

Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner roles typically focus on your ability to manage high-conflict situations, apply the Family Law Act, and keep children's safety central. You may be asked to demonstrate your screening skills and your understanding of the accreditation requirements.

- **Process questions:** Questions about how you conduct a mediation session from intake to agreement or certificate.
- **Behavioural questions:** Questions asking you to describe a time you managed a difficult dispute or a safety concern.
- **Scenario-based questions:** Hypothetical situations involving family violence, power imbalances, or parties who refuse to negotiate.
- **Technical questions:** Questions testing your knowledge of the Family Law Act 1975, section 60I certificates, and accreditation obligations.
- **Safety and risk assessment questions:** Questions about how you screen for family violence and child safety concerns.
- **Client-facing questions:** Questions about how you build rapport and maintain neutrality with distressed clients.

The interview process usually starts with a phone screen, followed by a panel interview with a senior practitioner and a manager. The panel interview often includes a mix of behavioural and scenario questions. Some employers also ask you to complete a written exercise, such as drafting a parenting plan outline or responding to a case study. You may also be asked to participate in a role-play mediation.

1. Walk me through how you conduct a mediation session from the initial intake to the final agreement or certificate.

Why they ask

This tests your understanding of the FDRP process and your ability to manage each stage.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through structure: describe intake and screening, then the joint session, then private sessions if needed, then drafting the agreement or issuing a certificate.

Example answer

"I begin with an intake session with each party separately. I screen for family violence, child safety concerns and power imbalances, and I explain the mediation process, confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. If it is safe to proceed, I hold a joint session, either in person or via Zoom or Teams. I set ground rules, ensure both parties have a chance to speak, and I use a facilitative approach to help them focus on their children's needs. If the conversation becomes unproductive, I might move to private sessions, or caucus. If an agreement is reached, I draft a parenting plan and check that both parties understand it. If no agreement is reached, or if mediation is not appropriate, I issue a section 60I certificate so they can proceed to court."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a situation where one party was intimidating the other during a mediation session.

Why they ask

This assesses your ability to maintain safety and neutrality under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"Situation: In a mediation session, one parent was raising their voice and interrupting the other. Task: I needed to ensure the other party felt safe and that the process remained fair. Action: I paused the session and reminded both parties of the ground rules. I then moved to private sessions, speaking with each party separately. I checked in with the quieter party to see if they felt able to continue. I also reinforced that I would not tolerate intimidating behaviour. Result: The parties were able to continue in private sessions and eventually reached a partial agreement about school holiday arrangements. I documented the incident and referred the quieter party to a support service."

3. You are mediating a dispute where one parent alleges family violence but there is no current intervention order. How do you proceed?

Why they ask

This tests your screening and risk assessment skills.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: explain your immediate steps, then your decision-making process, then how you would document and refer.

Example answer

"First, I would take the allegation seriously and not minimise it. I would conduct a separate intake session with each party to gather more information. I would screen for risk factors, including whether there is a history of violence, whether there are any current safety concerns for the children, and whether the parties are able to negotiate safely. I would also check if there are any existing court orders or intervention orders. If I determine that mediation is not safe, I would issue a section 60I certificate and refer the parties to appropriate support services, such as a family violence service or legal aid. If it is safe to proceed, I would put in place safety measures, such as shuttle mediation or a phone or online format, and I would ensure the alleged victim has support."

4. What is the purpose of a section 60I certificate and when would you issue one?

Why they ask

This checks your legal knowledge and understanding of your statutory role.

How to structure your answer

Explain: state the purpose, then list the circumstances for issuing, then mention your obligations.

Example answer

"A section 60I certificate is issued under the Family Law Act 1975 to show that a party has attempted family dispute resolution before applying for a parenting order. I would issue one when mediation is not appropriate, for example if one party refuses to attend, if the matter is urgent, or if I assess that mediation would not be safe due to family violence or child abuse. I would also issue one if the parties attended mediation but did not reach an agreement. I must ensure the certificate is accurate and that I have complied with the accreditation requirements set by the Attorney-General's Department."

5. How do you screen for family violence and power imbalances before and during mediation?

Why they ask

This is central to the role and tests your practical approach.

How to structure your answer

Process explanation: describe your screening process, how you use it, and how you adapt.

Example answer

"I screen at multiple points: during the initial intake, before each session, and during the session itself. I use a structured risk assessment tool, such as the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework, and I ask direct but sensitive questions about any history of violence, fear, controlling behaviour, and child safety. I also look for power imbalances, such as one party dominating the conversation or making decisions for the other. If I identify risks, I adjust the process. That might mean separate sessions, shuttle mediation, or deciding that mediation is not appropriate. I document all screening and any referrals I make."

6. How do you build rapport with clients who are distressed or angry?

Why they ask

This assesses your empathy and communication skills.

How to structure your answer

STAR or describe your approach: explain your techniques, then give an example.

Example answer

"I start by acknowledging their emotions and letting them know that it is normal to feel overwhelmed. I use active listening, reflect back what they say, and maintain a calm, neutral tone. I explain the process clearly so they know what to expect. For example, in a recent mediation, one parent arrived very angry and refused to sit in the same room as the other. I spent time with them individually, listened to their concerns, and explained that the mediation was an opportunity to be heard. By the end of the session, they were able to participate in a joint session and reached an agreement about their child's schooling. I always ensure I remain impartial and focused on the children's best interests."