

RICHARD MAHLER

MEDIATION & THERAPY

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REUNIFICATION THERAPY (page 1 of 2)

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 services are provided by Zoom.

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 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; however, not in relation to their specific individual needs, as that's a specialist area.

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 violence](#) between any of the family members involved.

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My reunification therapy process involves four stages and a minimum of eight one-hour therapy sessions (if required) in total.

I'll immediately stop the intervention at any stage during the reunification process if the child no longer wishes to continue or appears to be suffering from a trauma response.

Stage 1 – Assessment (one therapy session per family member)

The first stage of reunification therapy involves me conducting an assessment as to the appropriateness of this approach. I'll meet with each parent separately, and then the child separately. During this stage I engage in psycho-education, conduct risk assessments, and build rapport with each family member involved in the intervention.

Stage 2 – Therapy (at least three therapy sessions, if required)

The second stage of reunification therapy involves me engaging in at least three individual therapy sessions with the child (if required). If appropriate, I'll introduce the rejected parent into joint sessions with the child after at least two individual sessions with the child. It often takes several sessions 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.

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

The third stage of reunification therapy involves the child spending time with the rejected parent outside of therapy. This 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 one-on-one experiences.

Stage 4 – Evaluation (two therapy sessions)

The fourth stage of the reunification process is an evaluation. This involves one therapy session with the child and another session split between the parents (either separately or in a joint session) to discuss the effectiveness of the intervention. If appropriate, this may lead back to Stage 2 for a further intervention.