

PART 2
OVERVIEW OF THE COURT



ABOUT THE COURT

The Family Court of Australia, through its specialist judges and staff, assists Australians to resolve their most complex legal family disputes.

The Family Court of Australia is a superior court of record established by Parliament in 1975 under Chapter 3 of the Constitution. It commenced operations on 5 January 1976 and consists of a Chief Justice, a Deputy Chief Justice and other judges. The Court maintains registries in all Australian states and territories except Western Australia.

Goal

The Court's goal is to deliver excellence in service for children, families and parties through effective judicial and non-judicial processes and high-quality and timely judgments while respecting the needs of separating families.

Purpose

The purpose of the Court, as Australia's superior court in family law, is to:

- determine cases with the most complex law and facts
- cover specialised areas in family law
- provide national coverage as the appellate court in family law matters.

Vision

The Court's vision provides for:

- putting children and families first in the design and delivery of services
- furthering functional family relationships after separation
- independence and impartiality in the judicial process
- having staff who are valued for providing quality service for families
- providing quality child dispute services for families
- being at the forefront of the development of services.

Jurisdiction

The Family Court of Australia deals with more complex matters. These may include, for example:

- parenting cases, including those that involve a child welfare agency; allegations of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse of a child (Magellan cases); family violence and/or mental health issues with other complexities; multiple parties; complex cases where orders sought would have the effect of preventing a parent from communicating with or spending time with a child; multiple expert witnesses; complex questions of law and/or special jurisdictional issues; international child abduction under the Hague Convention; special medical procedures; and/or international relocation.
- financial cases that involve multiple parties, valuation of complex interests in trust or corporate structures, including minority interests, multiple expert witnesses, complex questions of law and/or jurisdictional issues (including accrued jurisdiction) or complex issues concerning superannuation (such as complex valuations of defined benefit superannuation schemes).

The Family Court of Australia also has original jurisdiction under Commonwealth Acts, including the:

- *Marriage Act 1961*
- *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988*
- *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989*
- *Bankruptcy Act 1966.*

Programs of work

To ensure that the Court fulfils its stated purpose, it has designed four programs of work. These are:

- maintaining an environment that enables judicial officers to make determinations
- provision of effective and efficient registry services
- corporate management of resources
- effective information and communication technologies.

OUTCOME AND OUTPUTS

The Court's outcome and outputs framework sets out its commitments to government. Each year, details of the framework are outlined in the Portfolio Budget Statements, along with relevant performance information.

Outcome

The Court's previous planned outcome of 'serving the interests of the Australian community by ensuring families and children in need can access effective high quality services' was revised for 2008–09 to become:

As Australia's specialist superior family court determine cases, including in particular those with complex law and facts, and provide national coverage as the appellate court in family law matters.



Output Group 1.1—Judicial services

Output Group 1.1 contributes to the Court's outcome by providing judicial services to Family Court clients which provide, through a case management pathway, for matters filed with the court to be finalised.

Judicial services include:

- determining cases that are complex in law, facts and parties
- covering specialised areas in family law
- providing national coverage as the appellate court in family law matters.

Output Group 1.2—Registry services

Output Group 1.2 contributes to the Court's outcome by providing registry services to clients of the Family Law Courts (comprising the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia) who are considering filing an application or who wish to file an application with either court.

Registry services include:

- provision of effective support to the Family Law Courts
- family law telephone and referral services
- family law document processing.

The Court reports on its performance against the agreed outcome and outputs in Part 3 of this annual report.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR

Government decision to restructure the Federal Courts

During 2009–10, the Court will work with the Federal Magistrates Court and the Federal Court to implement proposed reforms to the governance and structure of the three courts. The aim is to secure better access to justice for litigants and better use of publicly funded resources provided to the courts. This will involve:

- merging the existing Family Court with a lower division, to encompass federal magistrates who handle family law cases
- transferring funding from the Federal Magistrates Court to reflect the movement of federal magistrates to the lower division of the Family Court.

