

Separated Parents Policy

At Southern Child and Family Psychology, our focus is on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the children we see. Amongst the children who attend the clinic, many come from separated families. Conflict and communication breakdown within families can limit collaboration with health care providers, and impact optimal treatment outcomes for the child. The purpose of this policy is to outline our practice's philosophy to our families to ensure that the best interests of our clients are always prioritised.

Our expectations

It is our expectation that separated parents work together respectfully and cooperatively regarding the care of their child.

Family Law has two important principles that we adopt when working with parents who are separated or divorced; 1) joint parental responsibility and 2) the right of the child to have a meaningful relationship with both parents.

The exception to this is when there is a court order restricting involvement in your child's care. If this is the case, it is your responsibility to provide us with this information.

Joint parental responsibility means it is the responsibility of parents to work out how they will collaborate regarding their child's treatment, including assessment/treatment decisions, management of appointments, exchanging of information (e.g. appointment reminders, letters, feedback), and payment of bills.

- If we send a letter, or provide an appointment time to one parent only, we assume they will pass that information on as required to the other parent.
- Decisions regarding a child's assessment and/or treatment should be made jointly by both parents wherever possible.

A child's right to have a meaningful relationship with both parents means that if either parent calls us to organise an appointment regarding their child, we will proceed with that request.

- This does not, however, mean that both parents will always be invited to every appointment. The decision regarding whom is required to attend each appointment is one that is made by the treating clinician, in accordance with the purpose of the appointment and the best interests of the child.

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- If either parent wish to seek additional information or feedback, they may request a separate appointment, at their own cost, and the rules and limitations around confidentiality will apply as usual.

Communication

For each child, our practice management software identifies a 'nominated' parent. Communication regarding that child, by default, is addressed to that parent.

This applies to:

- Automatic communications such as reminder emails (sent to the email address of the primary parent)
- Reminder text messages (sent to the mobile phone number of the primary parent).
- Written communication including letters and reports.

It is possible that situations occur where information, such as confirmation of an appointment, is sent to the “wrong” parent (ie. the parent who is not attending the appointment).

- It is the responsibility of the parents to communicate with each other about this appointment.
- Appointment reminders are sent as a courtesy only, and we reserve the right to charge a cancellation fee for non-attendance or late cancellations, even in the event that reminder communication has been sent to the “wrong” parent.

Alternative arrangements

We understand there are circumstances where communication may not work well between separated/divorced parents. In some circumstances, the court makes orders that differ from these central principles (above). If this is the case for you, please let us know. We require a copy of the court orders before making alternative arrangements. We will do our best to accommodate individual circumstances for the benefit of the child where this is reasonable and achievable.

Payment

As per our payment policy, payment is to be made on the day of your child’s appointment. If there is a legal agreement that requires the other parent to pay all or part of the treatment costs, it is the attending parent’s responsibility to settle the account and collect reimbursement from the other parent.

Legal matters

Please let us know if there are any legal processes pending.

- Please note the reason for engagement with us is to provide treatment for your child. We do not provide reports for court and can refer you to another service if this is something you require.
- Further, we do not accept referrals where the purpose is to inform custody decisions.

Where there is significant conflict between parents, we reserve the right to request the court orders, obtain signed consent from both parents, or limit our services until dispute has been resolved. If necessary, we may discharge a family from the clinic if the conflict is disruptive to the clinic or impedes the care of the child.

*We always try our best to accommodate all family circumstances.
Please help us to provide the best care for your child by providing all information regarding your family situation at your first appointment with us.*

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.