

IMAW 2026

International Mediation Awareness Week

Naomi Holtring MDR

CHILD-FOCUSED SEPARATION

FROM CONFLICT TO COOPERATION



A Practical Guide For Parents Raising Children Across Two Homes



Book launch at NSW Parliament House at ADRA 40th Anniversary in September 2026

Chosen as an essential text for an FDR training college

Recommended to their students to provide to all their separating parents in Family Dispute Resolution

Being “In Love” is a Mental Illness

- Endorphins create a sense of euphoria
- Red Flags are ignored, often minimised or seen as something that can be changed over time
- Family and friends who see the issues often try to warn, but are ignored – Like Romeo and Juliette, love transcends all
- Relationships may start with promising possibilities
- Then the cracks start to open as “faults” begin to show
- Frustration and dissatisfaction grow, often with one person more than the other – when ignored the relationship can become toxic
- Stay or Leave

You do great work

helping parties to collaborate in session!

- Separated parents may leave your mediation or consultation with a reality-tested, future-paced, livable agreement they feel sure they can stick to,
- You have provided some really great ways to help them to work together in their children's best interests,
- You are great at your job and feel confident that they have resolved their parenting issues and wish them the best,
- BUT How will they co-parent, after the next escalations of conflict?
- You know we can't change parties' personalities

Child-Focused Separation, From Conflict to Co-operation

- **provides** separating parents with an **invaluable** and **indispensable** educational resource **prior** to mediation
- **builds** a greater understanding of what their child is experiencing
- **highlights** practical ways to help them
- **fosters** insight into what the other parent may be going through
- **enables** greater collaboration in session, serving as a **pivotal** guide of **paramount** importance throughout their journey of separation

Family Violence

Important Notice Before You Begin

If there is any real possibility that you, your child, or someone close to you may be in danger during or after separation, then this is no longer just about parenting — it is about protection.

If you recognise the following risks in your own situation, please go directly to Chapter 14 page 111- Early Intervention, The Window Before The Storm, and Chapter 15 page 117 - Understanding Abuse and Family Violence

In these circumstances, the usual co-parenting strategies may not apply. Please check with your mediator, or other family services. See Emergency Resources page 152.

Family violence can include:

Physical, emotional, psychological, financial or spiritual abuse

Coercive control — where one person uses patterns of intimidation, manipulation or isolation to dominate the other

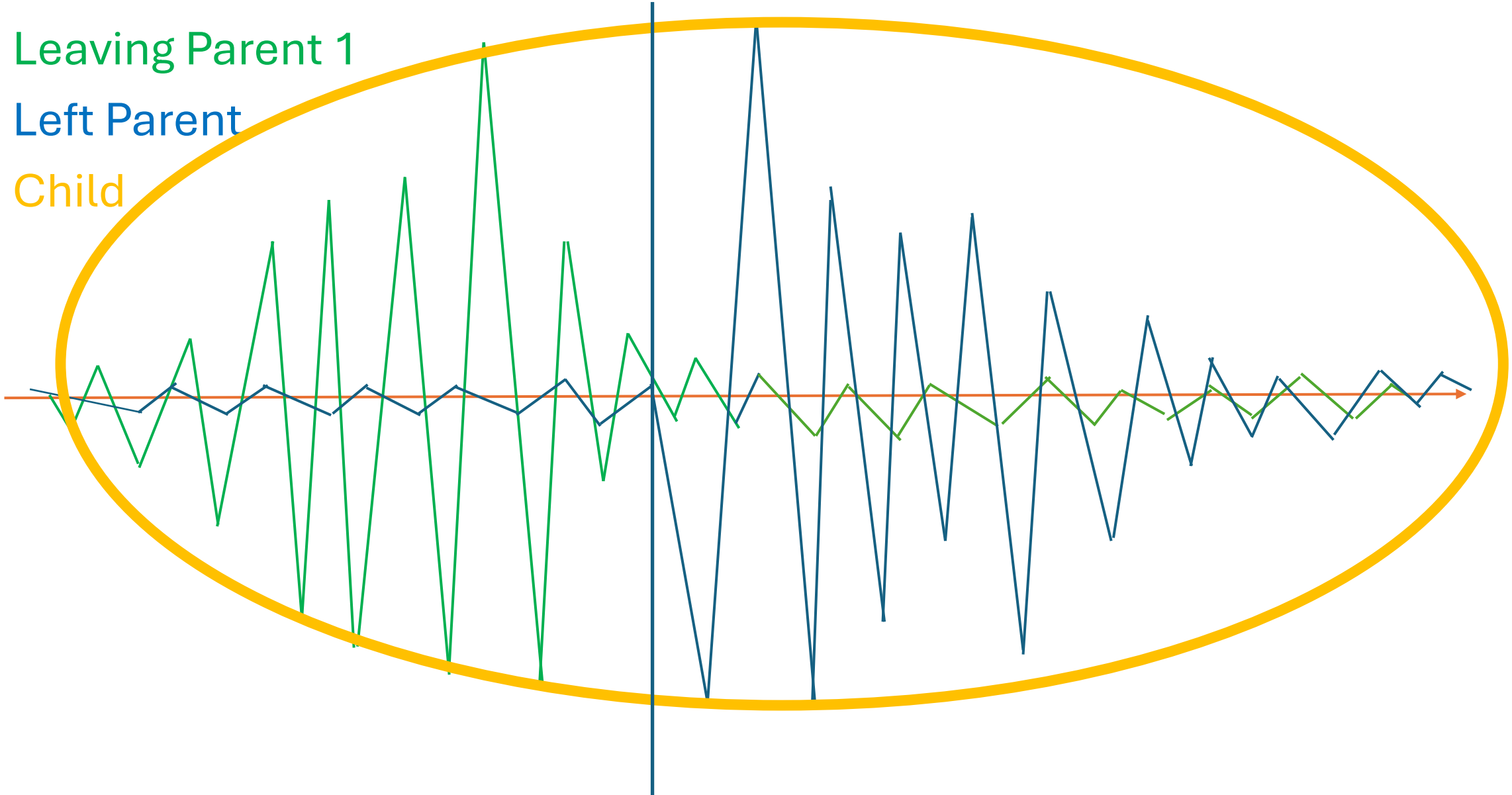
Drug use, alcoholic behaviour, or serious unmanaged mental health issues that impair judgement or safety

