Parenting matter costs: what you can expect to pay

Author: Jane Holford
Email: jane@smithfamilylaw.com.au
Date: Monday October 19, 2026

Unfortunately, there is rarely a simple answer as all family law matters are different. The total costs will depend on a number of factors, including the types of issues, how many issues are in dispute, the level of conflict between the parties and the steps required to resolve the dispute. Understanding the difference between your own legal fees and the disbursements you may incur can help you make informed decisions throughout your matter.

In this blog, we explore the costs that may be incurred in parenting matters. If you are interested in the specific costs and disbursements you may incur in relation to your parenting matter or if your matter goes to Court, you can read our blogs on these topics.

This is intended to be a general guide only, and the estimates herein are subject to change.

Legal fees

Your legal costs for your family law matter are the fees charged by your lawyer for the work undertaken on your matter on your behalf. Depending on the circumstances of your matter, this could include:

- providing legal advice;
- reviewing documents and correspondence;
- negotiating with the other party or their lawyer;
- preparing letters and legal documents;

- drafting applications, affidavits and supporting documents;
- attending mediations or family dispute resolution;
- appearing at court; and
- briefing and working with a barrister.

The amount you spend will depend significantly on how your matter progresses. For example, a relatively straightforward family law matter resolved by consent of the parties through early negotiation will cost much less than a matter that proceeds through the Court system and is determined at a trial.

Family law costs are also affected by the complexity of the issues. For example, a parenting matter may become more expensive where there are serious allegations of risk, multiple witnesses, expert reports or ongoing disagreements about significant arrangements for children (i.e. if a party is seeking to relocate with the children).

At Smith Family Law, we are transparent and upfront about how we charge, and provide our first appointment free of charge so that we can obtain an overview of your situation, the issues in dispute, and provide an estimate of costs.

Disbursements in a parenting matter

Legal fees are not the only costs that might be incurred in your family law matter.

You will most likely also incur 'disbursements' – disbursements are expenses or costs that your lawyer attends to on your behalf during the course of your matter (generally they are paid from funds you have paid into the lawyer's trust account on retainer). They are not 'legal fees' for work done, but third-party payments required to progress your matter.

It's important that you understand what disbursements you are likely to incur and at what stage in your matter, as together with legal fees your costs can quickly increase.

The most common types of disbursements you can incur in a parenting family law matter include the following (noting this is not an exhaustive list and should be read in conjunction with our blog on costs if your matter is litigated):

Family report fees

Parties may need to obtain (either before issuing in Court or during Court proceedings) a report from a 'family report writer' to help make decisions about short and long-term parenting arrangements.

There are two (2) main types of family reports:

1. Child Impact Report; and
2. Full Family Report.

A Child Impact Report is usually obtained at a relatively early stage of a family law matter and provides information about the experiences and needs of your child.

A Full Family Report is a lengthier and more detailed report, usually obtained either towards the late stage of a family law matter or if there is a significant issue in dispute (such as a relocation application).

Court-funded family reports obtained through the Court system do not incur fees. They are generally reserved for families who are experiencing severe financial hardship and cannot meet the fees of a private report.

The cost of private family reports vary between each report writer. Generally speaking, Child Impact Reports will cost less than Full Family Reports as they are usually shorter in length, and only deal with the pressing 'interim' issues. Currently, private Child Impact Reports in Victoria can be anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000, and Full Family Reports are generally between $10,000 and $15,000. Extra fees may be incurred if there is a large amount of material/documents that the report writer is required to read as part of their assessment.

For the most part, parties will equally share the cost of obtaining a private family report, except in specific circumstances, or if a party is experiencing significant financial hardship.

Risk assessment reports

Parties may also be required to undertake a risk assessment as part of their parenting proceedings. These reports can be general risk assessments, psychological assessments, psychiatric assessments, and/or psychosexual assessments, depending on the issues in dispute and allegations made in the matter.

