Australian
National
University

Post-Separation Parenting App Information

Contents

Welcome to the Post-Separation Parenting App Information Study

We do not endorse any particular app. Rather, this site provides independent information to help separated parents and family law system professionals make an informed choice about which app or app feature might meet a family's circumstances, needs, and budget.

The digital communication landscape changes rapidly. Much of the information provided seeks to help separated parents to think about what they might need for their own situation.

The information presented on this site is based on independent academic research from a 2-year study of parenting apps conducted by the Australian National University and Relationships Australia Partner Organisations in 2021-2022.

Background

Numerous apps are now available in Australia to help separated parents with their communication and parenting arrangements. These apps vary in cost, ease of use, and features. They usually include a messaging tool and a way to export records for legal purposes. Many apps also offer a shared calendar, expense tracker, and a way to share children's health information, other documents and photos. A challenge for many separated parents is knowing which apps and app features can work well for different family circumstances, needs and budgets.

In 2021–2022, we evaluated 9 popular post-separation parenting apps from Australia and overseas. We looked at what features they had, and how easy they were to use. We also explored the potential benefits and risks of using these apps.

How did we conduct the evaluation?

Using timed, structured, high-conflict role plays based on common post-separation parenting tasks (messaging, scheduling children's overnight stays, etc.), 30 divorce mediators from Relationships Australia (Canberra, and Victoria) tested the apps in pairs. Experienced mediators were used as raters because they were best placed to role play high-conflict scenarios and rate the various app features. Testing apps with separated parents would have been unethical because some apps or app features might involve potential risks of harm. No efficacy data

are currently available on post-separation parenting apps. Rater pairs and apps were randomised to reduce potential biases. Each app was evaluated by three different mediator pairs using a rating tool developed by the research team and Melbourne tech company, Portable. Detailed information about the study and key findings can be found in our academic publications (see Publications section at the end of this document).

Safety first

If you have any concerns for your and/or your children's safety, you should consider whether a particular app is appropriate. If you're worried about your safety or unsure about whether you are at risk of violence, contact 1800 Respect. This service can help you identify family violence. It's free, confidential and available 24/7.

If you, or someone you are with, is in immediate danger, call 000.

Separated parents, including those who are fearful of the other parent, often value the evidence-collection function of apps.

All apps have potential risks and benefits depending on the context and each family's unique circumstances.

Questions to ask yourself before choosing an app

1. **Purpose:** Why do you want to use an app?
2. **Key feature(s):** Which feature(s) is most important to you:

   - messaging;
   - a shared calendar;
   - keeping track of expenses;
   - sharing information;
   - accountability (i.e., being able to export certain messages to a lawyer or court, or to allow monitoring by a 3rd party).

3. **Longevity:** Apps come and go. Are you likely to need the app for a short period or might you need an app that has been around for some time and is likely to be around into the future? Losing access to an app because it is no longer available or updated that contains sensitive and personal information can be very frustrating.
4. **Simplicity and specificity:** Simplicity and ease of use might be important if one or both parents are not very tech savvy. Some parents might prefer to use an app that does one thing well (e.g., messaging or evidence collection). Others might want two apps that each do a different thing need well. Still others might have more expansive needs. The more features, the more time generally required to learn how to use the app. Be careful of 'feature-itis' – too many features can be overwhelming, especially if a parent is not tech savvy.
5. **Cost:** Must the app be free/affordable or can you and/or your former partner afford to pay for an app's subscription each year? Some apps require each parent to pay; others allow only one parent to pay. Be wary of free apps; Some may be free but might on-sell your data to marketing companies as their funding model. This should be clear in their Terms & Conditions. Bear in mind that whichever app you start with, you are likely to stick with it once you start putting in personal and potentially sensitive data. Starting with an app to try out because it's free might not be wise in the long-term.
6. **Data security:** Australian apps based on servers in Australia offer stronger privacy protection than apps with servers overseas. This is because your information is protected by the Australian Privacy Act 1988.
7. **Tone/sentiment analysis:** Some apps can flag certain offensive language; some apps can restrict the number and timing of messages. Is this important? While some apps offer the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to craft messages/replies, judicial officers tend to favour reading parents' raw communication.
8. **Buy-in:** Without buy-in from both parents, using an app may be fighting gravity. Obviously, there is little use in purchasing a subscription if one parent is not going to use an app or stick with it.

Key findings from our study

- There is no 'best' app. Rather, different features on different apps are likely to suit different family circumstances, needs, and budgets.
- Most apps, on average, were rated by mediators between 'Poor' and 'Fair'. (The rating scale was 1 = 'Worst possible', 2 = 'Awful', 3 = 'Poor', 4 = 'Fair', 5 = 'Good', 6 = 'Excellent', 7 = 'Best imaginable'.)
- While messaging features were generally well-rated, mediators found the shared calendar, expense tracking, and downloading functions difficult to use on the apps we examined in 2022.
- Some lesser-known apps were rated better than more popular ones.
- When choosing a parenting app, it's essential to be cautious because once you input personal and children's information, changing to another app can be annoying. Starting over with a new app might involve re-entering all your data, which is often very time consuming for busy parents.
- There is no cheap, quick, easy fix for strained or menacing post-separation communication. That said, a small recent follow-up study by one of our team members, Michelle Irving, indicates that apps can help to set boundaries for parents in high-conflict or potentially unsafe circumstances.
- If an app is court-ordered, there needs to be a 'sunset clause' so that parents are not stuck in an app for a long time, especially if it is not helping or is no longer available. (A sunset clause is a provision in a law that sets an expiration date, ending its effect after a specified period unless renewed.)

- Mediators in the study who rated the apps became less enthusiastic about post-separation parenting apps after they had actually tried them.
- After trying apps for themselves, many mediators reported they would not recommend an app until they tried it.
- Many mediators expected each app to have a monitoring function to stop users from sending inappropriate, abusive, or too many messages. Only some apps have this function. They varied in function, form and quality.

Key aspects to look for in different features

Messaging

The messaging functions in the apps we examined were all rated highly. This makes sense since this feature is relatively simple to develop, and there are many existing communication apps on which to base key features.

But there are important differences in the way some messaging systems operate:

- Are 'read receipts' important? Is it important to know if someone has opened a message, and what date and time this was done?
- Do you want to receive a notification of a message only when you are in the app or is it important that you are notified even when the app is not open?
- What type of alert would you like on receipt of a message: sound and/or a pop-up?
- Is the ability to restrict the number of messages received in each 24-hour period and what time of day or night it was received?
- Are different options for the type of messages you can receive or send (e.g., fixed number of characters; editable pre-written scripts) needed?
- Is it important for you to be able to have a subject header on a thread so you know what a message is about, or so you can group messages?
- Is it important for you to be able to flag certain messages you receive as abusive, menacing, or containing profanities, or would you appreciate

being told how to improve your message so that it is Brief, Informative, Friendly, and Firm (BIFF, as developed by Bill Eddy)?

Downloading records for lawyers & court

The ability to download messages or events for possible use in legal proceedings is one of the most common reasons post-separation parenting apps are used. A critical feature here is the ability to flag certain messages or events and extract them for a certain date range. Many apps simply download every message and event that has been entered. This can amount to a large amount of information over several months or years. This is likely to be expensive if a lawyer needs to read and select key messages. A judge only needs a small number of examples to understand the nature of interparental conflict, family dynamics, or coercive control.

If you can test an app, find out to what extent you can download certain messages for a particular day, week, or month rather than having to download everything. See if you can flag certain messages (or events) and just download those messages that have been flagged.

Calendar/Scheduling

Setting up a residential calendar for when children will be in the care of each parent can be one of the most difficult tasks to do on a smartphone. This is why some apps allow you to set up children's overnight stays with each parent initially on a desktop computer and a much larger screen than a mobile phone. For a small fee, some apps allow you to pay for initial calendar set-up.

Check that both parents can change the arrangements with the other parent's permission rather than have only one parent with control. Some apps keep a record of who-owes-who nights on certain screens, which can promote conflict or litigious behaviour. Also check the level of detail allowed (e.g., exact pick-up and drop-off times); how easy it is to identify in whose care the children will be; and how easy it is for each parent to arrange any last-minute changes if needed.