The allocation between the Federal Court and Family Court of funding transferred from the Federal Magistrates Court will reflect the number of federal magistrates appointed to each court. The actual split in appropriations may need to be adjusted to reflect workloads at the time of restructure.

The Family Court's appropriation includes additional funding of \$1.5 million over four years, as part of the restructuring measure, to enable enhanced support for families and to assist them to resolve disputes in a non-adversarial manner, including through access to family consultant services.

COURT SERVICE LOCATIONS

There are 19 family law registries in locations in every Australian state except Western Australia. Family law registries provide registry services to both the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia and are staffed permanently. In addition to sitting in its principal locations, the Court conducts judicial, registrar and family consultant circuits throughout Australia in accordance with the schedules published on its website at www.familycourt.gov.au.

Table 2.1 shows Family Court of Australia service locations

Table 2.1 Family Court of Australia service locations

| Location | Judge/s | Registrar/s | Family Consultant/s | Client Services | Judicial circuit | Registrar circuit | Family Consultant circuit |
|---|---------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Victoria / South Australia / Tasmania | | | | | | | |
| Adelaide | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Mt Gambier | | | | | | o | |
| Dandenong | | o | o | o | | | |
| Bairnsdale | | | | | | | o |
| Moe | | | | | | o | |
| Hobart | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Launceston | | | | o | o | o | o |
| Devonport | | | | | | o | o |
| Melbourne | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Albury | | | | o | | o | |
| Ballarat | | | | | | o | |
| Bendigo | | | | | | o | |
| Geelong | | | | | | o | |
| Hamilton | | | | | | o | |
| Mildura | | | | | | o | |
| Shepparton | | | | | | o | |
| Warrnambool | | | | | | o | |
| New South Wales / Australian Capital Territory | | | | | | | |
| Canberra | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Newcastle | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Port Macquarie | | | | | | o | |
| Taree | | | | | | o | |
| Tamworth | | | | | | o | |
| Parramatta | o | o | o | o | | | |

| Location | Judge/s | Registrar/s | Family Consultant/s | Client Services | Judicial circuit | Registrar circuit | Family Consultant circuit |
|---|---------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Bathurst | | | | | | o | |
| Dubbo | | | | o | | o | |
| Orange | | | | | | o | |
| Sydney | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Wollongong | | o | | o | | | |
| Northern New South Wales / Queensland / Northern Territory | | | | | | | |
| Brisbane | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Coffs Harbour | | | | | | o | |
| Lismore | | | | o | | o | |
| Rockhampton | | | | o | | o | o |
| Darwin | | | | o | o | o | |
| Alice Springs | | | | o | | | |
| Townsville | o | o | o | o | | | |
| Cairns | | o | o | o | o | | |
| Mackay | | | | | | o | o |

INITIATIVES OF THE FAMILY COURT

This section outlines new and ongoing initiatives of the Court in 2008–09.

Shared parenting statistics

The reforms to Part VII of the *Family Law Act 1975*, introduced by the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006*, were wide-ranging. Among the most significant of those reforms was the introduction of a rebuttable presumption of equal shared parental responsibility and particular obligations placed on family courts to consider ‘equal time’ and ‘substantial and significant time’ arrangements where the presumption applies.

Another important change was made to the ‘best interest’ factors that a court has regard to in deciding what order would be in the best interests of the child who is the subject of a parenting dispute. As a result of the reforms, the factors are now divided into ‘primary’ and ‘additional’ considerations.

At the same time that the government implemented these legislative amendments, it also established Family Relationship Centres around Australia and funded many other non-government organisations to provide advice, counselling and mediation designed to help separating parents reach their own agreements about their children. As a result, it is to be expected that there might be a higher number of shared care or substantial sharing of time cases negotiated outside the courts.

From the commencement of the legislation the Chief Justice decided that the court would, for the first time, endeavour to keep statistics on the ‘time with’ orders that were being made for the parties coming to court. In addition to cases in which judges make decisions, statistics have also been recorded of matters that come to court but in which the parties reach their own agreement without a decision by a judge.

