you will be charged a fee to go to a Parenting Orders Program. 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 use the Program.

How do I contact a Parenting Orders Program?

The Australian Government funds a number of community-based organisations under the Family Support Program to provide the Parenting Orders Program across Australia.

For more information call the Family Relationship Advice Line on **1800 050 321** between **8am to 8pm Monday to Friday** and **10am to 4pm Saturdays** (except national public holidays).

You can also visit Family Relationships Online at **www.familyrelationships.gov.au**



Where separating families are in high conflict over parenting arrangements, the Australian Government has funded the Parenting Orders Program to help parents focus on their children.

What is a Parenting Orders Program?

A Parenting Orders Program is the name of a post separation parenting program under the Family Law Act. It helps separated parents work out arrangements that allow parents and other family members to spend time with the children.

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.

Who can go to a Parenting Orders Program?

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.

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.

When do I use a Parenting Orders Program?

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

What information will a Parenting Orders Program provide me with?

The family counsellor and family dispute resolution practitioner in the Parenting Orders Program must give you information about parenting plans and other services available to help you.

What happens during a Parenting Orders Program?

There are many 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.

Is what I say at a Parenting Orders Program confidential?

Yes, under the Family Law Act, everything you say in a Parenting Orders Program 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.

How long is the 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.

What if you are feeling unsafe?

Parenting Orders Programs have arrangements in place to protect the safety of clients and staff. If you have concerns about your safety or the safety of your children, 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. If you are concerned about your child's safety, discuss this with the Parenting Orders Program Service.