Expense tracker

Money matters. In Australia, there are no strict guidelines on how child support payments should be spent. Typically, child support is used to cover the various costs of raising a child, including food, clothing, housing, healthcare, school books, and other activities. Child support is often not enough to cover other expenses like children's extracurricular activities, private tuition fees, private health insurance, and additional costs for a child's special needs.

Expense trackers can help to record child-related expenses where (a) parents might be outside of the formal child support system; (b) have more complex arrangements (e.g., shared-time arrangements, or split residence arrangements involving different time splits of children of different ages); and (c) parents want to track extra-curricular activities and/or other expenses for children (e.g., mobile phone plans; streaming services).

Expense trackers in some apps allow parents to agree on different percentage contributions, and to keep track of who-owes-who what.

Sharing information, documents and photos

The ability to share important documents and information can be critical if children have health and/or dietary requirements. Sharing children's homework tasks and documents (e.g., immunization records, school achievement certificates) can be very useful.

Several apps allow the sharing of documents, schedules and photos, making it easier for parents to stay organised and access necessary information quickly. This function can help to minimise potential conflicts, and foster collaboration between parents.

If photo sharing is available, check that the photos are not just thumbnail pictures that can easily be sent by accident. That is, photo previews should be large enough so that selection is accurate.

Ideally all of the various features described should be able to be switched on or off, with any changes to functions notified to both parents.

Privacy: australian post-separation parenting apps

There is something to be said for using a post-separation parenting app developed in Australia for use in Australia.

Some apps from overseas use local legal language (e.g., 'custody' and 'access') that does not apply in Australia. Some apps even slip into a local foreign language.

Apps from overseas may not be able to protect your data under the Australian Privacy Act 1988. For instance, data retained on US servers or in 'the cloud' are accessible by the US Government under the USA Patriot Act 2001.

There are currently four Australian apps available, with other Australian apps under development:

- https://amica.gov.au/
- CoOperate
- https://divvito.com/
- https://www.ourchildren.com.au/

Indicative costs*

	Name	Country of origin	Cost ($AUD) Two parents
1	2forkids	USA	Unavailable
2	2houses	Belgium	$199.99
3	Amicable	UK	$159.00
4	AppClose	USA	Free
5	Divvito	Aust	Free
6	Fayr (now called CoOperate in Australia)	USA	$198.00
7	Our Family Wizard	USA	$186 each
8	Peaceful Parenting	USA	Unknown
9	Talking Parents	USA	$491.16 each (for all functions)
10	WeParent	USA	$150.38 each

Please note: The cost of overseas apps will vary in Australia due to changes in international currency rates

Functions by app

	Messaging	Calendar	Expense tracker	Sharing information	Downloading reports	Other
2forkids	√	√	√	√	√	√
2houses	√	√	√	√	√	√
Amicable	√	√	X	X	√	√
AppClose	√	√	√	√	√	√
Divvito	√	√	X	√	√	√
Fayr	√	√	√	√	√	√
Our Family Wizard	√	√	√	√	√	√
Peaceful Parenting	√	X	X	X	√	√
Talking Parents	√	√	√	√	√	√
WeParent	√	√	X	√	√	√

Source: Smyth, Payne, Heard & Irving (2023)

Other available apps

Name	Address
Alimentor 2: Child Custody Log	https://alimentor.org/en/
BEEAmicable Divorce	https://app.net/a/5JMMC88QI1Ni
Coparently	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.coparentalys.coparentalys&hl=en_US
Cozi Family Organizer	https://www.cozi.com/
Custody Calendar	https://appadvice.com/app/custody-calendar/852286910
Daisy	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=au.com.medibank.daisy&hl=en_AU
DComply: Co Parenting Expense Sharing	https://www.dcomply.com/
DivorceSource	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.coparentalys.coparentalys&hl=en_US
FamCal: Shared Family Calendar	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.appxy.famcal&hl=en
FamiliPay	https://familipay.com/
Family Core	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=tech.hourglass.familycore https://thefamilycore.com/"
LeLo Divorce and Custody	https://apps.apple.com/au/app/lelo-divorce-and-custody/id1135479532
Our days Calendar	https://ourdayscalendar.com/
Parentship	https://parentship.en.aptoide.com/app
PlenoFamily	https://apps.apple.com/au/app/plenofamily/id557565843
Shared Calendar	https://apps.apple.com/au/app/shared-calendar/id601941101
SmartCoparent / Moeity Co-parent schedule	https://smartcoparent.com/
SupportPay - Child Support, Expenses & Alimony	https://supportpay.com/
Truece	https://truece.com
Unbroken Homes	https://www.unbrokenhomes.com/

2houses | Easier Co-Parenting

'Separated Parents Organizer'

Developer: 2houses S.A.

Website: https://www.2houses.com/en/

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	$199.99*	**Platforms supported**	Apple √ Android √ Web √
Who pays	One parent pays for subscription – covers coparent and additional users.	**Languages supported**	English (UK and US), French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Italian
Options for frequency of subscription*	Monthly √ Annually √	**App last update (at time of review)**	October 2024
Free trial?	Yes √ 14-day free trial	**Country of origin**	Belgium
Who can use the app	Solo X Two Coparents √ Children √ Other family √ Professionals √	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar √ Expenses √ File sharing √ Data download √ Others √

* Some apps charge each user while others charge one subscription to cover all users, additionally some apps charge per month while others charge annually. Some apps advertise only in US dollars which adds an extra element of confusion. To make it easier to compare app costs we have calculated a "comparable cost" in Australian dollars to reflect the combined cost for two coparents to use the app for one year.

App description

2Houses is a multi-purpose parenting app which a very broad array of features and functionality spanning messaging, calendar, expenses, file-sharing and more. It works across iPhone, iPad, Android phones and a website. It can be used between two coparents alone, or between entire extended families. Professionals (lawyers, mediators) can also be invited to use the app.

Key things we like about 2 Houses:

- It's available across a variety of platforms – you don't have to download the app if you just want to use it on the web, for example.
- It is an inclusive app that can just be used by two coparents, or can be used by an extended

family (e.g. invite grandparents or other partners as well as children and professionals). When you invite third parties you can toggle their access to different features (no access, read only, read and write).
- You can also use the app for a second or third blended family (keeping the data separate) if you have children across more than two households.
- You can search messages, which can be an invaluable feature when you are trying to find a particular message where you have been communicating a long period of time.
- The app has a nice user interface and a nice feel to it. In messaging in particular it is very clear what the name of the discussion is, who is invited to it and then what the content is.
- When you sign up they send through a user

guide and a warm welcome email. Further resources are sent through emails.

- You get a "daily digest" email that breaks down all the stuff that's happened on the app/program that day (you can opt out).
- Quite a range of toggling options re notifications.

User considerations and suggestions:

- The third party access (inviting other family members) could be good in many blended families, however in some it may be a cause of conflict – especially if one person invites someone to join the app with whom you do not want to interact. We suggest you think about whether this would be beneficial or not in your situation.
- The app shows whether a message has been read but not what time it was read. Some people might like this feature (as it doesn't make them feel watched by the other person all the time) but for others this might not be a detailed enough capture of message data.
- There is a lot going on in the calendar (lots of options) which could be good for the technically minded, however might lead to confusion and errors.
- Changes made to the calendar that impact the other parent's time do not verify that this change was either observed by the other parent, or permitted by them. E.g. weekly recurring events that cross over into the other parent's time. This may be cause for conflict in some parenting relationships.
- There is no way to download all the data in one step. It must be done on the website and each feature has to be clicked on and then the user has to work out how to get the data, which is different across the features. PDF outputs do not record who requested the data and the pages are not numbered. If you are seeking data over a long period of time this can be very frustrating.
- Be careful when sharing images if the preview is a small thumbnail – it is easy to share the wrong image. as while there is a preview of the image that you share, it is very small. Once an image has been shared it cannot be deleted.
- The website publishes when the app was last used by the other parent (even if they didn't send a message or make any changes) which

has the potential to feel invasive and create a sense of always being watched .

- Apps that do a lot can be a double-edged sword because while they can seem to be good value (everything in one place), they can also become overwhelming in their complexity. What happens in the app can be difficult to track and mistakes can be made. To mitigate this 2Houses keeps an activity log that you can have emailed to you daily, or you can check whenever you log in, and you can toggle notifications to get them by email as well as phone. However, checking the log and receiving many notifications for every action could become tedious – and even with such checks in place, where you have lots of changes occurring across different features there is scope to miss details. The concern that this app was too difficult to use – with too much detail – was a key part of our mediator feedback.
- Taking advantage of the trial period might help you determine if any of the issues raised above are going to be a problem for you or your coparent.

