

The Lighthouse Model

Over three-quarters of parties before the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia identify allegations of family violence, and over two-thirds allege child abuse or a risk of child abuse.

Piloted in Adelaide, Brisbane and Parramatta in 2020, the Lighthouse model has been expanded throughout Australia to respond to the safety risks faced by families and children entering the court system.

The Lighthouse model uses early risk screening, assessment and triage of cases, and case management to help ensure the safety of families and children and ensure better outcomes moving forward. This extends to mental well-being support and referrals to counselling, rehabilitation and parenting programs where required.

When filing an Initiating Application or Response with the Court, parties involved in parenting matters will be invited to complete an online questionnaire called the Family DOORS Triage, which is confidential and cannot be used as evidence. The yes/no questions address safety risks frequently found in family law proceedings, including family violence, mental health concerns, child abuse or neglect, and substance abuse. Other parties in the matter will not have access to answers given.

Answers to the Family DOORS Triage are assessed by a highly skilled team, including Judicial Registrars and Triage Counsellors, to identify the likelihood of harm or exposure to harm experienced by a party or child in family law proceedings. Matters are then triaged based on the level of risk identified and directed to the most appropriate case management pathway. This further allows for early intervention through additional support and safety measures for parties and children most at risk.

Matters assessed as medium or lower risk will be offered safety planning and service referrals. They will be considered for suitable case management options based on the individual and parties' needs, including Family Dispute Resolution.

Where a matter is assessed as high risk, it will be referred for immediate action, including an interview with the litigant, a detailed risk assessment, safety and well-being plans and service referrals where required. Matters with the highest levels of risk will be placed on the Evatt List.

The Evatt List

The Evatt List is a specialist court list developed to assist families entering the court system who are the most vulnerable. It focuses on early intervention, access to resources, and efficient court events to minimise the risk of further trauma and harm.

Matters placed on the Evatt List will be assigned to an Evatt Judicial Registrar with specialised training and experience working with families exposed to family violence and other high-risk

safety concerns. The Evatt Judicial Registrar will pursue early information gathering to assist the Judge or Senior Judicial Registrar in making the most appropriate decisions as soon as practical and will conduct regular chamber events to monitor compliance with orders and liaise with Court Children's Service where required.

The recently expanded Lighthouse Model has received positive independent evaluation and feedback and is acknowledged as fundamental to the Courts' critical reforms in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children for 2022-32.

For further information on The Lighthouse Model or to discuss a family law matter, please get in touch with us at **5303 0281** or **familylaw@ballaratlawyers.com.au**.

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