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A PARENTING COORDINATOR: FOR WHAT TYPE OF FAMILY AND WHY?

Post judgment families that require professional services tend to be in a perpetual state of conflict that will not cease despite having a final parenting plan. Both Co-Parenting Counseling and Parenting Coordination serve to minimize conflict, reduce litigation, and focus, educate and reorient the parents to the needs of the children.

Co-Parenting Counseling enjoys the best success with lower to moderately conflicted parents who demonstrate a willingness and an ability to be cooperative with each other in parenting their children. A Co-Parenting Counselor will assist the parents in developing strategies for communication, respect and navigating issues with their children as they arise. It is based in clinical, educational and therapeutic process. Co-Parenting Counseling can also be used to move through impasses in crafting a parenting plan to be returned to all counsel for final review.

A Parenting Coordinator is a case and conflict manager, appointed through a court order, for the parents of moderate to high conflict who have demonstrated an inability to work cooperatively with each other to the repeated detriment of the children. Parenting Coordination is a process of monitoring and managing both the parenting plan and the parent behaviors with a structured commitment and accountability. It is based in an alternative dispute resolution process that results in final decision making authority by the parenting coordinator if the parents cannot agree upon an issue (if so provided for in the court order). Parenting Coordination is not used to develop the parenting plan but to effectuate it.

Some Examples of Families in Need of a Parenting Coordinator:

- Where mediation and/or co-parenting services have proven ineffective
- Where there is a high rate of re-litigation for non-legal issues such as parenting plan implementation and parent behavior issues
- Where there is continued interference with the health and educational information access of the children
- Where parents are unable to navigate normal child related issues such as extra-curricular activities, transitions, minor temporary alterations to the parenting plan, etc.
- Where parents regularly utilize the children to express their disputes and incorporate them in the conflict
- Where parents overuse the court process to express anger, grievances or to punish
- Where either or both parent's behaviors are such that require monitoring and accountability
- Where the parents have heavily relied on the GAL and/or the court system for resolution of the vast majority of parenting issues

Some Examples of the Types of Disputes Resolved by a Parenting Coordinator:

- Identify and resolve ambiguities in the court ordered parenting plan (e.g. school closing due to inclement weather or the interaction between holiday time and regular access)
- Advanced calendaring to identify and resolve conflicts and problems
- Develop, implement and monitor achievable communication structure and rules
- