
Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program - Policy

1. General Policy

The Department of Communities and Justice (the Department) recognises that Guardians ad Litem (GALs) may experience problems in their appointments to matters or duties on the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Panel which impact on their behaviour, relationships, career and GAL appointments performance.

The purpose of the Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program is to provide professional counselling services for GALs and to help them resolve their problems in a comfortable, neutral and confidential manner. The service is provided free of charge. **The contact telephone number is 1300 366 789.**

The Program is available to all GALs on the GAL Panel. Where GALs are involved in a critical incident, access to counselling will be available to those affected.

A consistent level of service will be provided to all GALs regardless of their location throughout the State.

In limited circumstances, family members and relatives may be able to access counselling to discuss the impact of GAL appointments on family life.

The service provides face-to-face counselling telephone counselling, critical incident and/or trauma debriefing, group counselling and a Manager/Supervisor assistance service.

Where appropriate, by agreement between the counsellor and GAL, referrals may also be made to a suitably qualified and registered local psychologist, counsellor or social worker or to a service offering assistance in specialist areas such as substance abuse, mental illness, marriage counselling and other human relationship problems. The Program is for short-term assistance and not designed for long-term therapeutic interventions.

Division Support and Public Accountability (DSPA) will be the first point of contact. Then Human Resources will oversee the implementation and evaluation of the (GAL) Assistance Program.

2. Definitions

A family member or relative is:

- a spouse of the employee; or
- a de facto partner, of the opposite or same gender, who lives with the employee on a bona fide domestic basis, or a former spouse
- a child or an adult child (including an adopted child, a step child, a foster child or an ex nuptial child), parent (including a foster parent and legal guardian), a grandparent a grandchild or a sibling. These may be the relatives of either the employee or the employee's spouse/partner;
- a relative of the employee who is a member of the same household, where for the purposes of this paragraph:
"relative" means a person related by blood, marriage, affinity or Aboriginal kinship;
"affinity" means a relationship by marriage or by ties other than blood; and
"household" means family groups or mutually dependent groupings who share the same domestic dwelling.

3. The Aim of the Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program

The aim of the Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program is to provide professional and confidential counselling to GALs which will help them to resolve problems in their personal life and/or GAL Appointments.

Problems could include:

- stress, anxiety or depression;
- threatened or actual violence;
- grief and loss or bereavement; personal and interpersonal conflict;
- family or relationship problems;
- financial concerns;
- dependency problems (eg. alcohol, smoking, drug use, gambling, etc.); or
- harassment or perceived harassment.

4. Types of Counselling Available

The Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program consists of:

- a 24 hour, seven days a week, 52 weeks per year telephone counselling service;
- timely face-to-face counselling from 7.30am to 10.00pm, Monday to Friday and generally within 48 hours of contact being made with the service provider;
- non urgent counselling within 72 hours;
- group counselling (eg. family members seen with the employee, and employee groups) as appropriate; critical incident debriefing and/or trauma counselling; and
an advisory service to managers and/or supervisors which provides suggestions and options in the management of situations which could arise while appointed to a matter.

In some cases, the Program may also facilitate referral to a suitably qualified and registered local psychologist or other appropriate service.

Where referrals incur costs an agreement is to be reached between the counsellor and the GAL that costs are met by the GAL and services are appropriate for continuing assistance.

The Employee (GAL) Assistance Program is only for short-term assistance and not designed for long-term therapeutic interventions.

4.1 Accessing the service

The contact phone number is 1300 366 789.

GALs are entitled to three (3) free one-hour sessions per issue in a twelve (12) month period (see limit conditions later in policy). GALs can use: face-to-face counselling, telephone counselling, or a combination of both.

GALs can access the counselling sessions during working hours or after hours; at the provider's counselling offices, at the rooms of the counsellor, or at Department workplace offices. This includes GALs who live and work in isolated country regions. Choice of timing and location will be dependent on the individual feeling the counselling session is comfortable, neutral and confidential.

Occasionally, it may be appropriate for counselling sessions to take place in the home of the GAL. Prior approval for home counselling sessions will need to be obtained from Division Support and Public Accountability, and Human Resources by emailing guardian-ad-litem-panel-co-ordinator@justice.nsw.gov.au. GALs can have a third person present during any counselling sessions held in the home.

4.2 Critical Incident Debriefing

The Program will ensure GALs have access to critical incident debriefing for incidents of trauma or violence.

Debriefing sessions allow GALs to express their feelings and reactions to the incident and educate participants about the usual effects of trauma. Sessions can also assist employees to develop skills which allow them to deal with similar or recurring situations.

GALs who undergo incidents of trauma or violence can, with the agreement of the counsellor and Division Support and Public Accountability, and Human Resources, have family members and relatives attend critical incident debriefing.

4.3 Telephone Counselling

GALs have access to a 24-hour telephone counselling service seven days a week.

The aim of the telephone service is to provide callers **with**:

- immediate crisis counselling and/or
- information regarding appropriate agencies in their region and/or
- non-urgent counselling.

Callers to the telephone counselling service for the first two options will:

- be immediately connected to an appropriately qualified counsellor;
- be given sufficient time and assistance to clearly articulate the problem;
- receive counselling and/or information relevant to the issue or problem;
- have the opportunity to explore options for dealing with the issue or problem; and be referred to an appropriate counselling service where necessary.

