

SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION COMMITTEE  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**Output 1.1**

**Question No. 17**

**Senator Stott-Despoja asked the following question at the hearing on 31 October 2005:**

- a) Can the Department explain the rationale for excluding lawyers from Family Relationship Centres?
- b) How will it be ensured that parties attending family dispute resolution are given access to legal advice before being required to reach a final agreement on a parenting plan?

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

The Government wants to see a cultural change in how parenting issues are resolved after separation, with parenting after separation treated as a relationship issue rather than a legal issue. For this reason, Family Relationship Centres will not provide legal advice to clients and clients will not be legally represented in sessions conducted at the Centres.

However, parents will be free to obtain legal advice at any time and Centres will be expected to refer clients to legal advice when appropriate, particularly where it helps them to reach agreement. Centres will be expected to develop cooperative relationships with legal service providers (private practitioners, legal aid commissions and/or community providers such as community legal centres and women's legal services) in order to ensure clients have access to relevant and timely legal advice to assist them in resolving their dispute.