Because the collection and analysis of that data has been complex, it has taken some time for the court to be satisfied that the data contains meaningful information. However, an analysis of the 2007–08 shared parental responsibility statistics is now available.

The Court consulted the Australian Institute of Family Studies before using this collection method. The institute generally supported the Court’s approach and was not critical of the use of these categories, understanding that collecting such information is a costly exercise for a court of this size.

All the cases that resulted in a judgment from which data is collected are published on www.austlii.edu.au. Analysis of the data can be found at www.familycourt.gov.au.

Transfer of Federal Magistrate Court’s corporate systems

The decision to transfer some of the corporate operating systems of the Federal Magistrate Court (FMC) to the Family Court was made as a result of concerns, raised in a letter to the Attorney-General’s Department dated 15 August 2008 by the then CEO of the FMC, regarding the sustainability of the FMC’s human resources, payroll, property services and finance systems.

The FMC corporate systems infrastructure, which was established in 2000 to support 16 federal magistrates with minimal support staff, was stretched to capacity, and there was a high level of risk in regard to those systems.

A report addressing these concerns was prepared for the Family Law Court’s board by two senior staff from both courts, along with recommendations on the most efficient and effective approach to moving to a shared services model.

The board received and considered the report and agreed that a transfer of the following FMC corporate service functions to the Family Court should take place:

- Financial management—from 1 January 2009
- Contracts and procurement—from 1 December 2008
- Property management—from 1 November 2008
- Payroll management—from 22 January 2009
- Human resources—by the end of first quarter 2009
- Information management—from 1 December 2008.

Subsequent to the board's decision, it was also agreed that the Family Court's Statistical Services Unit would also provide support to the FMC.

Amendment de facto financial matters

On 10 November 2008, the government passed the *Family Law Amendment (De facto Financial Matters and Other Measures) Bill 2008*. The primary impact of this new legislation was to bring financial disputes arising out of the breakdown of de facto relationships (of same or opposite sex) under the Family Law Act.

As a consequence, since 1 March 2009, de facto couples have been able to access courts exercising federal family law jurisdiction (such as the Family Court of Australia and the FMC) in property and maintenance matters.

Prior to this, de facto couples could apply to courts exercising federal jurisdiction under the Family Law Act regarding parenting matters and to state or territory courts under state or territory laws

regarding property and financial matters. A further complication was that laws differed between the various states and territories.

The Bill also made other amendments to the Family Law Act in relation to financial agreements between married couples, superannuation splitting and family dispute resolution certificates.

Significant changes to court forms and publications and the Court's website were implemented to address the changes resulting from the implementation of the new legislation.



Staff member Julie Grieg with the silver award for the Court's Mental Health Support Program

Mental Health Program wins silver award

The Mental Health Support Program is a Family Law Courts initiative designed to help clients who are suffering the effects of separation and divorce on their emotional wellbeing.

The program is based on three key elements:

- a mental health support training program for all staff
- the implementation of protocols to help staff manage clients presenting with mental health problems, from stress to imminent threat of self-harm or harm to others
- the development of a network of community-based organisations able to provide support to clients in need.

The program, which commenced in October 2004 with a funding proposal to the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and which was followed by a pilot program in 2005–06, was successfully rolled out nationally throughout the Family Law Courts during 2008.

The courts entered the program in the 2008 Australia and New Zealand Mental Health Service Achievement Awards and were awarded silver in the Mental Health Promotion or Mental Health Awareness category.

The awards were announced on 3 September 2008 during the Mental Health Services Conference of Australia and New Zealand in Auckland, New Zealand.

Integrated Client Service Delivery Program final report

The Family Court combined a number of client service professional development activities into a single, coordinated entity known as the Integrated Client Service Delivery Program.