User annoyances

- The calendar struggled in the app and making big changes caused it to crash on some occasions.
- When you get a notification in the Discussions, it's not very obvious which discussion(s) the notification(s) applies to – they all look the same (no bolding or highlighting to show which one you need to click on to see the new message – especially problematic when there are multiple discussions).
- At the time of evaluation, our mediators found that the app did not update messages if you were already in the app – you had to exit the app to see the next reply to a message which could get frustrating and trigger conflict (because of delays where you don't realise a new message has come through).
- Notifications don't always clear logically – in testing we found there was text in the finance/expenses section that we couldn't get rid of and did not know what it was for.
- In Finances when you log an expense it has a toggle "Is this expense subject to reimbursement by a third party organisation". This is a confusing feature as it doesn't clarify

what the implications of clicking on this are. It can be ignored but could lead to mistakes/confusion.

- Sometimes things come up in French and not English – though not often.

Feature Summary

Messages

2Houses has an 'organised' messaging feature which is intuitive to use on the app and the website. Messages can be searched which can be a very useful feature when trying to find a specific detail from conversations that could end up spanning years. Images and files can be attached to messages via the app, though only one at a time. There is a small preview of the image before you send, however it is difficult to discern what the image is in some circumstances and errors could be made. Messages and attachments cannot be edited or deleted once sent. When using the website you can archive messages, which can be useful when a conversation is no longer active. If you have invited others to join the app you are able to use the messaging for group chats as well as one-on-ones.

Notifications for new messages come via the app, emails (which you can opt out of) and via the activity tracker on the website. The in-app notifications can be confusing when there have been a number of messages that related to different 'Discussion' threads (you can see the number of notifications but it's not always clear which threads they relate to).

Calendar

2Houses has a calendar available on the app and the website. In the calendar you can enter custom parenting time schedules or select from a range of existing templates. You can also add special events (e.g. a birthday party) and recurring events (e.g. sports). Items entered do not require the other parent's permission, though they will be notified of changes. You can also use the app to request to swap time with the other parent, which will send through a request that can be accepted or rejected. You can both edit and delete entries that you have made, though not ones that the other parent has made (even when they occur in your parenting time). You can also use the app to create private events that do

not appear in the other parent's calendar.

Changes to the schedules come via in-app notifications, email notifications (if switched on), and on the activity tracker on the website – however we did find that in-app notifications did not seem to consistently come through (or potentially were missed, if multiple things were changed in a short period).

You can export the calendar to an external calendar, however we did not see a way to import an external calendar into the 2Houses calendar.

Expenses

In 2Houses this function does two things:

1. You can request reimbursement for expenses within different categories. You log your request (with notes) and the other person gets a notification. They can accept or reject the request and are prompted to provide the reason for rejection. There doesn't appear to be a pathway to modify (e.g. if you made a mistake with the amount and they rejected for that reason and you want to fix it) – you would have to start over.
2. You can use the app to log that you've made a payment for a nominated amount. There is no way to make the payment through the app, rather you can use the app to notify the other parent that you have paid an owing amount (and how) and the other parent will be notified. They can confirm or reject receipt of payment. The app lets you know the balance of who owes what on the basis of these claimed expenses and claimed payments.

You an edit and delete your own entries (prior to the other party accepting them) and you can attach receipts to the requests for payment. You can also search expenses, which could be very useful.

File sharing

2Houses includes a Journal, Albums, and Folders for filesharing. Through these features the app provides multiple ways for you to share files and/or photos.

- Within the Journal there are Articles, Quotes and Images, however it is not clear what the

purpose of these are (e.g. what images would you put here instead of in the shared album?). They appear to be for collaboratively sharing parenting or child related information.

- Albums allows you to create labelled folders that you can add photos to.
- Folders can only be created and edited/added when using the website, but once a folder has been created it can be seen in the app. Documents can be uploaded and shared here and you can add notes about what you have shared.

Data download

While 2Houses allows for data downloading, it does not do this as well as some other apps. Users cannot request data via the app; they must use the website. There is no way to download all data, rather each feature has to be brought up individually and then the user has to work out how to get the data from that feature. The PDF output does not record who requested the data and the pages are not numbered. It is a very basic, minimal, text document. Such data may be intended to help with organising purposes rather than legal. The calendar allows multiple ways to export (e.g. to external calendars, to a PDF calendar, and as a record) but does not include a fine level of detail about changes.

Other features

There is a beta version of in-app calls that is a new feature of 2Houses. You can use the app to connect with the other users and to make audio or video calls. The detail of this new feature has not been explored (whether you can opt out, for example, and whether calls are logged in some way).

There is a contact list for sharing contact information.

On the website there is also a 'wishlist' and shopping list as part of the expenses function. (We did not explore these.)

This app is available in a number of languages and is frequently updated – showing that it is actively being worked on.

amicable coparenting

'The app for co-parents'

Developer: Amicable

Website: https://amicable.io/coparenting-app

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	$159.00*	**Platforms supported**	Apple √ Android √ Web X
Who pays	One parent pays a subscription that can cover both.	**Languages supported**	English
Options for frequency of subscription*	Monthly √ Annually √	**Country of origin**	United Kingdom
Free trial?	Yes - 30 days	**App last updated (at time of review)**	October 2024
Who can use the app	Solo X Two Coparents √ Children X Other family X Professionals X	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar √ Expenses X File sharing X Data download √ Others √

* Some apps charge each user while others charge one subscription to cover all users, additionally some apps charge per month while others charge annually. Some apps advertise only in US dollars which adds an extra element of confusion. To make it easier to compare app costs we have calculated a "comparable cost" in Australian dollars to reflect the combined cost for two coparents to use the app for one year.

App description

Amicable is a multi-purpose parenting app with several features including: messaging, calendar and data download. It works across iPhones, iPads, and android phones. It is only designed for use between two coparents.

Key things we like about Amicable:

- It has a 30 day free trial so parents can more thoroughly test it out before committing.
- In addition to entering children in the app (for the purpose of schedules – not as users), you can also include pets.
- The app subscription entitles you to a short session with a parenting coach. You can book the times through the app (though they are based in the UK which could be problematic if you need AU specific guidance, additionally the available appointments are limited because of UK time difference).
- In keeping with the name of the app, the processes in the app are designed to try and help parents work together 'amicably' and collaboratively – you can set 'goals' together to optimise your parenting (but note this may mean the app is not suitable for parents experiencing conflict).
- Chats can be archived – this is a helpful for reducing clutter and hiding conversations that you don't want to revisit (e.g. if they were upsetting).
- When you add a new parenting schedule you are given the option to "share with partner",

making it clear that you are making a change that impacts the other person and that they will be notified. They then have the opportunity to Confirm or Reject. A number of apps that we reviewed do not notify the other parent when a change is made in the calendar so additions and deletions just seem to appear, which could cause conflict.

- In the calendar there are additional school pick up and drop off schedules that some parents might find useful.
- It's a nice user interface – easy to navigate and not overloaded with features.

User considerations and suggestions

These are observations our team has made that may or may not apply to your situation, but are worth thinking through before committing to Amicable.

- When only one parent has to pay and there is no obvious process to share the cost, it could lead to conflict. The paying parent could feel that they are more out of pocket than the other – while the other parent may feel like they are not in control of their own subscription and would prefer to have paid separately. Even if there is a subsequent agreement to reimburse in order to share the cost, it's an extra administrative step and implications for future subscriptions are not always clear.
- In the sign-up process it is not always obvious that the subscription of the first parent who signs up will cover both parents – it's possible that the other parent could sign up and also pay a subscription, unnecessarily.
- The chat does not indicate whether a message has been read by the other party and does not record time and date of being read (which some apps do). This is either a benefit or a disadvantage, depending on your situation and preferences. If you have a coparent who claims not to have seen messages (that they have seen), this could be a problem. If you have a coparent who harasses you because they can see that you have read their message, but you haven't replied yet, this could be an advantage.
- The data download is not as detailed or useful as some others. You are not prompted to put in a date range and the PDF pages you receive are

not numbered. This means you will potentially get hundreds of pages that could be easily muddled if printed out. The output also doesn't reflect when the request was submitted (date and time) or by whom. There is data that it doesn't capture (such as changes to calendar schedules, when messages have been read, and who sent images in the messages).

