

Specialist reports in the Family Court

Information to help the court better understand your child's background

To better understand your case and your child's background, the judge might ask an expert to write a specialist report.

There are four different types of report:

- a cultural report might be asked for to look at issues such as ethnicity, language and religion
- a medical report might be asked for if the parents of a child with a serious medical condition disagree about medical treatment
- a psychiatric report may be needed if a child has or may have a mental illness
- a psychological report may be requested to look into what may have influenced a child to say something.

Preparing the report

The judge will decide what the report will cover. They will ask an expert to write the report (for example, a doctor or a psychiatrist).

The report writer will investigate the issues and prepare the report for the judge. The judge will then use the information in the report to decide what will be best for your child. The report writer doesn't decide your case; that's the judge's job.

Most report writers will want to meet with each parent or caregiver to find out how you see the issues. They may also want to talk to new partners and other people who may have a significant role in your child's life.

Paying for the report

The court will decide if the parents or other people in the case have to pay some of the costs of the report, or if this would cause hardship.

Reading the report and getting a copy

In disputes about the care of children and cases about care and protection, the lawyers for each parent or other party will get a copy of the report.

If you or the other parent or caregiver doesn't have a lawyer, the court will tell you how and where you can read the report. For example, you may need to go to court to read it.

Sometimes, the court will order the lawyer not to show their client the report or give them a copy. An example is if doing so could put someone at risk. In these cases, the court may appoint a lawyer to explain the report to you.

Letting your child read the report

In disputes about the care of children, the lawyer for your child will get a copy of the report. They can let your child see it only if the court specifically orders that they should.

Whether or not your child sees the report, the lawyer for your child must explain to them why it was prepared and what it says, unless the lawyer thinks doing that is not in your child's best interests.

In care and protection cases involving Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, the lawyer will get a copy of the report. However, the judge can order that your child not be shown some or all of the report.

If you're unhappy with the report

Tell your lawyer if you or the other parent or party disagrees with something in the report or thinks it leaves out something important. Your lawyer will raise this with the judge.

If you or the other parent or party thinks there was something wrong with how the report was prepared, you should talk to your lawyer who will raise it with the judge. If you don't have a lawyer, tell the judge what you're unhappy about in the report.

If you think the report writer has behaved unprofessionally, tell a court staff member. You may also be able to complain to the report writer's professional body. For example:

- if it's a medical or psychiatric report, you can complain to Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa – Medical Council of New Zealand
- if it's a psychological report, you can complain to Te Poari Kaimātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa – New Zealand Psychologists Board or Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga – Health and Disability Commissioner.

To find out more, go to
justice.govt.nz/family/about