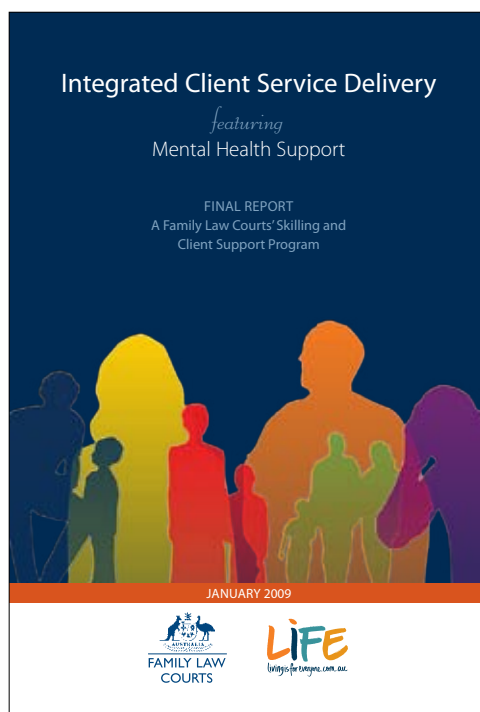
The program ensured that best practice client-focused principles are incorporated and embedded into the Family Law Court's service delivery. This approach enables court staff to understand and better meet the needs of court clients.

The initiative has been instrumental in providing staff with the necessary skills in communication, mental health, cultural diversity and safety issues to support clients attending court.

The national rollout was completed in 2008, and more than 400 Family Law Courts staff completed the training.

In May 2009, the final report from the Integrated Client Service Delivery Program was completed. The report, *A Family Law Courts' Skilling and Client Support Program*, summarises the program, with particular emphasis on the mental health benefits. The report draws extensively on the evaluations undertaken as part of the national initiative.

The report includes a resource CD and a DVD containing six training scenarios.



The report: A Family Law Courts' Skilling and Client Support Program

Initiating Application form moved out of trial phase

One of the outcomes of the Combined Registry Program was the development of a joint initiating application form for use in both the Family Court and the FMC. The form was piloted for 24 months and could be used in lieu of the Application for Final Orders form in the Family Court and the Application form in the FMC.

In conjunction with the conferral of the de facto jurisdiction, and after a review confirming the success of the pilot, the Family Law Courts Initiating Application form was implemented in both courts on 1 March 2009.

Commonwealth Courts Portal

The Commonwealth Courts Portal (www.comcourts.gov.au), launched in June 2008, is an initiative of the Family Court, the Federal Court and the FMC. The portal provides free web-based access to information about cases that are before these courts.

After registering, lawyers can keep track of their cases, identify documents that have been filed and view outcomes, orders made and future court dates. Users log on using a single user ID and access multiple jurisdictions from a single central web-based system.

Enhancements during 2008–09 included the introduction of Stage 1 of electronic filing (eFiling) in family law matters from 16 August 2008, making it possible for lawyers to file supplementary documents via the portal. A supplementary document is any document lodged against an existing cause of action that does not attract a fee and does not require follow-up action by court staff once lodged. See Table 2.2 for a snapshot of where documents were eFiled in 2008–09.

This means that lawyers and law firms who have family law matters with the Family Court, the FMC or the Family Court of Western Australia and who are registered with the portal can file supplementary documents in family law matters.

Throughout the reporting period, the portal continued to be a popular tool for legal practitioners. At the end of June 2009:

- 667 law firms had registered for eFiling
- approximately 5900 individual users had registered, including practitioners, members of the public, journalists, academics, judicial officers and staff of the courts.

Stage 2 of eFiling is due to be launched later in 2009.

At the end of June 2009, work commenced on a major enhancement which will enable clients to view their own personal dashboard when they log onto the portal. This will provide them with a snapshot of the latest happenings and what is coming up in relation to their case.

Table 2.2 Documents eFiled in the Family Court during 2008–09

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| Adelaide | 23 |
| Brisbane | 201 |
| Canberra | 1 |
| Dandenong | – |



Angela Filippello, Principal Registrar; Stephen Andrew, Executive Director Information Communications and Technology Services; Amber Lawson, Communications; and Marcus Leonard, Federal Magistrates Court at the Family Law Residential, Gold Coast, in August 2008.