- Be careful when sharing images as there is no preview of the image before you send. When you want to share an image you need to click on it in your phone's gallery, however this app will send it straight away rather than loading it and showing a preview. This means that there is no safeguard against accidentally sending the wrong image (which our testers experienced).
- You can't search messages in this app – this could cause difficulty when trying to retrieve a specific piece of information from your correspondence with a coparent (keeping in mind communication could potentially span a number of years).
- We experienced several bugs – see below in User annoyances.
- Taking advantage of the free trial can help you determine if any of the issues raised above are going to be a problem for you or your coparent.

User annoyances

- We had an issue connecting one of our accounts with another – it kept saying that it was waiting for the other parent to connect. However when we contacted support, this was quickly resolved.
- Date format in the Data download can be confusing, e.g. 2022-03-04 (is that April 3rd or 4th March?).
- The app has a bug where it prompts for the log-in code twice in a row. There is a bug for editing events where an edit button appears but does not seem to do anything (can't save). We also found a bug in the calendar where a schedule has been deleted – the other parent receives a notification but the content of the notification was blank (so it was not clear what action had happened).
- The app was slower than some others and we experienced it crashing or getting stuck on multiple occasions.
- The app cost is displayed in Pounds until you

go to put through the subscription.
- It asks for children's date of birth – information on child ages and genders does not impact the use of an app and we do not think apps need to ask for this information.

Feature summary

Messages Amicable has an 'organised' messaging feature. Users can create 'Chats' with subject titles of their choosing, as well as a subset of pre-existing chat themes (Education, Expenses, Holidays, Travel). You cannot edit or delete messages that have been sent or attachments to messages – they are permanent.

AppClose

'The Best App for Co-Parents.'

Developer: AppClose, Inc

Website: https://appclose.com/

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	Free	**Platforms supported**	Apple √ Android √ Web X
Who pays	Free to all users	**Languages supported**	English
Options for frequency of subscription*	n/a - free	**Country of origin**	United States
Free trial?	n/a - free	**App last updated (at time of review)**	September 2024
Who can use the app	Solo √ Two Coparents √ Children √ Other family √ Professionals X	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar √ Expenses √ File sharing √ Data download √ Others √

* Some apps charge each user while others charge one subscription to cover all users, additionally some apps charge per month while others charge annually. Some apps advertise only in US dollars which adds an extra element of confusion. To make it easier to compare app costs we have calculated a "comparable cost" in Australian dollars to reflect the combined cost for two coparents to use the app for one year.

App description

AppClose is a multi-purpose parenting app with multiple features including messaging, calendar, expenses, file sharing and data download. It works across iPhone, iPad, iWatch and Android phones. It has flexible usage: parents can use many of the features solo (for record keeping purposes); it can be used by two coparents; and it can also be used between extended family members and children.

Key things we like about AppClose:

- It is free so parents have the opportunity to thoroughly test it out before committing to using it.
- It is an inclusive app that can just be used by two coparents, or can be used by other family members (e.g. invite grandparents or other

partners, as well as children).
- You can create different family 'circles' so that you can use the app across more than one family.
- Both parties can comment on expenses and calendar items, and those comments are then kept as part of the record.
- If you want to keep a record of interactions in the app, you can use it 'solo' and can send things to the other parent's email address within the app (so that they don't have to use the app).
- It lets you preview files and photos before sharing and will ask you if you are sure you want to share before sending files to the other parent.

User considerations and suggestions

These are observations our team has made that may or may not apply to your situation but are worth thinking through before committing to AppClose.

- Apps that do a lot can be a double-edged sword: while they can seem to present good value with their multifunctionality (everything in one place), they can also become overwhelming in their complexity. They can be more difficult to learn to use in the first place, easier to become confused and make mistakes, and be more difficult to track changes (because so much can happen in the one space – the notifications can be endless and/or can get lost).
- The third-party access (inviting other family members) could be good in many blended families, however in some it may be a cause of conflict – especially if one person invites someone to join the app with whom you do not want to interact. We suggest you think about whether this would be beneficial or not in your situation.
- There isn't one easy place to export data – you will have to go into each function and work out how to do it within that function.
- You can't search messages in this app – this could cause difficulty when trying to retrieve a specific piece of information from your correspondence with a coparent (keeping in mind communication could potentially span a number of years).
- Because the app is free you can set your own 'trial period' at no cost. Trial periods can help you determine if any of the issues raised above are going to be a problem for you or your coparent.
- You do not need to log in to this app and at no point are you asked to create a password so if your phone is unlocked anyone can open the app which has privacy and security implications.

User annoyances

- US-centric: much of the advertising and email communications are about the US system.
- There are five tabs at the bottom of the app which link to the app's major functions. One of these tabs only opens to a page that says "Coming soon... ipayyou is not currently available in your country...", which has been the case since we first downloaded AppClose (2021).
- The calendar is the home view of AppClose and it creates a very busy feel to the app, even when nothing is scheduled. You can choose to create multiple calendars however it is then difficult to keep track of which one you are looking at.
- The record of expenses is integrated into the calendar rather than being a standalone feature, which adds to confusion.

Feature Summary

Messages

AppClose has an 'simple' messaging feature. Users open the chat straight up and begin messaging with the other parent (or other connections in the app). Chats are not organised into subjects or themes. You can have one-to-one chats or group chats. You can attach files from your phone to the chat.

You cannot edit or delete messages that have been sent or attachments to messages – they are permanent.

The app records the time and date when messages were sent and indicates that they have been read by the other person, however it does not show the time and date when they were read by the other person. This information is available when you export the chat data.

Messages cannot be searched which can make it difficult to find a specific detail from conversations that could be months, or even years, old.

Messages cannot be archived.

AppClose has a 'bookmark' feature where you can bookmark a message to make it easier to relocate at a later time.

Calendar

AppClose has a calendar available on the app. In the calendar where you can enter custom parenting

time schedules or select from a range of existing templates.

You can also create special events (e.g. a birthday party) and recurring events (e.g. sports) that you can choose to share with the other parent or keep private.

You can add notes (a memo) to calendar entries and you also can tag which child calendar entries concern.

AppClose did not notify the other parent about changes made to the parenting schedule, but did notify regarding events.

AppClose lets you create requests to swap time with the other parent, which will notify the other parent and prompt them to accept or reject the request.

You cannot delete or edit the other person's calendar entries, only your own (and vice versa).

You can export the AppClose calendar to an external calendar and you can import an external calendar into the calendar.

We could not work out how to AppClose calendar entries.

You can create different calendars within AppClose, however we found this made the calendar very confusing to use. Additionally expense requests are made through the calendar (see below) which added to the confusion.

Expenses

AppClose has two expense related features – one that is unavailable in Australia ("ipayyou") – a feature which appears to be made to facilitate payment between parents and requires users to be located in the USA. The second is a record of expenses and works through the calendar. It lets you note and share expenses that have been incurred on certain dates.

You can add attachments to each expense and notes (memos).

You can tag which child each expense relates to and the expense category (using pre-existing categories or custom ones that you create). This will notify the other parent, who can accept or reject the expense.

They can then enter when they have made the reimbursement and how, including attachments and notes. Each reimbursement can be accepted or rejected by the receiving parent.

AppClose keeps a record of the expenses and reimbursements over time including the balance and the status (Pending, Approved, Declined, Paid and Cancelled by each parent).

Expenses can be edited and deleted by the creator, prior to them being accepted or rejected by the other parent. Each time a new expense or reimbursement is shared it also appears in the chat part of the app.

File sharing

AppClose lets you share files (photos and documents) about each child you have registered in the app. It provides pre-set categories for this purpose. The categories are: Important reminders, Medical, Measurements, Education, Childcare, and Additional notes. Each one of these categories has its own set of sub-menus relevant to that category (e.g. the Medical category has a Wellness Log, Immunisations, Medications, Allergies and Doctor info that you can share). You can write a memo and attach files for each entry. You can choose whether or not to share each entry with your coparent or other users with a clear share toggle switch, and then clicking on each user who you are connected and wish to share with.

