

PARENTING COORDINATION: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is Parenting Coordination?

A qualified impartial professional assists separated or divorced parents to resolve issues pertaining to their parenting plan and to help them implement their parenting plan in a new alternative dispute resolution process.

This can include:

- identifying disputed issues;
- reducing misunderstandings;
- clarifying priorities;
- exploring possibilities for problem solving;
- developing methods of collaboration in parenting;
- Developing a parenting plan; and aiding parties in complying with the court's order regarding parenting issues.

Parenting Coordination helps the parents avoid repeated trips to court over parenting issues.

Q. What is a Parenting Coordinator?

A professional trained in parenting coordination who performs five functions:

- a. Assessment
- b. Parent Education about communication and co-parenting
- c. Coaching
- d. Case Management/ Coordination of Services
- e. Mediation and other forms of Conflict Resolution
- f. Arbitration

Q. What are the benefits of Parenting Coordination?

Parenting Coordination offers a much better way of resolving parenting plan issues than returning to court. In addition, the resolution comes much faster than waiting for a court date and then the court decision. The Parenting Coordinator educates the parents about the harm to the children of hostility between parents, mediates issues as they arise, and if the parents are unable to resolve minor issues, makes the decision.

Q: What does Parenting Coordination provide that mediation, therapy, and other services for families do not provide?

Parenting Coordination is a long-term success-oriented process for divorced or separated parents who are in conflict.

It is not:

- Therapy to treat an emotional problem or psychological problem.
- Counselling

The Parenting Coordinator will work with others involved with the family, including mental health experts, health care personnel, social services, education and legal professionals, as well as extended family, stepparents and the children. The Parenting Coordinator may make recommendations for outside services, such as a child specialist.

Parenting Coordination is a solution-oriented process. It helps parents work together for the good of their children rather than fighting each other. Parenting Coordination provides an opportunity for parents to develop an ability parent their children in a healthy, constructive way rather than perpetuating a conflict that places their children in the parents' war zone.

Q. What are the characteristics of parents who could benefit from parenting coordination?

The parents are having frequent disputes about issues such as the parenting schedule, exchange times and locations, extracurricular activities, education choices, and medical decisions. They may have gone back to court several times since the divorce. Some of these parents may be in "high conflict" meaning they are continuously and frequently in dispute with the other parent.

Q. What are the goals of Parenting Coordination?

The goals of Parenting Coordination include:

- a) Providing an alternative method for parents to communicate about child-related issues;
- b) Taking children out of the middle of parental conflict.
- c) Fostering creative problem solving that involves both parents in the children's lives.

Q: What information does a Parenting Coordinator have about the family?

The Parenting Coordinator should have access to any of the following for review:

- Parenting or custody evaluations;
- Interim or final court orders in the divorce or parenting case;
- Protective (family violence) orders; and other applicable cases involving criminal assault, domestic violence or child abuse regarding one or both parents;
- Educational records; and
- Information from parents, children, and other collateral sources.

Q: When in the court process is Parenting Coordination most likely to be used?

Parenting coordination can be used at any point in the divorce or separation process. However, a parenting coordinator usually works with a family post-divorce or when there are repeated returns to court, continuing anger and distrust, difficulty between the parents in communicating and cooperating in the care of their children, or other behaviors that the court feels warrants the appointment of a parenting coordinator. A parenting coordinator may be appointed by the courts or the parents determine that parenting coordination at that stage is necessary.

Q. How is the arbitration function of a Parenting Coordinator different from the decision-making of a Judge?

The arbitration function is limited and it is clearly outlined in my Parenting Coordination Agreement. Often it is on issues that cannot wait the month or two that it would take to get a decision from the court. The court can make decisions about a change in primary residence, allocation of time between the parents, moving the child's residence a substantial distance, and changing child support. A Parenting Coordinator may make NONE of these decisions. Instead, a Parenting Coordinator decides about

- times and locations to exchange the child,
- choice of extracurricular activities, holiday schedules, daily, weekly and/or monthly schedules; daycare/babysitting;
- parenting exchanges and transportation responsibility;
- medical, dental and vision care;

- psychological counseling and related arrangements for the children;
- extra-curricular activities and arrangements for the children; education, including but not limited to school choice, tutoring,
- participation in special education programs;
- discipline;
- methods of communication; and
- any other issues that may be identified by the Court or agreed on by the parents.

Q. How is Parenting Coordination different from Parent Training?

Parent Training, like Parenting Coordination, helps parents create a better environment for their children. Parent Training teaches parents the behavioral techniques and parenting skills to use with their children. The main differences, however, are that Parenting Coordination:

- Is post order so the parents do not live together,
- Incorporates issues unique to separation and divorce, and
- Uses a variety of alternative dispute resolution techniques to help resolve conflict (mediation, facilitation, consensus building, and arbitration).

Q. What research is available on the effectiveness of Parenting Coordination?

Case studies shows that reduced conflict between parents and reduced court appearances have a positive impact on a child (ren)’s well-being.

Q. How Can Parenting Coordination Help?

Parents learn to:

- Manage their emotions
- Communicate more effectively
- Understand the impact of conflict on children
- Learn about children’s developmental needs
- Negotiate appropriate post-divorce or separation boundaries
- Develop sensitivity to their children’s needs
- Identify mutually agreeable parenting goals
- Brainstorm options to meet goals
- Evaluate options to reach agreements within legal guidelines