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Darwin | – |
| Hobart | 5 |
| Melbourne | 110 |
| Newcastle | 21 |
| Parramatta | 67 |
| Sydney | 54 |

Individual judicial hearing docket

The judicial docket gives individual judges responsibility for managing their own cases from the time the case is docketed to the judge to finalisation.

The system is designed to ensure early judicial intervention and active judicial case management in order to streamline the process, ensure the earliest possible settlement or determination, and thus to dispose of cases more efficiently.

All registries have now implemented the new case management pathway and judicial docket.

Less adversarial trials

Division 12A of Part VII of the Family Law Act commenced on 1 July 2006, enabling the Family Court's model for a less adversarial trial to be applied to all new child-related proceedings in the Family Court, without the need for consent of the parties.

During 2008–09, the less adversarial trial continued to be implemented in all Family Court registries.

International interest in the less adversarial trial process has continued to grow. This interest, which has resulted in other countries adopting a similar model for handling parenting cases that proceed to a hearing, demonstrates that there is a growing international understanding, in common law countries, of the need to move away from traditional adversarial trials in parenting disputes.

The Parenting Hearings Program being piloted in New Zealand is a less adversarial process adopted by the Family Court of New Zealand and is modelled on our process.

To facilitate the learning and sharing of best practice, a less adversarial trial education package was developed and launched in June 2009. The package contains three products:

- a DVD featuring three actual parenting cases, interviews with judges about their approaches and impressions of the less adversarial trial, and interviews with parties and lawyers
- a handbook that provides background and context which links the practices seen on the DVD to the less adversarial trial framework
- a copy of *Finding a Better Way*, which details the Court's journey towards implementation of a less adversarial model.

The package has been developed to highlight the experiences and practices of other judges and to give the legal profession and other interested parties—both here and overseas—an insight into the way the principles of conducting child-related proceedings are put into practice.



Justice O'Ryan at the launch of the less adversarial trial education package

Australia–Indonesia judicial cooperation memorandum of understanding

In July 2008, a formal agreement under which the Asian Legal Information Institute (AsianLII) will provide free online access to Indonesian court decisions on www.asianlii.org was signed in Melbourne. The signing was part of the inaugural trilateral memorandum of understanding between the Supreme Court of Indonesia, Federal Court of Australia and the Family Court of Australia hosted by Chief Justice Bryant.

Professor Graham Greenleaf of AsianLII and Dr Bagir Manan, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Indonesia, said that this was a logical next step following the launch in February 2008 of an online database of High Religious Court decisions to increase judicial transparency.

The trilateral MOU, signed by the heads of jurisdiction, creates a framework for the courts to work together to promote further understanding of each other's laws and judicial cultures.



Chief Justice Bryant at the signing of the MOU

The Indonesian delegation's visit was supported by the Indonesia Australia Legal Development Facility, a joint Indonesian and Australian initiative based in Jakarta and funded by AusAID, which aims to strengthen the capacity of the Indonesian Government and civil society to promote legal reform as well as to protect human rights.

The Family Court of Australia has worked with the Supreme Court of Indonesia over the past five years to undertake the first large-scale access and equity study of the Religious Courts (Pengadilan Agama) in Indonesia. The Religious Courts have jurisdiction in family law matters such as divorce, child guardianship and inheritance for Indonesia's Muslims. This study aims to improve access to family law courts for women and the poor in Indonesia. A copy of the report, *Providing Justice to the Justice Seeker*, can be downloaded from www.ialdf.org. In response to the survey results the Indonesian Supreme Court has now approved a 30-fold increase in the funds available for the Religious Courts to waive court fees for the poor, increase the number of 'circuit court' hearings in remote locations, and provide better information to court users.

Young Employees Advisory Group

In 2008, the Family Court of Australia adopted a creative approach to engaging the young employees of the organisation. It asked its employees aged 25 and under to 'step up' and apply their unique perspective and new ideas to the implementation of best practice through an advisory group.

