

# Thousands helped by Family Works' service for separating parents

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Timothy McMichael runs the family dispute resolution service for separating parents offered by the Family Works Northern community support organisation in Manurewa.

More than 3000 people have been helped by a programme designed to support separating parents and their children.

Timothy McMichael leads the Manurewa-based Family Works Northern community support organisation's family dispute resolution (FDR), or family mediation, service.

It has been running for two years and encourages separating parents to consider their child's needs and helps to create an environment for them to

thrive.

McMichael sees the damage that can be done to children if their parents don't handle separation well.

"Their mum or dad may encourage parental alienation," he says.

"If the child spends a weekend with one parent and when they go back to the other they say 'you're safe and sound' that sets up the thought the child is at risk if they are with the other parent.

"It's a subtle and complex parental alienation."

Signs children are not handling their parents' separation well can include changes in sleep or eating patterns, behaviour at school or relationships with siblings, McMichael says.

"Children can be resilient and they don't need to have a bad time if their parents split. They may hurt for a short time but will get over it quickly."

The resolution service has three main components, he says.

The first is a pre-mediation meeting to assess if those involved are suitable for the process and that what they want from it is appropriate.

"The second is coaching, or preparation for mediation, which is not compulsory but highly recommended. It's so they don't think about unhelpful past memories when they go into the room and see the other party.

"The third is the family mediation component. They can do it in one to three meetings so they don't feel rushed."

A completed parenting plan or agreement is then signed by all parties and filed with the Family Court.

Parents can be exempted if domestic violence is involved or they can choose to do family mediation in separate rooms so they're kept safe.

People who qualify for legal aid can access the service for free, otherwise the Ministry of Justice has set the cost at \$897 per dispute or just under \$450 per case.

Email [support@resolution.org.nz](mailto:support@resolution.org.nz) or phone 0800 737 6583 for details.

**- Stuff**