Ongoing neglect or failure to meet a child's basic needs

Chapter 1: The Shockwave of Separation

The Shockwave of Separation

- Leaving Parent 1
- Left Parent
- Child



Chapter 2: Through the Eyes of a Child

Children don’t just see a separation; they feel it—deeply, and often silently. Their whole world is shattered. Their security, identity, and sense of family are all shaken. Everything they’ve known as “home” now feels uncertain. Even if parents try to shield them from conflict, children absorb far more than adults realise.

Unlike their parents, children have no timeline for acceptance. Their internal landscape may be full of fear and questions they don’t know how to ask:

“Did I do something wrong?”

“What if my parents stop loving me too?”

“Who will look after me?”

“Will I lose my family forever?”

Chapter 3: Protecting Your Child from Conflict

Children of separated families have about twice the probability of experiencing poor outcomes in the long term, compared to children in intact families.

These outcomes include greater levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, poorer health, higher levels of behavioural problems and depressive symptoms, and higher levels of smoking, drinking, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy.

The risk of suffering such outcomes is associated with parental conflict, parental distress and multiple changes in family structure. Rodger s and Pryor (1998)

Chapter 4: Speaking to Your Child About the Separation

It is not just an event between two adults—it's a seismic shift in a child's world. How you speak to your child about separation can shape how they internalise it, cope with it, and carry it into their future relationships. The moment you explain what's happening is not a one-off conversation—it's the beginning of an ongoing dialogue filled with reassurance, honesty, and love.

- When to speak,
- How to speak
- The power of reassurance
- What to AVOID

Chapter 5: The Emotional Rollercoaster

Separation can bring a storm of emotions—guilt, shame, loneliness, fear, anger, grief—especially if you were the one left behind or didn't see it coming. It can feel like your whole identity has been shaken. One moment, you're numb. The next, you're overwhelmed. This is normal. In fact, it's a deeply human response to a life-changing event. You might wake up with dread. You might cry while making dinner. You might be holding it together in front of your child, only to fall apart in the car on the way to work.

Separation can feel very much like a death.

Don't Spill It on Your Child

Your child needs to feel that you are okay, so they can be okay too

Finding Healthy Outlets

Introducing a New Partner to your Child

Chapter 6: One Childhood, Two Homes

When separation happens, a child's experience of childhood becomes divided — not just between two households, but between two sets of routines, two parenting styles, and sometimes, two emotional worlds. As parents, we cannot give our child a single home anymore — but we can give them something just as powerful: a sense of emotional safety and connection, no matter where they are.

A well-handled separation can still offer children love, predictability, and space to grow. But it takes conscious effort. Because for a child, living in two homes is more than a logistical shift — it is a deep emotional adjustment.

