RICH MAHLER
MEDIATION & THERAPY
0417 947 976 | rich@richmahler.com.au | GPO Box 2639 Brisbane City Qld 4001

REUNIFICATION THERAPY

Since 2018 I have been working as an Individual, Relationship, Family and Co-Parenting Counsellor / Psychotherapist. I am registered with the Psychotherapy and. Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) (Provisional 27503).

My therapy practice is trauma-informed, evidence-based, and draws upon several modalities, such as Gestalt (including authentic presence and empty chair work), existential (meaning making), experiential / felt sense (linking the mind and body for awareness and healing) and psychodynamic (such as exploring the effects of key relationships with caregivers and partners). I often provide support in high conflict situations and blended family dynamics.

I believe every individual has the innate capacity to thrive both personally and in relationship. My aim is to help my clients work through any resistance or blocks that may be preventing this from happening, by creating a safe space where every part of the client is welcome. I also bring warmth and humour to co-create a client-focused healing and growth experience.

My family therapy includes all family members aged five and above, and often in high-conflict situations. I work with children in supporting them navigate their relationships within a family system. My reunification therapy program supports children in having a meaningful relationship with both parents (where this is appropriate).

My **reunification therapy** is a specialist service that I offer within my family therapy practice. Reunification therapy requires a sensitive and adaptive approach, given that generally at least one party (usually a child of another party) is somewhat reluctant or resistant to this therapeutic intervention (at least at the beginning).

The purpose of reunification therapy is to determine whether the child's resistance to a parent comes from the genuine innate (and appropriate) safety concerns of the child, or the child being influenced by the (often well-meaning) non-rejected parent.

Often times, the child is caught in the conflict between their parents, where the non-rejected parent claims (and projects) that the rejected parent is clinically narcissistic, and the rejected parent claims (and projects) that the non-rejected parent is engaged in parental alienation. However, very rarely is this actually the case. Generally, the reality is that the needs of the child haven't been met and their attachment to the rejected parent is insecure.

Reunification is not appropriate where there is any form of ongoing domestic and family violence between any of the family members involved.

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My reunification therapy process includes up to four stages and a minimum of eight hours of therapy sessions, including both individual and (if appropriate) joint sessions between the child and unaligned parent.

I'll immediately stop (or adapt) the intervention at any stage if the child appears to be displaying a trauma response.

Stage 1 – Risk Assessment & Intake (with each parent separately)

Stage 1 is an individual Zoom session with each parent for up to one hour. I conduct a risk assessment and intake with each parent separately to determine whether this approach is safe and appropriate in the particular circumstances of the family involved. This also includes psychoeducation and reality testing of the timeframe and likely outcome.

Stage 2 – Blocks of reunification therapy

Stage 2 consists of 4-hour blocks of therapy. I spend the first block with the child and aligned parent in person, with the unaligned parent attending by Zoom. This is to minimise any resistance to attend from the child, as well as to manage any potential risk. If appropriate, during the second block I'll introduce the rejected parent into joint sessions with the child. These may be in-person or by Zoom. However, it often takes several blocks before the child is ready to include the rejected parent in joint sessions. In the meantime, I regularly liaise with both parents to provide updates and insights into the child's journey. After several blocks I can adopt a more flexible approach, depending on the particular needs of the family.

Stage 3 – Time between the child and rejected parent outside therapy

Stage 3 involves the child spending time with the rejected parent outside of therapy. This may be supervised by myself or an agreed third party. The time is paced according to the needs of the child. For example, it may begin with the rejected parent attending a sporting event or other extra-curricular activity within eyesight of the child. Over time it may progress to short causal meetings in public places. It may then progress to extended one-on-one experiences.

Stage 4 (if required) – Ongoing reunification therapy

If Stage 4 is required I engage in ongoing reunification therapy. This often involves a deeper dive into the psychology of shadow work and parts integration, exploring and resolving the causes of the ongoing unwanted behaviour patterns.