AppClose clearly previews files before posting, which is an important safeguard against accidentally sharing the wrong information. Further, when you save a new entry it will also bring up a prompt "Are you sure you want to share this information?", which is an additional safeguard. This will then send the coparent a "New information merge" which opens up straight away (even if you are doing something else in the app). The other parent can choose to 'merge' that information into their records or click X to close. If accepted, the information is independently saved to their account (it is duplicated to their record). Each parent can make changes (edit or delete) to their own, independent record without it impacting the other parent's record. If you make an edit to a file that had been shared, and then share again with the coparent, rather than merging with the existing record, it creates a new record. This could become confusing if there are multiple records with the same title.

If you close the "New information merge" before accepting the merge, there does not seem to be a way to get it back – it just disappears (you would have to ask the other parent to share it again).

We could not determine a way to export data from the information sharing part of AppClose. As such, if a coparent chose to misuse this part of the app to send harassing messages or images, it might be difficult to capture.

Data download

You can request to export chat and expenses data through the app. It will generate an email with a link. The link opens a PDF.

The AppClose logo appears in the header of the export. The user who generated the report and the time and date that the report was generated is recorded in the PDF. Pages are also numbered.

The chat export includes the text of messages sent, who sent them and the date and time they were sent and viewed. It includes images that have been sent as part of the chat.

The expenses export includes the date that an expense is incurred, as well as the date that the expense was created in the app. It also records details such as the amount, category, and which child the expense relates to. However, it does not appear to record which parent created the expense.

Reimbursements can be exported separately from expenses but you would then have to compare the two reports to see if reimbursements cancel out expenses.

Other features

AppClose has a new in-app audio/video call feature. It appears within the chat part of the app. Each parent must give permission for calls to be able to take place (if you do not give permission to the other coparent, you cannot receive calls and vice versa). At the time of review this was a new feature and we did not test it extensively.

The main other feature is the app's capacity to be used as a solo resource, or for extended family connections (creating family circles).

CoOperate Co-parenting app

(formerly Fayr in the USA)

Developer: FAYR LLC, purchased and improved in Australia by The Co-Parenting Institute Pty Ltd

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	$198*	**Platforms supported**	Apple Android
Who pays	Both parents pay for subscription – covers coparent and additional users. ($99 per parent)	**Languages supported**	English (UK and US),
Options for frequency of subscription*	Monthly $9.99 Annually $99	**App last update (at time of review)**	November 2024, was updated July 2024
Free trial?	No	**Country of origin**	USA but updated and modified for Australia Australia
Who can use the app	Two Co-parents Professionals	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar with negotiation √ Expenses √ File sharing √ Data download √ GPS check in √ Private journal √

* Some apps charge each user while others charge one subscription to cover all users, additionally some apps charge per month while others charge annually. Some apps advertise only in US dollars which adds an extra element of confusion. To make it easier to compare app costs we have calculated a "comparable cost" in Australian dollars to reflect the combined cost for two coparents to use the app for one year.

App description

CoOperate is a multi-purpose coparenting app which has a broad range of features and functionality spanning messaging, calendar, expenses, file-sharing and more. It works across iPhone and Android phones. It can be used between two co-parents. Family law system professionals (e.g., lawyers, mediators, counsellors) can also be invited to use the app.

This original American version of this app, Fayr, was evaluated as part of our study but the release of the Australian upgrade, CoOperate was not evaluated.

Feature summary

Messages

CoOperate has an 'organised' messaging feature which is intuitive to use on the app. Images and files can be attached to messages via the app, and a large preview of the image appears on the screen before sending. Messages and attachments cannot be edited or deleted once sent.

Notifications for new messages come via the app. They appear on your homescreen. These notifications can be temporarily turned off.

Calendar

CoOperate has a calendar in the app. In the calendar you can enter custom parenting time schedules. You can also flag special events (e.g. a birthday party) and recurring events (e.g. sports). Items entered do not require the other parent's permission, though they will be notified of changes. You can also use the app to request to swap time with the other parent, which will send through a request that can be accepted or rejected. You can both edit and delete entries that you have made, though not ones that the other parent has made (even when they occur in your parenting time). The calendar can be synced to the calendar on your own phone.

Changes to the schedules come via in-app notifications.

Expenses

CoOperate has an expenses feature that parents can use to share a record of child related costs.

You can add up to three attachments for each expense and there is the option to add a note. Expenses can be edited and deleted by the creator.

You can tag which child it relates to and the expense category (using pre-existing categories but no custom ones). You can indicate the percentage breakdown of what you would like the other parent to pay.

When you create a new expense, the other parent is notified and is able to view what has been entered. They are not given the option to accept or reject the expense, or to mark anything as reimbursed. The app keeps a tally of expenses that have been entered in the 'year to date' of each parent and a percentage record of who has spent more or less ("--% of total expenses logged").

File sharing

CoOperate includes a Private Journal (unsharable), and a File Vault for filesharing. Through these features the app provides multiple ways for you to share files and/or photos.

This app was initially tested as the US app Fayr (see below). We have not tested the more recent Australian version which has been updated for the Australian context. This means some of the issues raised below may no longer apply.

- The Private Journal can be used to record confidential personal notes such as "handover was difficult today. Maybe neutral places work better?"
- The File Vault is where both parents can upload important documents they want to share, e.g. medicare/passport/school reports/immunization records. Documents can be uploaded and shared here and you can add notes about what you have shared.

You can create a Title for each upload and notes. You can edit your own entries and delete your own entries, but not the other parent's. Other than the title, there are no organising principles to the Vault (no categories and no ability to tag a child) – it appears to just be an open repository for files. There is a search function to help parents find specific files.

There does not appear to be any way to export data from the The Vault. As such, if a coparent chose to misuse this part of the app to send harassing messages or images, it might be difficult to capture.

Export Data

CoOperate allows for data exporting. Users can choose to export all data or a selection of data , for example only messaging and expense tracker, with a push of a tab within the app.

Users can click on 'Export' and 'and can then enter an additional email address to send the report (in addition to their own, which is automatic), to set the dates that they would like to include, and to select which features they would like to export. The features that they can choose from are: Calendar, Expenses, Check-Ins, Messages and Parenting journal. There is no option to Export 'The Vault'.

The calendar overview shows the percentage of parenting time, length of time, and how many special events and notes were added to the calendar. In the

detailed section parenting time, forfeits and special events are listed with the dates and times and the title of the events.

Check-ins for the app are also recorded in the Exports, however we did not test this feature so cannot comment on what is exported.

Check-in feature

The Check- In feature uses the phone's location data to verify geo-location and timestamp with Google maps. You can choose not to let the app access your phone's location data and it appears that you must opt in to checking in on any given occasion (it is an active step, not something that happens without intent). We did not test this feature so cannot comment more regarding its functionality.

Key things we like about Fayr (now 'CoOperate'):

- It has a nice, clean user interface. It's easy to navigate the app and intuitive to use.
- Exporting data through the app is straightforward and easy to do, giving clear options about timeframes and check boxes for which features to include. In the same step you can choose to email to yourself and to other email addresses.
- During evaluations the notifications worked well on this app.

User considerations and suggestions

These are observations our team has made that may or may not apply to your situation but are worth thinking through before committing this app.

- Apps that do a lot can be a double-edged sword: while they can seem to present good value with their multifunctionality (everything in one place), they can also become overwhelming in their complexity. They can be more difficult to learn to use in the first place, it can be easier to be confused by and make mistakes, and more difficult to track changes in (because so much can happen in the one space – the notifications can be endless and/ or can get lost).
- Reports generate percentages of parenting time for each parent, percentages of money

spent by each parent, number of messages sent and average response time to messages in a given timeframe. We strongly urge you to think about whether this feature would be a useful tool in your parenting relationship or something that would be exacerbate conflict. There is no way to opt out of this feature.
- The messaging feature is very simple with no organisational features. You cannot attach images or files to messages. The messenger displays the month, day and time messages were sent and read, but not the year. For older messages it only shows the month, year and time but not the exact date. When you export the data to a PDF you can see the missing information.
- You can't search messages in this app – this could cause difficulty when trying to retrieve a specific piece of information from your correspondence with a coparent (keeping in mind communication could potentially span a number of years).
- The only way you can enter a parenting schedule, as far as we could tell, is to pay an additional cost through the sign up process where you would send them your schedule and they would enter it for you. Otherwise you can enter a parenting schedule in the calendar in the same way that you enter normal calendar 'events'.
- In our trials we found that changes could be made in the calendar by one parent which would impact the other parent's time, but they were not given the option to agree or decline. Changes and deletions from the calendar were not reflected in the export.
- The File Vault is a photo and doc sharing area of the app. It lets you share images and PDFs and enter a title and notes about what you're sharing – however this doesn't appear to be exportable as part of the data extraction feature. Parents can make changes without notifications or it going on the app 'record'.
- The app has a 'check-in' feature which allows you to use the app to verify your geolocation. While this is optional, concerns were raised by evaluators regarding the implication that parents should be able to monitor their coparent's whereabouts and/or that mistakes could be made and a parent might unintentionally share their location.
- As far as we were able to determine , there is

no free trial period for this app, making it hard for parents to check if it is the best option for them before a financial commitment.

