

Child and Family Experts

Child and Family Experts (CFEs) are engaged to assist the Court by providing independent, expert assessments in parenting matters.

To engage a Child and Family Expert, the Independent Children's Lawyer must submit the referral form available on the Legal Aid WA Law Hub website to the CFE team.

This infosheet explains the role of CFEs and the types of work they do.

Who are Child and Family Experts?

The Child and Family Experts Service is a part of Legal Aid WA's Family Law Division.

The team has specialised expertise at the intersection of family law, social science, and child protection.

The CFE team provides trauma-informed psychosocial interventions in parenting matters, supporting both the Family Court and limited Children's Court matters.

Working with Independent Children's Lawyers (ICL), the CFE team aims to reduce risk to children, facilitate resolution, and minimise the harm of protracted litigation.

Why does CFE work matter?

The CFE team focuses on reducing entrenched litigation and protecting children from psychological harm that can arise from ongoing conflict between parents or caregivers.

Which matters are given priority?

The CFE team will prioritise referrals which are related to:

- High risk family violence or mental health issues
- First Nations families

- High chance of settlement via early intervention
- Defined issues preventing agreement.

CFE approach

The CFE team approach each matter through the following lenses:

- **Safeguarding children:** prioritising children's safety and wellbeing by identifying and assessing risks, including family and domestic violence, abuse, neglect, and exposure to harm.
- **Child-centred:** focusing on the holistic needs of children and families.
- **Trauma-informed:** sensitive to the impact of trauma on children and parents.
- **Collaborative and creative:** promoting improved communication and problem-solving.
- **Efficiency-focused:** reducing entrenched litigation and streamlining proceedings.

What types of assessments do CFEs conduct?

The CFE team will review the referrals and identify ways to reduce risks to the children. The nature and scope of the assessment will depend on the information required by the Court. Based on the information required, the CFE can do the following types of assessments and reports, each one tailored to address particular issues.

Brief intervention

A brief intervention is a short-term, child-focused process designed to assist parents in resolving discrete parenting disputes early, with the goal of diverting matters from prolonged court involvement and strengthening co-parenting alliance. The approach is strengths-based and incorporates psychoeducation, emotional regulation, and structured problem-solving.

The CFE bases the report on their interviews with each parent (and potentially the children), as well as a joint parent session, and a follow-up review.

Once the intervention is completed, the CFE will produce a report that provides a snapshot of the issues between the parties.

Risk assessment

A risk assessment involves the systematic gathering and analysis of information about the issues in dispute. This usually includes consideration of past and present parenting arrangements, the parenting capacity of each party, the children's relationships with significant people in their lives, the children's views, and any risks posed to them.

For this type of report, the CFE will interview each party and the children, and may consider relevant collateral information. The CFE will then prepare a report outlining their observations, assessment, findings, and recommendations to support an appropriate resolution of the matter.

Family coordination

This is a longer-term and structured process for parties experiencing ongoing high conflict, particularly when court orders or parenting agreements are already in place. The aim is to encourage child-focused, collaborative co-parenting.

The CFE implements and monitors the parenting arrangements and provides ongoing dispute resolution. The CFE will also document the

agreements reached between the parties, the ongoing concerns, any compliance issues, and if required, any recommendations for further intervention.

Child wishes

A child's wishes report is a psycho-social assessment of the children, informed by interviews with each child.

The report presents the children's expressed perspectives and lived experiences, together with the CFE's professional observations and analysis of the children's views and behaviours within the context of parenting arrangements and issues in dispute.

The report assists in bringing the children's voices before the Court, while also providing insight into their emotional and developmental needs. In doing so, it can support and inform parents about arrangements that would likely be in the children's best interests.

Single Expert Witness (limited capacity)


A single expert witness report provides a more thorough and detailed analysis of the parties' and children's positions.


The CFE undertakes extensive interviews with the parties and children and prepares an impartial report to help the Court determine the best interests of the child.

Assisted Dispute Resolution (non-reportable)

In consultation with the ICL, the CFE can support the dispute resolution process by meeting with the parties separately before the conferences, and/or attending conferences to provide non-reportable assistance by offering an expert perspective focused on the children's needs.

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