The telephone counselling service will not accept anonymous calls. Counsellors will be required to ask callers to provide details about their involvement with the Department. GALs can be assured the telephone counselling service is completely confidential.

GALs accessing the telephone counselling service for not so urgent counselling can have access to telephone counselling within 72 hours from initial contact or arrange a time convenient to meet their needs.

GALs changing counselling appointments can also have access to telephone counselling within 72 hours or arrange a time that is convenient to meet their changing needs. This will be counted as one of their three free sessions.

4.4 Face-to-Face Counselling

The purpose of face-to-face counselling is to create rapport between the individual and the counsellor.

GALs can attend face-to-face counselling sessions to discuss issues in their work or personal life which impact on their work. In most cases, GALs will be able to attend counselling sessions within 48 hours of initial contact with the service provider.

5. State Wide Service

A consistent level of service will be provided to all GALs across the state. All locations across the GAL Panel have been grouped into regions to ensure a quality service is provided to all GALs.

Psychologists will be available in each of these regions to provide face-to-face and telephone counselling.

GALs who work and reside in remote country regions have access to immediate telephone counselling and can access face-to-face counselling at the provider's counselling offices and at Department workplace offices.

6. Types of Referral

6.1 Self-Referral

GALs are able to access the Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program without the approval of Division Support and Public Accountability. Arrangements for an appointment can be made directly by telephoning the service provider. This will ensure the service remains completely confidential.

6.2 Referral by Division Support and Public Accountability

In some cases, it may be appropriate for Division Support and Public Accountability to discuss counselling options with GALs.

Generally, this would involve promoting the Program and/or simply encouraging GALs to access counselling if there appears to be a problem.

Division Support and Public Accountability are also responsible for arranging for GALs to receive immediate critical incident debriefing and/or trauma counselling from the provider.

It should be noted that GALs cannot be directed to attend counselling sessions.

7. Limits to the Program

The Department will pay for three (3) counselling sessions per issue of approximately one hour's duration, per GAL, in a twelve-month period from the first initial contact to the counsellor about the issue.

Subsequent issues not relating to the original issue will start as three (3) free counselling sessions.

Group critical incident debriefing and the Supervisor Assistance service are not included in the counselling limit.

As most sessions attended by family members and relatives will be in the company of the GAL concerned, the above counselling limit will apply. Alternative limits for family members or relatives may be determined at the discretion of Human Resources.

8. Further Sessions

In some cases, it is possible for GALs to attend more than three (3) sessions in a twelve-month period eg. where the problem is not resolved or the employee encounters a different problem.

Continued payment by the Department would depend on advice from the counsellor and prior approval by Human Resources.

Where counselling limits have been reached and Human Resources does not approve further sessions, the GAL will be responsible for any costs incurred. The counsellors provided by the Program can assist by providing appropriate referrals when counselling limits have been reached.

GALs may appeal to the Chief People Officer if an appropriate referral is not available and Human Resources does not approve payment of further counselling sessions.

9. Cancelled Appointments

GALS will be required to give 24 hours notice if they are unable to attend an appointment.

To cancel the counselling services requires GALs to phone the provider and cancel or change appointment the day prior to appointment time. At this time GALs can change the appointment from, for example, face-to-face counselling to a telephone counselling session to meet their changing needs.

A GAL who fails to cancel an appointment without giving 24 hours notice will incur a loss of one of the three (3) free sessions and the Department will be charged for the session.

10. Confidentiality Guarantee

The Department respects the right of GALs to have access to counselling which is private and confidential. The service provider will maintain all client records associated with the Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program in a strictly confidential manner.

The counsellors will be responsible for providing the Department with access to individual records in the following exceptional circumstances:

- with the written consent of the individual GAL;
- to prevent a serious threat to any person's health or life; or
- by requirement of law.

11. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Groups

The Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program will provide services appropriate to GALs covered under anti-discrimination legislation categories such as:

- gender (including pregnancy);
- marital status;
- race (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; people from racial, ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups);
- homosexuality/lesbianism;
- disability (including HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, other infectious diseases);
- age;
- transgender; and
- carer's responsibility.

GALs can state their preference for an appropriate counsellor at initial point of contact with the provider. Accessible premises, interpreters and TTY service are all available.

12. Program Evaluation

GALs who access the Employee (or GAL) Assistance Program will be asked to complete a voluntary client satisfaction survey by the counsellor at the end of each counselling session. The client survey will not ask GALs to identify themselves, nor will it require them to describe the nature of their problem.

The provider will send GALs who access the telephone counselling services a survey via mail or e-mail at the end of each session.

The Department values the opinion of its GALs and seeks to identify favourable or not so favourable services of the provider.

The survey seeks to identify such things as:

- the general level of satisfaction with the service;
- the degree of helpfulness of the counselling;
- whether the GAL would recommend the service to others; and
- other comments.

13. Enquiries

GALs who require further information about the program or would like to make any comment about the level of service provided can email guardian-ad-litem-panel-co-ordinator@justice.nsw.gov.au.