

## **Patients with separated parents**

At Brighton Health Clinic for Kids, we understand the challenges faced by separated parents when it comes to coordinating the care and treatment of their child.

Our primary focus is the child's safety and well-being, while respecting both parents' rights to participate in health decisions. To support effective collaboration with healthcare providers, we have established guidelines aimed at minimising the impact of conflict and communication challenges that may occur during relationship breakdown.

## **Practice guidelines for separated parents**

### 1. Legal documentation

In families where parents have separated, our patient care team will request a copy of any court orders and parenting orders to facilitate your child's appointment.

### 2. Involvement in appointments

Paediatricians prefer to see both parents who are sharing the care and decision making for their child. However our patient care team will seek advice and permission from the **parent making the appointment**, as to the appropriateness of having a shared appointment, or separate appointments for each parent. In cases where both parents are unable to be in the room together, we can offer one parent to link in via Telehealth.

If separate appointments are needed, please inform our patient care team. Standard consultation fees will apply and there is a fee for each appointment if separate appointments are required.

It is a Medicare requirement that the child must be present during the consult (including for Telehealth) for the parent to claim a Medicare rebate for their attendance. If you need to speak with your paediatrician without your child in the room, please arrange for a relative or trusted friend to supervise your child in the reception area during the appointment.

### 3. Appointment Information Sharing

When one parent schedules an appointment, it is their responsibility to inform the other parent and invite them if appropriate. We do not automatically offer the other parent the appointment details and the right to attend the appointment.

***If the appointment is made by one parent, it is the responsibility of this parent to inform the other parent, invite them to attend, and provide feedback to them.***

### 4. Communication Policy

Our practice management software designates a 'default primary parent' for each child, to whom all communications about that child are automatically directed. This includes

reminder emails (sent to the default primary parent's email) and text message reminders (sent to their mobile phone number).

Occasionally, this setup can lead to issues, such as when a non-default parent schedules an appointment, but reminders are still sent to the default parent. We operate under the assumption that separated parents maintain a framework of joint parental responsibility, which legally requires them to coordinate and share information.

While we do our best to support individual family circumstances as much as possible, we cannot accommodate complex personalised arrangements for communication. If this policy presents any issues, please feel free to discuss your concerns with our patient care team.

## 5. Sharing Clinical Information

Clinic correspondence and letters will be sent to the parent who attends the appointment and it is the responsibility of that parent to forward information and reports to other parent. The doctors do not have the capacity to provide separate feedback to each parent without separate appointment time being made to do this. They welcome both parents to attend appointments and will provide copies of correspondence to each parent, if specifically requested.

## 6. Joint Decision-Making

We expect separated parents to work together respectfully and cooperatively in making decisions about their child's medical treatment, whenever possible. Both parents should be involved in deciding whether to commence medication or initiate intervention therapy.

Cooperation between parents is necessary for therapeutic interventions to be effective. Where conflict arises between parents regarding therapeutic decisions, the paediatrician's role is to provide an opinion, rather than require or pursue a decision.

Where specific interventions are under consideration such as the prescription of non-essential medication, the doctors' standard practice is to not proceed with the recommended treatment unless both parents are in agreement.

## 7. Payment Responsibility

Payment is to be made on the day of the child's appointment. If there is legal agreement that requires the other parent to pay all or part of the treatment costs, it is the attending parent's responsibility to settle account and collect reimbursement from the other parent.

## 8. Conflict Resolution

Where there is significant conflict, the doctor reserves the right to review the court orders, obtain signed consent from both parents, or limit their services until dispute has been resolved. If necessary, your doctor may discharge a family from their services if the conflict is disruptive to the clinic or impedes the care of the child.