

Family violence cases and the Evatt List in the Federal Circuit and Family Court

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The Evatt List operates as a specialist court list within the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia for parenting matters with serious safety concerns, including family violence and child abuse. The list focuses on early risk assessment, intensive management, and quicker progress for high risk families.

This guide explains how cases reach the Evatt List, who qualifies, what happens at each stage and what to expect if your family is involved.

What is the Evatt List and why was it created?

The Evatt List forms part of the Court's safety response, alongside the Lighthouse Project, which screens new parenting applications for family violence, child abuse, and other serious risks.
The Court designed this pathway to reduce further trauma, improve safety, and avoid long delays for vulnerable parties and children. Only parenting disputes enter the Evatt List. Property only proceedings and child support disputes proceed through other case tracks.

How does a parenting case get into the Evatt List?

When a party files an Initiating Application for parenting orders through the Commonwealth Courts Portal, the Court sends a secure link to an online risk screening questionnaire, known as Family DOORS Triage. The same process applies when the other party files a Response.

Specialist Court staff, including a Triage Counsellor, review the screening results and other material, then classify risk as low, moderate, or high. High risk matters move to an Evatt Judicial Registrar, who assesses suitability for the Evatt List.

Parties do not file a separate application for the Evatt List, and parties do not receive a copy of the screening results. Answers in the screening process remain confidential, subject to limited exceptions for serious threats to safety.

High risk criteria for the Evatt List - who qualifies?

Only cases with a high risk classification and specific risk features qualify for the Evatt List.
Cases that may qualify for the Evatt List include allegations of serious abuse or risk of serious abuse of a child, exposure to serious family violence, and serious parental substance misuse.

Other listed risk features include serious mental health concerns, risk of self-harm, recent threats or attempts to abduct a child, and recent threats to harm a child or another relevant person, such as a new partner.

Parenting only cases with this risk profile receive priority treatment in the Evatt List, with an aim to resolve proceedings faster than standard parenting cases. Generally, cases heard in the Evatt List aim for resolution within a timeframe of roughly 9 to 12 months. Whereas standard family law matters are around 2 to 3 years.

Confidential risk screening and safety focus - the Family DOORS Triage

The Family DOORS Triage questionnaire asks structured yes or no questions about violence, threats, substance use, mental health, and other safety issues. How the party responds will result in how their matter is triaged and safety planned, however it does not constitute evidence.

Court material explains that parties do not need to reveal whether they completed the screening, and lawyers must not cross-examine on this topic. Screening information only becomes disclosable in narrow circumstances, such as steps to protect a child or prevent an imminent threat to life or health.

What happens after a case is allocated to the Evatt List?

Once an Evatt Judicial Registrar allocates a matter to the Evatt List, the Court usually makes initial procedural orders in chambers, without a court appearance. These orders often direct police and child protection agencies to provide material to the Court and address other urgent safety measures.

The first formal step often appears as an Evatt Determination Event or similar early case review, followed by an Evatt First Return Hearing within about six to eight weeks of filing. At these early events, the Judicial Registrar investigates risk, considers any urgent parenting arrangements, and sets up a clear plan for evidence and next steps.

What court hearings happen in an Evatt List case?

After the first return event, Evatt matters progress through familiar stages, but with a specialist team and closer supervision. Events often include interim hearings, mentions, compliance and readiness hearings, and eventually a final hearing before a judge.

Throughout this pathway, the same Evatt Judicial Registrar often reviews compliance, presses for timely evidence, and refines the focus for any final hearing. This approach seeks fewer adjournments, fewer unnecessary court events, and steadier momentum.

Specialist professionals in the Evatt List

The Evatt team includes Senior Judicial Registrars, Judicial Registrars, Court Child Experts, and trained Court staff with specific expertise in family violence and child abuse.
These professionals assess risk, gather key information, and design case management steps that promote safety.

Court Child Experts, often psychologists or social workers, engage with parents and children for assessments and reports where appropriate. These reports assist the Court with insight into children's experiences and needs in high risk situations.

Independent Children's Lawyer in high risk cases

In many Evatt matters, the Court appoints an Independent Children's Lawyer, often referred to as an ICL. The ICL represents the best interests of the child, not the wishes of either parent. You can read more about the role of an ICL in our earlier blog, "The Role of an Independent Children's Lawyer".

How does the Evatt List respond to family violence?

Domestic and family violence remains a significant problem across Australia, with reports of rising incidents during and after the COVID-19 period. Family law and domestic violence intersect directly in the Evatt List, because this specialist pathway responds to serious safety risks through structured, early intervention.

Judicial Registrars focus on early information gathering from police, child protection, and family violence services, then use that material to shape safety-focused interim parenting arrangements, including supervised time or no contact in appropriate cases.

The Evatt framework aligns with the Court's Family Violence Plan and Best Practice Principles by reducing unnecessary court events, limiting unsafe contact between parties at court, and linking families with support services, all aimed at reducing further trauma and harm.

What you should expect if your parenting case enters the Evatt List

If your matter enters the Evatt List, you should expect closer supervision, more frequent contact with the Court, and earlier attention to safety concerns than in many standard parenting cases.
You should also expect strong emphasis on timely evidence from police, child protection, and expert professionals.

An Evatt matter does not involve a finding that allegations are true at the start of the case.
Allocation instead signals that the Court has identified serious risk features and places your family into a specialist pathway for careful management.

Practical steps for parents in Evatt matters

If you find your matter enters the Evatt List, you should consider the following practical steps:

Responding in a timely manner to Court directions will help strengthen your position. Prompt compliance with orders about affidavits, disclosure, and attendance at appointments supports a smoother process.

Gather and organise key material that relates to safety concerns, such as police reports, medical records, and communications regarding threats or violence.

Discuss this material with your lawyer so that your evidence remains clear, focussed, and consistent with Court directions.

Contact Meillon & Bright early if you expect serious risk issues in your parenting matter or if the Court has already placed your case into the Evatt List.

The information contained in this article is of general nature and should not be construed as legal advice. If you require further information, advice or assistance for your specific circumstances, please contact us.