The Young Employees Advisory Group (YEAG) consists of staff members from different organisational units of the court and from different states. The members of the first group were selected in March 2008 for a 12-month term.

One of the group's major focuses was on regular engagement with, and opening lines of communication to, the court's young staff. The diversity of the group provided further opportunities to ensure that new and useful ideas from one registry were shared nationally. A discussion database helped members keep in touch with their young colleagues while raising themes for discussion and providing feedback.

The YEAG has the assistance of a mentor and project coordinator from the Court's executive. The involvement of senior staff was integral to the development of projects that could be achieved in a short timeframe and benefit the court into the future.

The Court is not aware of anything similar in other Australian public sector organisations and hopes the YEAG's success will prompt other organisations to consider setting up similar initiatives.



The 2008 young employees advisory group

The group's achievements during 2008–09 included:

- improving the internal functional directory available via the Court's intranet, including by adding more extensive user profiles and photos, increased functions, a better search facility and a more user-friendly design
- surveying all staff members under 26 about the environmental practices within the Court and looking at potential improvements, including the development of an environmental sustainability strategy for the Court
- investigating the potential for using text messaging, among other options, as a means of connecting with court clients
- successfully completing Prince2 project management training
- receiving training from a leadership consultancy firm to develop strong group dynamics and strategic direction
- representing young employees on the Court's Staff Development and Occupational Health and Safety committees.

Membership of the 2009–10 YEAG was announced at the end of June 2009. Nine employees aged 27 years or less from both the Family Court and the FMC were selected.

International Framework for Court Excellence

The International Framework for Court Excellence was launched in Australia at the Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration's Court Quality Forum in September 2008. The framework will enable the Family Court to review its existing strategic plan for delivering family law services to the community.

The framework provides guidance for courts to improve performance in seven key areas:

- court management and leadership
- court policies
- human, material and financial resources
- court proceedings
- client needs and satisfaction
- affordable and accessible court services
- public trust and confidence.

In determining how it would like to be recognised within the legal environment, the Family Court is reviewing the measures in place to allow it to achieve its goals, opportunities to become a best practice organisation, gaps in current frameworks and the best way to engage key stakeholders. The seven areas identified in the framework provide a starting point for review.

The Court is well positioned to adapt its current activities to the international framework. It has identified the reporting measures used in the *Report on Government Services and Court Administration* and the similar framework developed by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice as a means to help the Court improve its performance.

Some areas, such as formal strategic and corporate planning, will need updating after the government has finalised its review of the Family Court and FMC and the transition to a single administrative system is completed.

Transitioning to a new court

The 'transition project', aimed at transitioning the Family Court and the FMC into a single merged identity, commenced in May 2009. Although proposed changes to the relevant legislation are still to be confirmed, the project is operating under the following set of assumptions:

- There will be one court with two tiers (Tier 1 will be Family Court of Australia judges; Tier 2 judges will be former federal magistrates).
- All matters will commence in Tier 2 and some will be transferred to Tier 1 because of their complexity or because they are out of the jurisdiction of Tier 2 judges.
- Tier 1 judges can also hear Tier 2 matters if required.
- There will be one set of harmonised rules of court, with a separate section for each tier.

At this stage, the scope of the project has been restricted to three main areas of impact: legal, business and IT system changes.

Canadian documentary

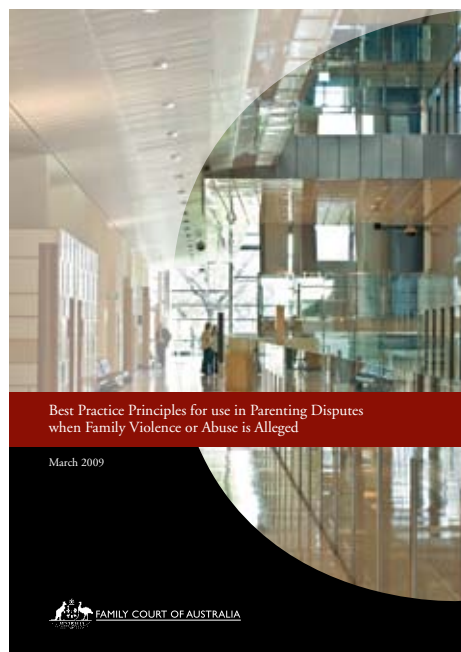
In January 2008, the Court was contacted by Bountiful Films, a Canadian group planning to make a documentary on the theme of 'How to divorce and not wreck the kids' for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The aim was to showcase the most innovative public and private initiatives transforming divorce from a largely adversarial process to a more amicable one. Filming occurred in the Parramatta Family Law Registry in July 2008 and included an interview with Chief Justice Bryant.