User annoyances

- In the registration process the app asks a handful of questions to "better understand you". These questions are personal and potentially sensitive, and concern how stressed you are, your sleep, and whether parental conflict has affected you negatively at work and in your life.
- The calendar has an option called 'Release date' , the purpose of which is unclear.
- We experienced a number of intermittent bugs with registration, and both the calendar and the messages. Technical support for CoOperate is responsive.

Divvito

'Co-parenting made easy'

Developer: Divvito

Website: https://divvito.com/

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	Free	**Platforms supported**	Apple √ Android √ Web X
Who pays	Free to all users	**Languages supported**	English
Options for frequency of subscription*	n/a - free	**Country of origin**	Australia
Free trial?	n/a - free	**App last updated (at time of review)**	December 2021
Who can use the app	Solo X Two Coparents √ Children X Other family X Professionals X	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar √ Expenses X File sharing X Data download √ Others X

App description

Divvito is a single purpose parenting app designed for two co-parents to send messages to each other and to be able to export the record of messages. It is unique for having an in-built 'messaging assistant', Dani, which can give feedback on the content of messages, frequency of messages and more.

Key things we like about Divvito

- It is free so parents have the opportunity to thoroughly test it out before committing to using it.
- The unique features of Juvo's language control set this app apart - could be useful for some high-conflict parenting dynamics – especially because they give the author the chance to re-think messages containing explicit or threatening language before they are sent. This needs to be carefully considered for each unique parenting relationship.
- Divvito is the only app we reviewed which allows for both simple chatting (where you can open the app and send a message straight away) and organised messaging (where you can have message subjects for organising messages).
- Divvito has some additional safety features to prompt those who have experienced family violence to think about who they should contact in the event that conflict escalates in the app.
- Because Divvito is a messenger and nothing else, it's a simple app that is easy to master quickly.

User considerations and suggestions

These are observations our team has made that may or may not apply to your situation but are worth thinking through before committing to Divvito.

- Divvito's export process is fairly straightforward, but the data that it captures is not as useful. The pages aren't numbered, there's no Divvito header, and if the app has turned any explicit language into emoticons it is the emoticons that appear in the report, not the actual language used.
- Divvito does not record when a message has been read by the other parent, or if it has been seen. Depending on your situation this could be a problem (if the other parent habitually pretends not to have seen messages for example) or an advantage (some users report feeling 'watched' by the other person when apps give feedback to the other parent about when they have been opened, or that knowledge a message has been read creates an unfair expectation of immediate response).
- Be careful when sharing images as there is no preview of the image before you send, when you are sharing an image and click on one in the gallery it sends straight away - this means that there is no safeguard against accidentally sending the wrong image.
- Messages cannot be searched which can make it difficult when trying to find a specific detail from conversations that could be months, or even years, old.
- There are some things that the app lets you toggle off and on where it is not obvious that this will be evident to the other parent. E.g. when you toggle to block profanities the other parent is advised. When you set a 'flagged' word or phrase and the other parent uses it, they will be told that you have set it up.
- Juvo suggests that you stop sending messages after 5 messages if the other person hasn't responded, however depending on your messaging style this could be too small a number (and you could receive that feedback for friendly messages that have been sent).
- Divvito is free to use - take advantage of this to help you determine if any of the issues raised above are going to be a problem for you or your coparent.

User annoyances

- The Divvito helper isn't for everyone. In our role plays some mediators thought it was great while others found it annoying.
- There are also a couple of bugs associated with Juvo – on one occasion it kept asking one of our team for their name and they had to log out of the app and log back in to fix it.
- You can set a do not disturb schedule in your notifications settings within the app, however it doesn't seem to work at all (we kept receiving notifications regardless).

Feature Summary

Messages

Divvito has both 'simple' messaging under a Messages tab and 'organised' messaging under a Conversations tab. Users can open the Messages tab and begin messaging with the other parent straight away, or they can go into the Conversations tab and create a message with a title in order to group communication around a theme. Communication that is written within the Conversations tab also appears in the Messages tab, but not vice versa. This can get confusing because when you receive a notification and open the app it will open straight into the Messages tab, even if it was sent from a Conversation. The only indication that it is part of a Conversation is a little icon that appears with the message. The user then needs to navigate to that Conversation to continue the communication (if they're wanting to keep it under that theme). There is also an option to press on any message and it will give the option to move it to a conversation.

The app records the time and date when messages were sent but gives no indication of whether (and when) messages were read by the other parent. You cannot edit or delete messages that have been sent or attachments to messages – they are permanent.

You can attach files from your phone to any message however the app does not give any preview of attachments before they are sent - if you click on the wrong image, it will send straight away and can't be deleted.

Messages cannot be searched which can make it difficult when trying to find a specific detail from conversations that could be months, or even years, old. Messages cannot be archived.

Divvito has additional messaging functionality. It is unique in that it has an AI assistant called 'Juvo' which provides communication feedback including:

- Suggesting a user take a break if they've sent a number of messages with no response from the other person. "It's only been an hour and you've already sent 5 messages. Why not wait a little longer…"

OurFamilyWizard Co-Parent App

'The Best Co-Parenting App'

Developer: Our Family Wizard

Website: https://www.ourfamilywizard.com.au/

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	$ 186 each	**Platforms supported**	Apple √ Android √ Web √
Who pays	Multiple options – parents can pay individually or one parent can pay for both.	**Languages supported**	English
Options for frequency of subscription*	Monthly X Annual √	**Country of origin**	United States
Free trial?	30 days free trial	**App last updated (at time of review)**	October 2024
Who can use the app	Solo X Two Coparents √ Children √ Other family √ Professionals √	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar √ Expenses √ File sharing √ Data download √ Others √

* Some apps charge each user while others charge one subscription to cover all users, additionally some apps charge per month while others charge annually. Some apps advertise only in US dollars which adds an extra element of confusion. To make it easier to compare app costs we have calculated a "comparable cost" in Australian dollars to reflect the combined cost for two coparents to use the app for one year.

App description

Our Family Wizard is a multi-purpose parenting app with many features including messaging, calendar, expenses, file sharing and data download. It works across iPhone, iPad, and Android phones as well as Amazon's Kindle Fire and on the website. It can be used by two coparents exclusively, and it can also be used between extended family members, children, and professionals (who have their own app that ties in).

Key things we like about OFW:

- It can just be used by two coparents, but it can also be used by other family members (e.g. invite grandparents or other partners, as well as children) – though there may be additional costs.

- It's available across a variety of platforms (the most broadly available) which gives flexibility over its use – you don't have to download the app if you just want to use it on the web, for example.
- OFW has a good reputation for offering customer support.
- While it is a US-based company, they provide an Australian version of their website and have support available during Australian hours (not just US hours).
- There is a wide range of media on the web to help you learn to use it.
- Our Family Wizard has more security features than most of the apps we have tested.
- It lets you preview files and photos before sharing which is a safeguard against

accidentally sending the wrong thing.

- Using OFWPay, you can choose to reimburse expenses and set up regular payments through the app by linking your bank account (though we have not tested this feature).

User considerations and suggestions

These are observations our team has made that may or may not apply to your situation but are worth thinking through before committing to Our Family Wizard.

- Apps that do a lot can be a double-edged sword: while they can seem to present good value with their multifunctionality (everything in one place), they can also become overwhelming in their complexity. They can be more difficult to learn to use in the first place, easier to be confused by and make mistakes, and more difficult to track changes in (because so much can happen in the one space – the notifications can be endless and/or can get lost).
- The third-party access (inviting other family members) could be a good thing in many blended families, however in some it may be a cause of conflict – especially if one person invites someone to join the app with whom you do not want to interact. We suggest you think about whether this would be beneficial or not in your situation.
- You can't search messages in this app (we did not check web version) this could cause difficulty when trying to retrieve a specific piece of information from your correspondence with a coparent (keeping in mind communication could potentially span a number of years).
- The notifications were confusing (see below in User annoyances). This is potentially problematic if needing to use the app for quick messages where an immediate read and response is ideal.
- Most apps we tested opened immediately, with only occasional need to log in again. OFW requires logging in (with email and password, or with a code) every time you re-open the app. This is likely for extra security and would would benefit some, but for others it could be an irritating barrier to its quick and effective use. We could not find a way to change this in the settings. It did not appear to be face

recognition enabled at the time of testing.

- The date and time(?) that a user last accessed the app – and even specific app features - is visible to the other users that you are connected to. You can bring up "Last viewed" data for all connections. We suggest that you consider whether this is a beneficial feature or one that could have negative impacts.
- OFW has a 'check-in' feature. These features are often touted as promoting accountability, however they could also be used to enable controlling behaviour.
- The ToneMeter may offer some false hope – in many of our conversations with mediators there was a misunderstanding that OFW will stop people from being able to send abusive messages (actively blocking, for example) which it does not do.
- There is no visible free trial period for this app and there is only an annual fee (rather than monthly). This makes a high upfront cost for an app that you cannot try out first. If the other parent does not sign up (or delays signing up) you will also lose out financially.

User annoyances

- The sign up process for OFW was more fiddly than any of the other apps we tried. You have to sign up over the web (rather than through the App Store) and there were many steps. This may provide extra security but was time consuming.
- We found the notifications for OFW to be confusing and problematic: some changes appeared in the "dashboard" but others did not and we had to go looking for them (e.g. for Action items or Notifications). The website provides information about these different kinds of notifications, but it would be easy to see how users could be confused (as our testers were). When the app was open our testers did not get push notifications to alert for new messages.
- It is not as aesthetically pleasing as many of the apps we tested. We also found that there was icon/button overload with more than 20 different icons – it felt very 'busy' and pathways to perform tasks were not always clear.
- The app and the data download often uses US date format (MM/DD/YYYY) which can cause confusion.

- We experienced some minor bugs in the app (for example the keyboard covering buttons that you need to press and, in the Android version, covering the ToneMeter).
- You cannot export data from within the smartphone app, you have to log into the web version of the app.

Feature Summary

Messages

Our Family Wizard has an 'organised' messaging feature which appears to work much like email. When contacting the other parent you need to create a new message with a subject, or continue in a previous message thread. You can choose who the message goes to and CC other people who you are connected with on the app. Messages can be put in different subject folders.

You can attach files from your phone or computer to messages. Images are previewed before being sent, which is an important safeguard against sending the wrong file by accident.

You can write and store draft messages, however you cannot edit or delete sent messages, or attachments to messages. Once they have been sent they are permanent. You can archive messages so that they do not appear on the message screen (but they can be retrieved from the archive).

The app records the time and date when messages were sent and indicates the time and date they were read by the other person. This information is available in real time on the app, and in the exported data report.

Messages cannot be searched when in the app, which can make it difficult when trying to find a specific detail from conversations that could be months, or even years, old.

Parents have the option of paying for an additional feature, the ToneMeter. The ToneMeter only works for messages (it does not work in other features) and is designed to help the user to assess the tone of their own language. If you have paid for the ToneMeter, when you write a message that the ToneMeter detects to be "emotionally charged" you will see feedback (in the form of a small scale from 1-4 bars) which labels such language (e.g. aggressive or concerning etc.) and colours the scale bars in red to correspond with the level it has detected. The idea is that you can self-edit using this information and change your own language. There is nothing to stop you ignoring the ToneMeter (it is not obtrusive, it is a passive feature that appears but does not interfere). You cannot use the ToneMeter to stop someone from sending you aggressive or rude messages (it is self-directed, not directed at the other parent). There is no reporting regarding what the ToneMeter does or doesn't say (it does not form part of the data download) and the other parent has no visibility as to what the ToneMeter has flagged.

Expenses

OFW has two expense related features: 1) a record of child related expenses and 2) a means of reimbursing. To reimburse through the app requires linking a bank account so we have not tested this feature.

When you create an expense in OFW you are provided a template to fill in which includes: a title, the amount, the category of expense and percentage to be reimbursed (e.g. 50/50), the date the expense was incurred, the children it applies to, and the capacity to upload an associated receipt. You can also mark the expense as private. There is no capacity to write notes about an expense within that template.

Once you have saved it becomes part of the Register and will be marked as Open until the other parent responds. The other parent can accept or reject the expense and they can request a receipt if none has been attached. Parents can log when they have made the reimbursement and how, including attachments and notes. If accepted, the expense status is then marked as paid.

These transactions are captured in the data download for expenses and users are able to review expenses over time by category and transaction history.

Expenses can be edited and deleted by the creator, prior to them being accepted or rejected by the other parent. Once accepted or rejected by the other parent they are part of the permanent record captured in the app.

File sharing

OFW lets you share files (photos and documents) about each child you have registered in the app in two different places, the Journal and the Info Bank.

The Journal in OFW is touted as 'part family album, part diary'. There are two components to the Journal – Moments and Check in. In Moments parents can share photos, and/or write text to share with the other parent (and can opt to keep private). It is also possible to tag a location. Moments can be edited and deleted by the parent who created them. The other parent will be notified when there are new Moments as well as when they are edited or deleted. In the Check-in part of the journal parents can choose to use the phone's GPS data to verify that they are at a location and write accompanying text. We did not test this part of the app.

The Info bank is designed for storing and sharing family information such as medical information, contact details, school information, clothes sizes and so on. There are more than 14 predefined categories with associated icons for this purpose and it can be overwhelming to work out what information should go where. Most of these categories opened a template for contact information.

The MyFiles category of the Infobank appears to be more broad file sharing (rather than just contact details). You can choose to keep uploaded files private or to share (and who to share with). Additionally, any attachments that were uploaded as part of a message, an expense, or a Journal entry will also be recorded within MyFiles.

When uploading files in the app we were able to type in a description, however after saving the file the label and descriptive information could not be located anywhere within the app - only the file name (which is automatic and not descriptive e.g. IMG_0009_JPG) and a thumbnail of the file. This may be different in the website.

When we tested uploading photos we found that there was no preview of the image before you send (i.e. you click on the image in the phone's gallery that you wish to share, and it then sends straight away). This means that there is no safeguard against accidentally sending the wrong image.

Files that were uploaded could be edited and deleted by the parent who created them.

In MyFiles you can sort files by date received and you can filter by date range, type, permissions and creator. There is a search function within the app however it seems to be for searching file names only. There may be more flexibility on the web version.

The information that is uploaded to the Info Bank is saved onto OFW's servers (rather than just on the device) so they are backed-up, however there is a limit to how much can be saved and additional fees associated with needing more file space.

Users can create a record of what is in the InfoBank and the Journal part of OFW. It is not clear whether this record would include items that have been deleted or edited.

Data download

You cannot download data from OFW through the app, but you can do it through the website. There is no 'download all activity' button; each feature has to be downloaded/extracted separately. The mechanism to do this is not consistent across the app features (i.e. there is no easily recognisable 'export' icon, button or method - you have to find the way to do it in each section). The output is also not consistent: in messages it generates a PDF which you have to find in the Notifications section of the program, but for Calendar you are asked for an email address to which the information is sent.

In our testing we were able to download data for the following features:

- Messages: you can download all messages, but not images attached to messages (just the filenames). The messaging download allows you to enter a date range, order messages by oldest to newest (and vice versa). You can choose whether or not to include message content or just headings, and whether to have a new message on each page. When you export the data it generates a link which appears in the Notifications section of the app. The report is a PDF with OFW headers and pages numbered. It includes information such as when it was generated, who generated it, and which time zone it was generated in.

- Calendar: Download some calendar information. For example, can generate reports on some actions (such as trade/swaps). There did not seem to be a way to export all the interactions around the calendar, but a PDF of calendar contents can be created (e.g. for putting on the fridge) and you can export calendar contents into an external calendar.
- Expenses: you can select any/all expenses and 'print' which generates an OFW report including the info about when the expense was created, accepted and paid etc. It does not include images. You can also click on 'Reporting' within the Expenses section and it gives some options about reporting chronologically, statistically, transactionally or by payment - and you can select dates and which children for etc.
- Shared files: In MyFiles you can download each individual file that has been stored, however we could not find an option there to export a record of all files sent with a date range (for example).

It may be possible to export other parts of the app but we either could not work out how or did not have scope to test in the timeframes we allotted.

Other features

OFW has a Check-in feature which we mentioned above but did not check. OFW has various resources available on the website and through emails, including webcasts, which are not accessible through the app. Many of these are aimed at mediators

Peaceful CoParenting Messenger

'Coparent Divorce Ex Limit Chat'

Developer: Gemini Communications, LLC

Website: https://www.peacefulparentapp.com/

Quick facts

Cost of app for two parents to use for a year*	Unknown (need registration) or free version (fewer features)	**Platforms supported**	Apple √ Android √ Web X
Who pays	Each parent	**Languages supported**	English
Options for frequency of subscription*	Monthly √ Yearly √	**Country of origin**	United States
Free trial?	No – however there is a free cut down version.	**App last updated (at time of review)**	September 2024
Who can use the app	Solo X Two Coparents √ Children X Other family X Professionals X	**Features**	Messaging √ Calendar X Expenses X File sharing X Data download √ Others X Unknown (need registration)

* Some apps charge each user while others charge one subscription to cover all users, additionally some apps charge per month while others charge annually. Some apps advertise only in US dollars which adds an extra element of confusion. To make it easier to compare app costs we have calculated a "comparable cost" in Australian dollars to reflect the combined cost for two coparents to use the app for one year.

App description

Peaceful Coparenting Messenger is a single-purpose parenting app which focuses on messaging features. It works on iPhone and has recently been updated to now also work on Android phones. It is designed for use between sets of two coparents (you can use it with multiple sets of two).

Key things we like about Peaceful Coparenting Messenger:

- Peaceful Coparenting Messenger has the most versatility when it comes to boundaries for messaging. It has a wide range of settings that you adjust to limit what and when the other parent messages (explained in Features below).
- There is a free version for parents who do not

need to use the additional boundary settings but just want a stand-alone messenger.
- You can flag messages as offensive to make them easier to locate in the event of legal action.
- If at any stage you revert from the paid version to the free version of the app, you don't lose your data.

User considerations and suggestions

These are observations our team has made that may or may not apply to your situation but are worth thinking through before committing to Peaceful Coparenting Messenger.

- Peaceful Coparenting Messenger is focused on written communication and does not have other organisational features (like a calendar or expenses). If you need those features for your parenting arrangements then the benefits of the boundary setting aspects of Peaceful Coparenting Messenger might end up being moot (i.e. if the other parent can't send you the messages in Peaceful Coparenting Messenger because you have restrictions on, they may find a way to do it through a calendar or other app that you have to use).
- The messaging feature is simple with no organisational features, there is no way to search and no way to archive old messages. If you are using the messenger for a long period of time this could make it difficult to locate specific information that you have shared (i.e. the need to scroll through months of messages).
- The boundary setting chat features (discussed more below) have been designed to curb harassment and reduce conflict. Only paying users can access these features. Parents need to consider whether the benefits outweigh the risks in their situation. For example, would the other parent misuse these features for revenge? Would they deliberately obstruct reasonable communication? If you experience family violence, it's important to think through the safety implications of this app for your situation (i.e. whether blocking messages from the other parent would increase risk to yourself).
- Be careful when sharing images as there is no preview of the image before you send, when you take the steps to attach an image to a message, any image you click on in the gallery will send straight away. This means that there is no safeguard against accidentally clicking on and sending the wrong image (you can't delete it once sent).
- As far as we were able to determine there is no free trial period for this app with all the boundary setting features working, which could make it hard for parents to determine if it is the best option for them before a financial commitment. There is however a free basic version which could be downloaded in order to test out the basic elements of the app before committing.

User annoyances

- The data is stored in 'Coordinated Universal Time', which means that when reports are generated it shows them as occurring in that time (e.g. AEST +10). While it explains this on each report that the app generates, it does not negate the headache this might cause users as they try to work out message timing in their time zone. Additionally, the dates are displayed in US format, which can be confusing for Australian users (MM/DD/YYYY instead of DD/MM/YYYY).
- The user interface is not as aesthetically appealing as some other apps.

Feature Summary

Messages

Peaceful Coparenting Messenger uses a 'simple' instant messenger approach. Users open the chat within the app and begin messaging with the other parent straight away. The chats are not organised into subjects or themes, they are a stream that appears chronologically with the most recent message at the top.

You cannot edit or delete messages that have been sent – they are permanent. The app records the time and date when messages were sent and when they have been read by the other parent. This information is visible in the app and when you export the chat data to a report.

You can attach images or files to chats. Images are not previewed before they are sent: when you want to share an image it will open the phone's gallery and you click on the one you want to share, the app will then send that image immediately. While this is fast the drawback is that there is no safeguard against accidentally sending the wrong image.

Messages cannot be searched which can make it difficult when trying to find a specific detail from conversations that could be months, or even years, old (you would need to scroll). Messages cannot be archived. Users can flag messages, including marking them as offensive, which makes them easier to locate when scrolling and in any exported data reports.

Peaceful Coparenting Messenger's paying subscribers can set boundaries within the app using a number of unique settings. The settings include:

- Censoring swear words (using ****)
- Limiting the length of messages received to discourage excess messaging (150 characters)
- Limiting the number of messages you receive each day
- Setting timeframes when you will receive messages
- Putting 'wait limits' around messages (to stop back to back messages)
- Limiting messages to 'canned' pre-written message text rather than being able to send any text (i.e. they can only send you specific phrases to do with organisation around children).
- Setting whether attachments may be sent
- Flagging and highlighting "important" or "offensive" messages

Each paying user can activate these settings, however if one parent is using the free version they will not have access to the full range of settings. As far as we can tell, each paying parent can independently change the settings for how they receive messages (i.e. if you limit the messages from your coparent to be 150 characters, that does not mean that your messages are limited unless the other parent turns that setting on too).

Calendar

There is no calendar.

Expenses

There is no Expenses feature

File sharing

There is no separate file sharing feature (beyond what you can share in the chat).

Data download

You can request to export from Peaceful Coparenting Messenger through the app. This is a fairly straightforward process. After clicking on Reports and electing which coparent they would like the report about (in case there is more than one),

users are taken to a screen where they can choose the date range, whether to include attachments, whether highlight flagged messages and/or highlight offensive messages, and where to send the report (email address).

A PDF report is generated and sent to the elected email address. The Peaceful Coparenting Messenger's logo appears in the header of page 1, though no other pages. The report says which user generated it, and who the communication is between (their user names and email addresses), as well as when each user signed up for the app. The report has date and time zone information which explains that all app data is stored in Coordinated Universal Time (e.g. AEST+11) and that the times associated with chats in the report will reflect that. Likewise it explains that dates are displayed in the US format (MM/DD/YYYY). While this information is clearly explained, it may be a nuisance for Australian users to have to translate the data back into their time zone and date format.

The app displays all messages that have been sent chronologically and includes the message author, time sent, message content, and time seen. Messages that have been flagged appear in a different colour.

Other features

You can use Peaceful Coparenting Messenger to share your location with the other parent (by letting it access your phone's location data). We did not test this feature.

In a recent update Peaceful Coparenting Messenger has added an "Emergency Contact". This is so that you can be notified by a trusted person when there is an emergency, even if you have limited communications with the other parent. We did not test this feature.

Funding bodies and research team

Conflict-of-Interest Statement

Publications

Heard, G. M., Irving, M. A., Smyth, B. M., Payne, J. L., & Althor, G. (2023). Risks and benefits of post-separation parenting apps: perceptions of family law professionals in Australia and New Zealand. Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, 45(2), 143–164.

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See also

Smyth, B., Ainscough, G. & Payne, J. (2020). Modes of Communication between High-Conflict Separated Parents: Exploring the Role of Media Multiplexity and Modality Switching. Journal of Family Communication, 20(3), 189–205.

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