

Family &Psychological Reports | Family Law Parenting

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Understanding how Family Reports and psychological assessments work is essential for any parent involved in family law parenting matters. These reports help the Court assess the child's best interests and make informed decisions about parenting arrangements, particularly where there are complex issues or allegations.

This blog explains the different types of assessments used in family law, including Child Impact Reports, Full Family Reports and psychological evaluations, and outlines when the Court may order them and what parents can expect.

The purpose of specialist reports in parenting disputes

The Court may look at reports and evidence from independent psychologists, psychiatrists and family report writers to help make decisions about short and long-term parenting arrangements. The different types of psychological assessments and family reports include:

- Child Impact Reports (also known as short form or section 11F reports);
- risk assessments;
- psychological and psychiatric assessments;
- psychosexual assessments;
- Full Family Reports.

The Court may consider that a family or psychological report is appropriate in circumstances where there are complex issues or allegations in the matter.

Family Reports

There are two types of family reports: a Child Impact Report and a Full Family Report.

Child Impact Reports

A Child Impact Report, sometimes called a short form report or section 11F report, is a written report prepared by a qualified psychologist or social worker to help inform the Court on a range of issues in dispute, including the child's views and needs, relationship with each parent, and existing or potential risk factors.

The psychologist or social worker interviews each parent, the children (if it is age-appropriate to do so), and observes a short interaction between the children and each parent. The report gives an overview of the matter background, the interviews and observations, and the report writer's recommendations for short-term parenting arrangements.

Child Impact Reports are usually ordered early in the proceedings to assist the Court in understanding the key issues and deciding how the case should be managed. The reports can be done privately at the cost of the parties, or in some circumstances can be provided by a Court Child Expert at no cost to the parties.

It is important to note that a psychologist who prepares a Child Impact Report cannot diagnose an interviewed parent or child with a mental health condition. They may recommend that a parent or child be referred to mental health or support services, but it is ultimately up to the Court to make those orders.

For a more detailed overview of Child Impact Reports and what they provide, you can read our earlier blog, "What is a Child Impact Report?'

Full Family Reports

Full Family Reports are similar in structure to a Child Impact Report, but they cover more extensive issues and make recommendations for long-term parenting arrangements. For this reason, Full Family Reports are generally ordered after the matter has been in court for some time and is likely to proceed to a Final Hearing.

As these reports are being provided as expert evidence to inform and assist the Court in determining key issues, what you say to the report writer is **not** confidential and is reportable to the Court. This also applies to anything the report writer sees or hears during observations of each parent and child.

Psychological reports and assessments

The Court may order that one or more parties in a parenting matter undertake a psychological assessment for the purposes of a psychological or risk report. They are usually privately funded by the party required to undertake the assessment.

Risk assessments

Risk assessments are generally prepared to assess the likelihood of any behaviours that may negatively impact the parent-child relationship or coparenting relationship.

Common causes for a risk assessment include:

- Allegations of family violence perpetrated by a parent towards the other;
- Allegations of family violence perpetrated by a parent towards a child;
- Allegations of drug and/or alcohol misuse by a parent;
- Allegations or diagnoses of mental health disorders for either parent.

Psychological and psychiatric assessments

These assessments may include one or several clinical psychological tests and an extensive discussion between the report writer and participating parent.

The report writer may discuss the participating parent's health history and how they are coping with separation and co-parenting. The psychologist or psychiatrist will then analyse the data from the test results to make their findings and recommendations.

Psychosexual assessments

If a parent makes an allegation of sexual abuse towards the other parent, the Court may order the alleged offending parent to undertake a psychosexual assessment. This may include allegations of sexual abuse or sexual attraction towards a child.

A psychosexual assessment generally addresses a range of issues in relation to the alleged offending parent, including:

- their sexual history, background and development;
- their mental health;
- a psychometric evaluation.

Talk to a family lawyer

Assessments can be stressful and daunting, particularly if the outcome might impact your children's time with you.

If you have been ordered to undertake a psychological report or participate in a family report, you can get free initial advice from one of our experienced family lawyers.

Contacting Smith Family Law

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This blog is of a general nature and should not be relied upon as legal advice. If you require further information, advice or assistance for your specific circumstances, please contact us.