Smartphone apps for separated co-parents

Separated co-parents can access a range of smartphone applications (apps) which are designed to support co-parenting communication. Some of these apps are free, while others have an annual fee. Apps usually include a messaging tool, shared calendar, expense tracker, shared documents library, and the ability to export a record of communication between co-parents.

Between 2021 and 2023, Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) took part in a collaborative research project investigating 9 popular apps used by separated co-parents[1]. One main aim of this research was to help you – as separated co-parents – make an informed choice about whether using an app is right for you.

What we did

- Our mediators tested 9 apps by role-playing separated co-parents who were experiencing high conflict and using the apps to complete 5 common communication or organisational tasks.
- We also surveyed app users and a range of family law professionals (e.g. lawyers, mediators).

What we found

- On average, our mediators rated all apps 'poor' to 'fair', on a scale ranging from 'terrible' to 'excellent'.
- They generally found messaging features easy to use, while calendar features were harder to use.
- Around half (49%) of all app users surveyed felt that using an app had helped to reduce conflict.

Should you use a co-parenting app?

Using any co-parenting app will involve potential risks and benefits, which will vary between families. If deciding whether to use a co-parenting app, and/or which app to use, consider your family's circumstances and what your relationship with your co-parent is like.

Risks and benefits of apps

Potential benefits	Potential risks
Accountability: Apps provide a complete record of communication, which may mean communication is more civil and respectful.	If one co-parent is more committed to using an app than the other, or either/both co-parents find it hard to use the technology, it can be a frustrating experience.
Containment: If there is conflict and/or stress between co-parents, an app can limit this to just one channel of communication.	Apps may replace more direct communication, such as face-to-face or phone conversations which can be healthy for children of cooperative co-parents to see.
Convenience: Apps which offer multiple functions allow co-parents to keep everything in one place, including messages, a calendar and expense-tracking. This can help to improve organisation and information-sharing between co-parents.	Expense-tracking and record-keeping functions may encourage petty account-keeping (e.g. for financial and/or legal purposes).
	A shared calendar may set the expectation that co-parents have the right to monitor each other's movements. This can facilitate controlling and/or abusive behaviour.

Other questions for separated co-parents to consider

- Why do you want to use a co-parenting app?
- Which app features are most important to you?
- Can both co-parents commit to using an app?
- Does the app need to be free, or can you afford/are you willing to pay for an app?

Family violence support

If you feel unsafe right now, please call 000 (triple zero) immediately.

For free, 24/7 crisis support call Safe Steps (Victoria) on 1800 015 188 or 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732.

To find out how we can assist you, visit rav.org.au/affected-family-violence or speak to your practitioner. Please note that RAV is not a crisis service.

---

[1] The research was funded by the Australian Research Council with support from Relationships Australia Canberra and Region, and RAV. The lead organisation was the Australian National University, Chief Investigator Professor Bruce Smyth.

Popular smartphone apps for separated co-parents

Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

TABLE 1 Basic descriptors of the rated apps (N = 9).

Descriptor	2forKids	2houses	Amicable	AppClose	Divvito	Fayr	OFW	Peaceful parent	Talking parents	No. apps	Mean
Price											
Free trial of full version	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	–	–	–	5	N/A
Free Limited version	✓	–	–	✓	✓	–	–	✓	✓	5	N/A
Full app Free	–	–	–	✓	✓	–	–	–	–	2	N/A
Annual cost[a] (2 parents, full version, all features) (AUD)	$180	$160	$165	$0	$0	$290	$240	$196	$396	N/A	$232[b]
Multiple languages (as indicated in the app store)	✓	✓	–	–	–	✓	–	–	–	3	N/A
Web version available	✓	✓	–	–	–	–	✓	–	✓	4	N/A
Nuisance factors											
In app ads	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
Features in app not available in AU	–	–	✓	✓	–	–	–	–	✓	–	N/A
Overt bugs	✓	–	✓	–	✓	–	–	–	–	–	N/A
Average file size (MB)	71.1 MB	75.3 MB	25.2 MB	218.2 MB	24.3 MB	68.6 MB	67.3 MB	30.8 MB	188.5 MB	N/A	82.3 MB
Guidance to navigate app											
Tutorial or user guide available on web	–	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	8	N/A
Quality ratings (AU app store)[c]											
If rated, average number of stars (1–5)	–	4.3	–	4.6	2.9	3.9	2	4.3	4.1	N/A	3.7
Written reviews available	–	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	7	N/A
No. of ratings	–	n = 40	–	n = 369	n = 15	n = 7	n = 31	n = 12	n = 244	–	n = 96
Who can use the app											
2 separated parents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	N/A
1 separated parent (alone)	–	–	–	✓	–	–	–	–	–	1	N/A
Third party (children)	✓	✓	–	–	–	–	✓	–	–	4	N/A
Third party (other family etc.)	✓	✓	–	✓	–	–	✓	✓	–	6	N/A
Third party (professionals – if diff/sep to above)	–	–	–	–	–	–	✓	–	–	1	N/A
Functions											
Messaging	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	N/A
Language filter/ Tone monitors	–	–	–	–	✓	–	✓	✓	–	3	N/A
Shared calendar	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓	8	N/A
Expense sharing	✓	✓	–	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓	6	N/A
File store/vault/share (separate to Messaging)	✓	✓	–	✓	–	✓	✓	–	✓	7	N/A
Data extraction for legal purposes	–	PC only	✓	✓	✓	✓	PC only	✓	✓	8	N/A
Other features	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	N/A

[a]Costs for Apple store subscriptions, current at 23 August 2022. Rounded to nearest dollar.
[b]Excludes free apps.
[c]Apple Store reviews current at 23 August 2022.

This table provides basic information about the 9 apps that were tested as part of our research project.

This information is correct as of 2022 but is subject to change.

RAV does not endorse or recommend any particular app. We encourage clients to consider their personal circumstances before using an app.

Any method of communication can be misused, particularly in situations of family violence.

Source:
Smyth et al. (2023) Popular post-separation parenting apps: an evaluation. *Family Court Review*, 61: 563-585.