

# SPEAKING OUT ABOUT FAMILY SEPARATION



Whenever I speak with children and young people across WA they tell me that a loving and supportive family is what matters most to them.

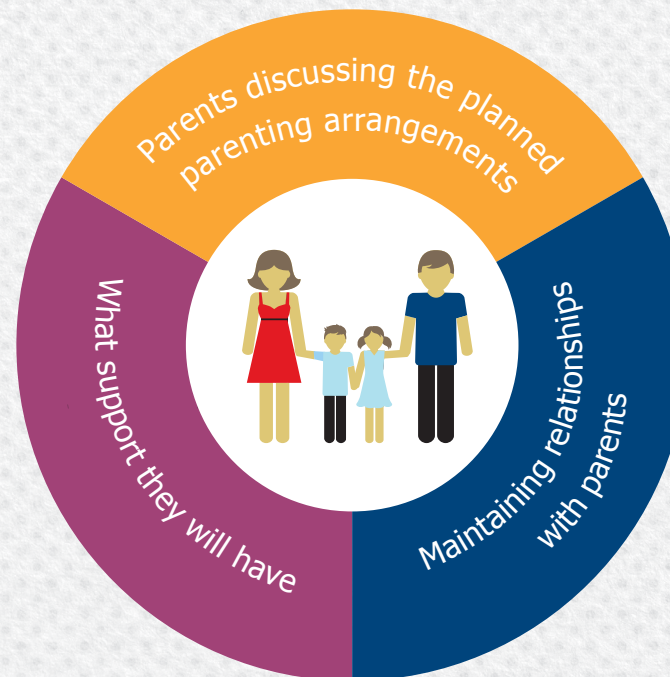
Many children and young people across Australia are affected by family separation. Every family situation is different and while most children and young people adjust well to changes in their family, it can be a difficult time for everyone involved.

In 2018 I invited WA children and young people to share their experiences of the family separation to talk about what worked well for them and what could be improved.

Twelve young people took part in interviews or wrote their story and I thank them for speaking out. Their views provide important insight on how we can best support children and young people who are experiencing family separation and reduce the negative impacts.

Colin Pettit  
Commissioner for Children and Young People

- 1. Ongoing, open and respectful communication** with their parents during and after separation. This includes:



“I think it’s really important to be sensitive, because there’s a lot going on... what would have been so good was to be involved, to be told what was going on.”

- 2. Being listened to by their parents and service providers.**

Keeping children informed about any family law proceedings and acting on their ideas and concerns - particularly any safety concerns.



“I think it’s really important for kids to have a say in what happens to them and what goes on.”

- 3. Being treated fairly and as a person of value in their own right.**

Children and young people want to be acknowledged, have their opinions on family matters heard and want to understand the reasons for decisions that affect them.



4.

## Contact with professionals who are respectful, competent and capable of taking action.

Children and young people can recognise when professionals show genuine care and respect. They also want to understand the role people play in the process and want professionals to acknowledge the impact the process has on them.



“ It would be amazing to just know what happens and what’s going to occur, because then I can ready myself for what might occur. It’s affecting us, it’s our health and wellbeing. ”

“ I feel like rapport was the biggest thing, she never used our names, didn’t really involve us, it was as if we were just there for an hour to fill in the time on the schedule. ”

“ My parents...involved the school and they were highly supportive of us both and provided an in-school program. It was an effective, active step by the school to support students like myself. ”

“ It’s always helpful to speak to kids as if they’re intelligent and they want to know what’s going on. A lot of the time, when I did want to find out details, talk to someone about it, it was really brushed aside, and I was talked to as if I was really little. ”

## 5. BROADER COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Broader community awareness of the impact of family separation on children and young people. This included other children and young people and school staff - peers and teachers play an important role in providing support.

“ Lots of my teachers are really supportive...I’ve got a pastoral care leader who has become really involved, and has helped me out a lot with it. He often just comes and checks in with me and sees how I’m doing. ”



TEACHERS



FRIENDS

## WHAT WE WILL DO WITH THIS INFORMATION

The Australian Government is reviewing the family law system in Australia and looking at where improvements can be made. The views of WA children and young people on their experiences of the family law system were provided to the National Law Reform Commission to be considered in this review.

The Commissioner has also provided these views to the Family Court of WA. The full report is available at [ccyp.wa.gov.au](http://ccyp.wa.gov.au)

 **WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT?**

Kids Helpline is available if you would like to talk about what’s happening for you. Call **1800 55 1800** or visit [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au) for information on family separation.



**Commissioner for Children and Young People**  
Western Australia