What Children Need Across Both Homes

The Hidden Pressure to Keep the Peace

Practical Tools to Bridge the Two Homes

Three Common Parenting Styles After Separation

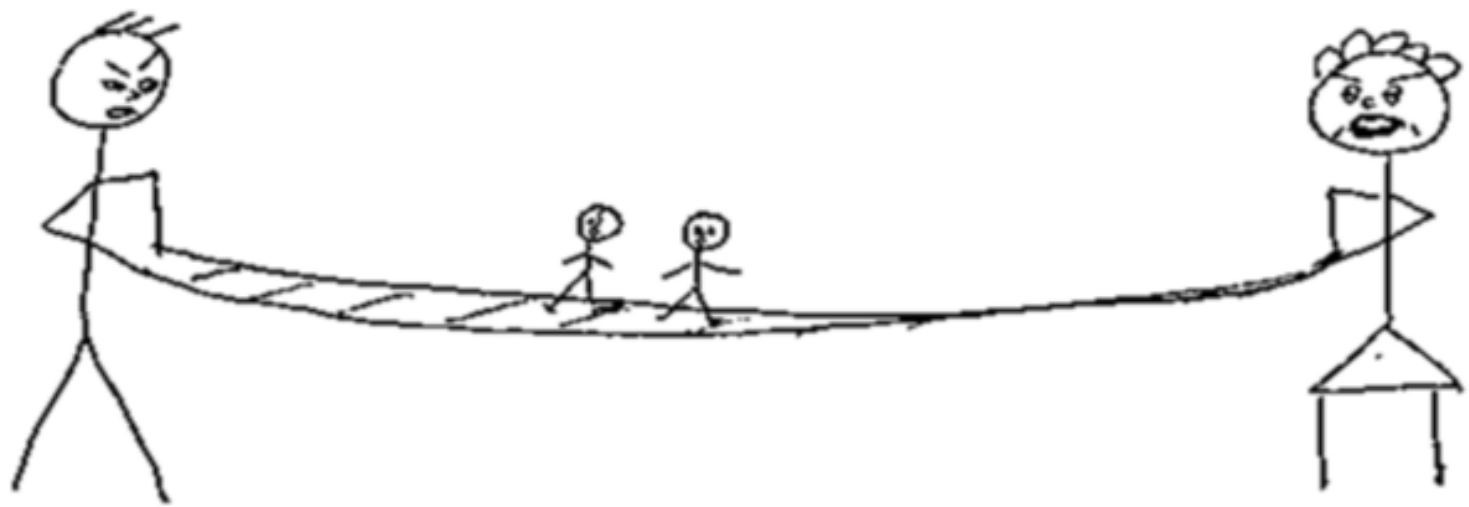
Co-operative Parenting

Parallel Parenting

Conflicted Parenting

- Moving Toward Safety, Not Perfection

The Bridge between Parents



Chapter 7: The Silent Witness

Children don’t always tell us how they feel. They show us. They become quiet. They become loud. They misbehave, or they overachieve. Some children cling tighter, others push away. And too often, parents assume these reactions are about school, friendships, or personality.

However, many times, they are quiet signals of distress.

“Children Are So Resilient”

What They See, Hear, and Feel

A child may never say: “My parents argue constantly, and it makes me feel frightened and unsafe.”

The New Reality for the Child

Separation doesn’t just change the structure of your child’s life—it changes their emotional reality.

Chapter 8: The Role of Extended Family

(Managing grandparents, stepsiblings, aunties/uncles, and their influence)

When a family restructures after separation, the effects ripple beyond the parents and children.

Extended family members—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and new blended relatives—often want to help.

Some become key supporters. Others may unknowingly make things harder.

Chapter 9: When Sexual Preferences and Families Change

Separation is never easy, but when a parent leaves a relationship to live more authentically—such as coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual—or when a same-sex couple separates to live in a heterosexual relationship, it can create added emotional and social challenges for everyone involved.

A Different Kind of Adjustment

Protecting Your Child from External Judgement

Stories that help children feel seen

Chapter 10: Parenting Apart, Together

Parenting after separation isn't about being friends—it's about being functional. You don't have to like each other. You don't even have to talk often. But you do need to communicate respectfully, make consistent decisions, and prioritise your child's wellbeing. This is parenting apart, together.

A Businesslike Approach

Don't sweat the small stuff—but don't ignore the big stuff

Creating a New Normal

Chapter 11: Time, Transitions and Age-Appropriate Care

One of the most common questions separating parents ask is how to divide time between households in a way that best supports their child's wellbeing. It is a reasonable question, and one that often carries a great deal of anxiety.

