

# First Choice

## Help for families going through separation or divorce

### WHAT IS FIRST CHOICE?

FIRST CHOICE is a brief confidential evaluation process. It provides an alternative to a traditional court-ordered assessment.

It is offered by Family Conciliation Services.

The service is designed to help parents resolve parenting issues and provide recommendations for child-focussed planning.



**Manitoba**

### WHO CAN USE FIRST CHOICE?

Most cases involve parents, but FIRST CHOICE is also available to others with child custody issues (ex: other family members wanting access to a child). Family lawyers are strongly encouraged to attend sessions or be available by phone.

### HOW DO I ACCESS FIRST CHOICE?

Only the Family Court judge can refer parents and other family members to the program. Lawyers and parents sign a participant agreement to keep the process confidential from court. You will be contacted by a member of the FIRST CHOICE team within two weeks of receiving the court referral.

### WHAT HAPPENS AT FIRST CHOICE?

- FIRST CHOICE sessions are led by two counsellors – a man and a woman, also called the “team.”
- The first session, with both parents, takes about three hours. Each parent may talk about his or her plans for their children and respond to the other parent’s plans.
- The team:
  - interview parents separately, usually by phone
  - ask questions in the sessions to make sure the information provided by the parents is clearly understood by all
  - encourage parents to talk to their lawyers during the process, either in person or by phone
  - sometimes ask to talk to other professionals involved with the family
  - sometimes interview the children
  - make recommendations to the parents and lawyers (if present) about what is best for the children
  - give their opinions about whether parents should be referred back to court for a full assessment

### WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE SESSIONS ARE FINISHED?

- With the help of their lawyers, parents can negotiate a parenting plan, based on the team’s recommendations.
- The team may recommend a follow-up session.
- The team will write a summary report that is sent only to both parents and their lawyers.
- Free mediation is offered to help parents develop detailed parenting plans.
- Counselling services can help families and children.
- Parents may return to court if the matter is not resolved.

If you have any questions, contact FIRST CHOICE at:

#### Family Conciliation Services Winnipeg

2nd Floor, 379 Broadway  
Winnipeg MB R3C 0T9  
Phone: 204-945-7236  
Toll free: 1-800-282-8069  
ext. 7236

#### Family Conciliation Services Brandon

340-9th Street  
Brandon MB R7A 6C2  
Phone: 204-726-6336  
Toll free: 1-800-230-1885

For information about FIRST CHOICE and other programs offered by Manitoba Family Conciliation Services, go to: [www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/family\\_conciliation](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childfam/family_conciliation)