

Supporting children's mental health when working with separating parents

Case study – Anne

Anne and her husband were living with their two children Connor and Millie when she first started seeking help to separate from him. Anne and the children were being subjected to family violence.

Anne interacted with a range of professionals during this difficult period, including the police, a counsellor, hospital staff, community organisations and her local GP. Very few knew how to help her and even fewer asked about the wellbeing of her children.

When she sought support from a local community organisation to leave her husband, the individuals she interacted with convinced her to stay, leaving Anne feeling confused and uncertain.

Despite interacting with a range of professionals, it wasn't until one year after starting to seek help to separate from her husband – when Anne and her children reached out to a homeless refuge – that they received the help they needed. Anne calls this 'a failure in our system'.

Anne believes that if she had had access to the right knowledge and support, she would have left her relationship much earlier, reducing the negative effects on her and her children's mental health and wellbeing. She wishes that she had received a referral to a family mediation service early in the separation process, to help her become clearer about her options and to facilitate a more amicable separation.

Anne also wishes that her children could have received a referral to a service much earlier to help them through the difficulties they were experiencing. Anne believes that what she needed was not isolated referrals to different practitioners, but someone who understood the system and could respond to her concerns.