

Being Brave: The role of the Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner in Child-Inclusive FDR

National Mediation Conference – Canberra 2019

Bianca Roche-Bolger and Belinda Taranto

Macquarie Park

Family Relationship Centre

Reflections for today

- 1) Why include children?
- 2) To do this work safely and meaningfully you need to be a highly skilled, reflective practitioner.
- 3) Importance of the Relational/Interdisciplinary Team.

Child Focused vs Child Inclusive

- **Child-Focussed Practice (CF)**
 - Children not directly involved in the process, but parents are actively encouraged to consider the needs of their children
- **Child Inclusive Practice (CIP)**
 - The child participates in a child consultation session
 - Direct assessment of the child's experiences of the separation and of their relationship with their family
 - Information from the Child Consultation is fed back and considered with the parents

What is Child Inclusive Practice?

“At its core, child-inclusive practice is a process of developmental consultation and therapeutic conversation. The primary goal of the model is to re-establish and maintain a secure emotional base for the child after family separation.”

(McIntosh- Child inclusion as a principle and as evidence-based practice: Applications to family law services and related sectors, AFRC Issues No. 1 – July 2007)



Give children a bigger voice more of the time: Children's and young people's experiences of the family law system

Rachel Carson and Norma Williams

This webinar discussed recent research on young people's experiences of the family law system and its implications for child-inclusive practice.



This webinar was held on Wednesday, 27 September 2018.

A full recording of this webinar is [available on our YouTube Channel](#).

The audio, transcript and presentation slides are available under Event Resources on this page.

A list of resources related to this topic will be available on our [post-webinar forum](#).

A recent study by the Australian Institute of Family Studies has highlighted the importance of listening to and supporting children and young people throughout the process of parental separation and their involvement in the family law

Why should we include children?

- Children have a right to be heard (to have a voice in matters that impact them). UN Rights of the Child- Article 12
- Children want to have a voice
 - Carson and Williams, AIFS 2018
 - *Cashmore & Parkinson*
- Including children produces better outcomes
 - *McIntosh & Maloney*, Including children produces outcomes that are more sustainable
 - *Ballard RH, Holtzworth-Munroe A, Applegate AG, D'Onofrio BM & Bates JE*
- Children have better outcomes when they are safely and meaningfully included.

Child inclusive on the agenda but why are so few children seen?

What are the barriers to children being included in FDR?

- Shortage of appropriately qualified Child Consultants
- Cost of the process both in terms of time and resources.
- Reluctance of parents to agree to the process
- Reluctance of FDRP's to promote CIP

Being “Brave”

To be *brave* is;

- “to endure or face unpleasant conditions or behaviour, without showing fear.”
- “Ready to face and endure danger or pain, showing courage.”

How do we “see” children?

“Children are not passive recipients of our wisdom, but active constructors of their own worlds.”

(Lawrie Moloney)

Starting with self

- What is my own view about children?
 - Their capacity?
 - Their competency?
 - Their agency?
- Would I involve my own children in such a process?
- What is in my own personal history that may shape my bias toward inclusion, or not?
- What would it mean to me in my practice if I counselled/included a “rich child” rather than a “client”/ “child in need” (*Reggio Emilia*)

Knowing what to do and how to do it confidently and competently

How can I assist in facilitating a child inclusive process safely and meaningfully?

- Knowledge of the model
- Knowing the role of the Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner within a child inclusive model
- Experience in working with the model
- Being brave to ask for help...Where do I go?

The bravery of sharing one's case...

Interdisciplinary Teamwork

- *“The structures, rules and boundaries of mediation, specialist developmental knowledge of the child consultant, and the astute use of therapeutic techniques offers an opportunity for parents to re-establish a workable alliance with each other and to again hold the children’s interests to be of primary concern”.*
- Bill Hewlett

Confidence in the consultant

“So, I guess I’m saying that I have no concerns or fears in working with the consultants that I *know*.”

(*FDRP- JB*)

Confidence in the wider system

“I would feel more confident in I knew the child inclusive process could be undertaken in a timely manner and there being more flexibility around the associated fees”

(FDRP- LM)

But what if including children does not sit well with me?

- Remember first...do no harm.
- Other ways of supporting children and families;
 - Child Psychologist
 - Family Therapy
 - School Counsellor
 - Children's groupwork
 - GP- Mental Health Assessment
 - Headspace
 - Using other resources- Children's books



So be brave...but always remember who the heroes are...

“Speaking honestly and openly about who we are, about what we’re feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of courage....Heroics is often about putting our life on the line, but ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerabilities on the line.”
(Brene Brown; 2019)