Newborns and infants

Toddlers

Preschool-aged children

Primary School-Aged Children

Adolescents

Chapter 12: Creating a safe Parenting Plan and the Power of Common Ground

Hopes Needs & Concerns

	Parent A	Parent B	Child (6yr old girl)
Hopes	That she always feels loved	She knows she is loved by both parents	Mum and Dad will get back together
	That she succeeds academically	She does well at school	Mum and Dad are happy
	She is not caught in conflict	She doesn't feel she has to choose who to love	She learns ballet
	She leads a happy life	She is greeted by love by all her family	She has more dolls than all her friends
	She is able to make wise choices	She becomes a great ballet dancer	She can stay at the same school
Needs	Parents not to fight in front of her	Peace	Mum and Dad to get along
	Lots of cuddles	Re-assurance that she will be loved by both parents	Ballet lessons
	Both parents supervise homework calmly	Both parents are able to attend school events and meetings	To be loved and reassured by both parents
Concerns	She feels caught in the middle	She is acting sad and upset	She is told that ballet lessons are unaffordable
	That she doesn't know how to speak with each parent about the other	We are considering moving to a cheaper area and may need to change schools	She is told that the other parent doesn't pay enough to enable her to live comfortably

Age-appropriate parenting plans and transitions

- Some parents think that a parenting will work for years
- Child development needs consideration
- Plans need to be changed when needed – whether annually, moving address, starting/changing daycare or schools
- When a parent can no longer care for them
- Unemployment, change of employment, moving distances
- When the plan clearly isn’t working

Time considerations for children

These are simply a guideline

Infants need one primary parent with whom they have bonded ensuring they have a stable emotional and physical base to feel safety and to establish patterns routines and security, with frequent short times spent with the other parent

Toddlers may able to tolerate an overnight with the other parent, but can become very distressed with longer periods – note t hat if they are able to spend overnights with a trusted auntie or grandparent, they can do this with the other parent

2 to 4 year-olds may be able to spend more time away from the primary carer. As long as they have had the important bonding times and are comfortable and happy with the other parent. Their needs are primary.

By early primary school, children MAY be able to tolerate equal time, but this needs to be considered carefully. Rather than a 7:7 plan where children spend a week-about, a 3:4, 4:3 is likely to be easier for The child, even though parents may feel it is hard.

From around age 10 a 7:7 is usually suitable.

Adolescents may believe they are the experts, however parents still need to guide them. Friends, school and extracurricular activities often mean that the 7:7 becomes impractical. Both parents may now be seeing them less. Listen to them, understand, and as long as they are safe, work out creative ways that work for everyone.

PARENTING PLAN

(SAMPLE)

MEDIATED BETWEEN:

(Parent's name) and

(Parent's name)

Parents of:

CHILD

Name

Current Age

Date of Birth

Agreement Date:

Full and detailed parenting plan is contained in the book

Chapter 13: Family Dispute Resolution and Mediation

Mediation and Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) are closely related processes, but they can serve different purposes.

They both provide a structured, neutral, and child-focused space in which parents can make their own decisions about their children with professional support.

In Family Mediation, parents have agreed that they will make parenting arrangements without court.

Chapter 14: Early Intervention – The Window Before the Storm

Conflict rarely begins with violence. It begins with tension. It begins with small moments — subtle changes in tone, repeated dismissals, or quiet distance that slowly becomes the norm. Hurt that festers. Mistrust that builds. Perhaps a sense that something isn't quite right — not unsafe, but certainly not healthy.

Chapter 15: Understanding Abuse and Family Violence

Lost Behind Closed Doors
Family violence doesn't always leave bruises — but far too often, it ends in death.
In Australia, during 2023–24, one woman was killed by an intimate partner every 8 days.
One man, every 41 days.
Most of these deaths occurred in the context of separation or attempted separation.

Data from the Australian Institute of Criminology (2025): www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr52

Chapter 16: When Courts Get Involved

There are times when legal intervention becomes necessary. When communication has broken down completely or when the welfare of the child is at risk, courts may need to step in. Otherwise, the courtroom should never be the first stop—it should be the last resort.

Chapter 17: Breaking the Cycle

Some patterns run deep — so deep we don't even realise we're repeating them. We often parent the way we were parented. Speak the way we were spoken to. React with the same anger, silence, or fear that once shaped us.

Yet these patterns, as familiar as they are, do not have to define us. They can be acknowledged, examined, and changed.

This chapter is for those brave enough to say: "It stops with me."

Chapter 18: Your Parenting Legacy

Separation may mark the end of your relationship, but it does not mark the end of your influence. In fact, how you handle this chapter of your life becomes part of your child's story.