These reports are generally not funded by the Court and the party required to undertake the assessment is generally solely responsible for the fees. The cost of these reports vary between practitioners, and depending on the type of report requested are currently around $4,000 to $15,000 in Victoria.

Family therapy / parenting coordinator fees

As part of resolving a parenting dispute, families may engage in family therapy or parenting co-ordination.

Family therapy is a type of talk therapy that helps family members improve how they communicate, solve conflicts, and fix relationship patterns in the context of a separation or relationship breakdown (either in the context of repairing and strengthening the parents' co-parenting relationship, or repairing and strengthening a child's relationship with one or both of their parents). The costs of family therapy are determined by the therapist providing the service, however are generally on par with usual psychological fees, currently around $250 to $500 per therapeutic hour.

If the family therapy is reportable, and the parties require a report to be prepared as to the progress of the therapy, this is usually an additional cost (again determined by the therapist). This could be anywhere between a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on the type of report required, the length and the amount of detail within. Parties will usually share the cost of obtaining

a family therapy report equally, except in specific circumstances, or if a party is experiencing significant financial hardship.

Parenting coordination is a collaborative dispute resolution process in which parents engage the assistance of a ‘parenting coordinator’ to assist them in resolving the day-to-day issues that can arise when co-parenting. Parenting coordinators can help parents to communicate more effectively and save time and money by refraining from using lawyers to work out the smaller issues between themselves. Their fees are determined by the individual practitioner, but are generally between $250 to $500 an hour.

Parties will generally share the costs of joint family therapy/parenting coordination sessions (and the children’s individual sessions of family therapy), and otherwise meet any costs for their own respective and individual appointments separately.

Supervision fees

Supervised changeover and supervised time refers to arrangements in which parties conduct changeover under supervision or a person (usually a parent) spends time with a child under the supervision of another person. This arrangement is usually implemented where there are concerns or allegations about a child’s safety or well-being when in the sole care of that person.

There are both government-funded supervision services and privately funded supervision services who will charge different fees for their service. Depending on the kind of service required (i.e. changeover or long period of private supervision), the fees to utilise a supervision service range greatly, and generally could be anywhere between $10 to $500 per visit.

Whether this cost is shared equally between the parties or is met by the person utilising the supervision service varies from matter to matter depending on the specific circumstances. It is generally accepted that it is appropriate, where possible, that each party contribute to the costs of supervision so that both parties are actively involved, and both have an interest in facilitating and promoting the process.

If the parties require a report to be prepared as to the progress of the therapy, this is usually an additional cost (determined by the service provider). This could be anywhere between a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on the type of report required, the length and the amount of detail within. Again, whether this cost is shared equally between the parties or is met by the person utilising the supervision service varies from matter to matter.

Summary - what to keep in mind about parenting matter costs

Depending on what steps are required to resolve your parenting matter, there are a number of disbursements that may be incurred in addition to your legal costs. It is important that you are aware of and kept up to date about what each stage of your matter will likely cost you, both in terms of your legal fees and any likely disbursements.

While it is not likely that you will incur each and every kind of disbursement, it is important that you have a clear understanding both of what you are likely to incur, but also an ‘up to’ estimate of what you could incur in a worst case scenario.

Talk to a family lawyer about your parenting matter

If you have questions or concerns about what steps/disbursements may be required in your parenting matter, is it important to obtain legal advice and a costs estimate from an experienced family lawyer. It is just as important to stay informed about what costs you are incurring throughout the progression of your matter, as changes/updates in your matter may affect your costs estimate.

Our family lawyers can explain the likely costs at each stage of your parenting matter. Smith Family Law offers a free first appointment, with offices in Melbourne, Sunshine and Williamstown. For practical tips on keeping costs down, read our blog "6 ways to minimise your family law costs".

Contacting Smith Family Law

03 8625 8957

info@smithfamilylaw.com.au

This blog is of a general nature and should not be relied upon as legal advice. If you require further information, advice or assistance for your specific circumstances, please contact us.