Family Violence Best Practice Principles

The Court's *Family Violence Strategy 2004–05* underpins the Court's work when violence is suspected, alleged or found to be occurring. The last piece of the strategy was put into place in April 2009, when the *Best Practice Principles for use in Parenting Disputes when Family Violence or Abuse is Alleged* were launched by the Attorney-General. The principles were developed by a committee which obtained submissions, comments, contributions and expertise from a wide range of stakeholders.

The *Best Practice Principles* are for use by the judicial officers in matters which involve allegations of family violence. They are relevant to any dispute in which violence is alleged, whether it is one of the parties or someone else connected to the case who threatens or commits violence.

The principles operate as a checklist of matters that may be considered when a judge is deciding the next step in a case. They also include matters a judge may want to consider when they have made a finding that family violence has occurred or that there is an unacceptable risk of a child being exposed to family violence.



Best Practice Principles

When a judicial officer has determined that it is in the child's best interests to communicate or spend time with a person against whom a finding has been made, the *Best Practice Principles* help the officer to decide what particular arrangements should be put in place. These could include time being spent at a children's contact centre or having a family consultant undertake a supervisory role.

The principles are intended as an aid to assist while still allowing complete judicial discretion. They are also available for the use of federal magistrates hearing family law cases and have been published on the Court's website for the benefit of interested persons.

The release of the *Best Practice Principles* created substantial interest from outside the Court. Requests for copies or access to the electronic version came from academics, students, practitioners, parties, lobby groups, community-based organisations, support groups, charities, Australian Government and state government departments, members of the public and other courts, including the Supreme Court of Florida.

2009 Victorian bushfires

During 2008–09, court staff helped people in the community in a number of ways, the most significant being the assistance provided to families and communities devastated by the Victorian bushfires in February 2009.

The Family Law Courts supported community efforts to promote a coordinated and responsive service system by implementing a number of initiatives:

- Two family consultants were seconded to Centrelink to provide expert case management support to affected clients.
- A waiver of fees was introduced for clients who had lost records in the fires and required replacement documentation.
- The Family Law Courts website was updated to include community advice, information and a fact sheet containing general information on court events, replacement of documents and correspondence with Family Law Courts staff.
- Any clients contacting the National Enquiry Centre requiring more specialised coordination were referred to a nominated case coordinator at the relevant registry.
- A bushfire appeal fund was established to enable judges and staff to make contribution by way of deduction from their salary. A total of \$9,930 was raised by the Family Court.

Visits by overseas delegations

Visits by overseas delegations during 2008–09 included the following:

- China. A delegation of 15 visited the Family Court as part the China-Australia Human Rights Technical Cooperation Program.
- Hong Kong. The court was visited by a judge from Hong Kong who observed the Court's less adversarial trial processes.
- Indonesia. An Australia–Indonesia judicial cooperation memorandum of understanding was signed (see page 20 for more information).
- New Zealand. Judge Lawrence Ryan from New Zealand visited the Court to study the less adversarial trial process. The visit was organised by the Principal Registrar of the District Court of New South Wales.

- Sweden. A delegation of nine members from the Swedish parliament and two government officials visited the Court to study the Australian family court system, including less adversarial trials.
- Tanzania. A delegation of Tanzanian judges visited to learn about how the Court uses technology, including its case management system, Casetrack, and the Commonwealth Courts Portal.