Chapter 19: Final Reflections

Separation is one of life’s greatest upheavals.
It reshapes the landscape of your daily world, shifts long-held expectations,
and often asks more of you than you feel ready to give.
But it also reveals something extraordinary: the strength of your love for your child

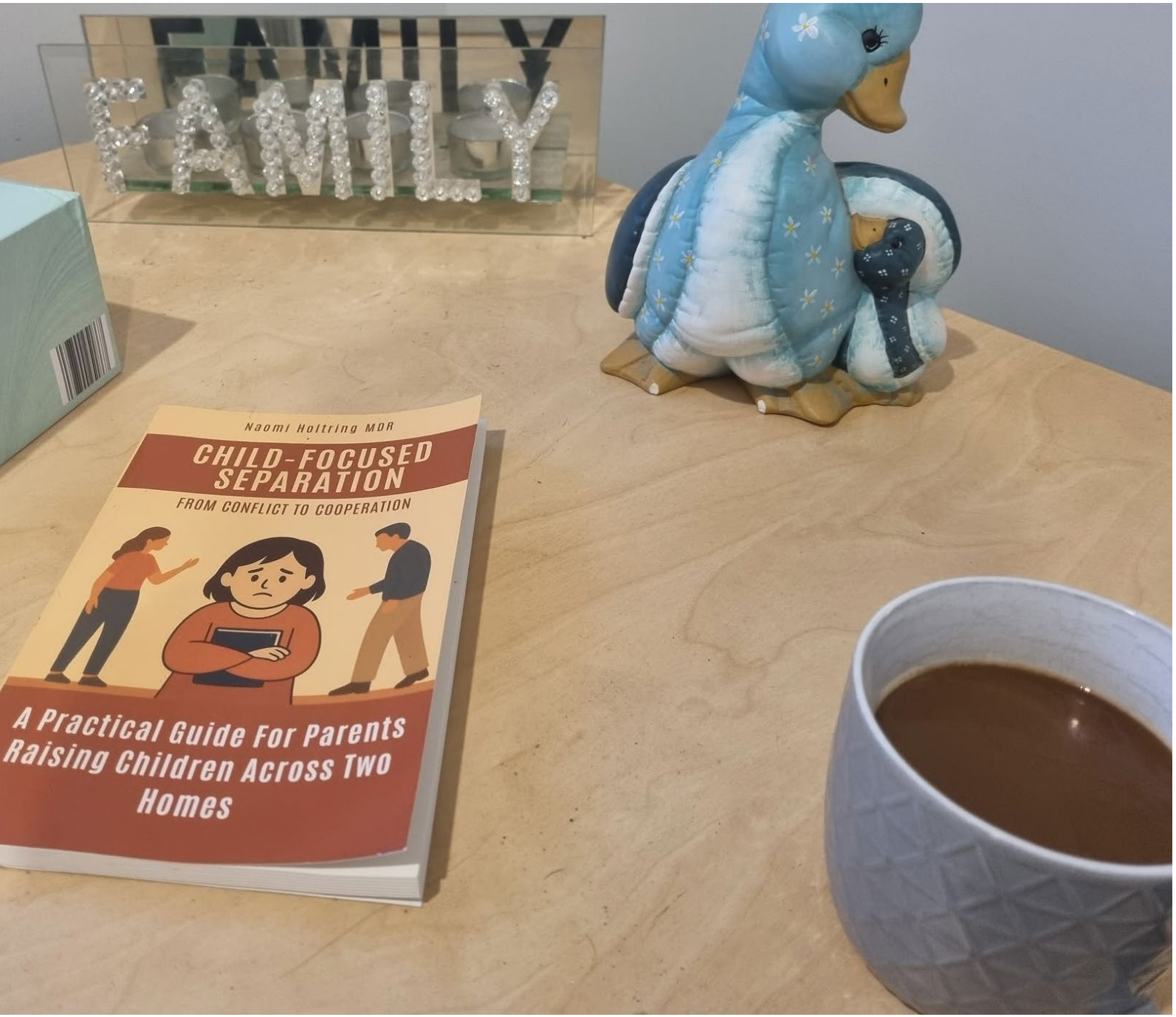
Glossary of Terms

Recommended Reading

Emergency and Crisis Help in Australia

Acknowledgements

About the Author



A vital resource for practitioners and separating parents

Thank you for listening

Order copies for your parties to enable them to be
Child-focused and move from Conflict to Co-operation.
I only have a limited number in stock, so please order early for fast freight.
Later orders WILL take longer.

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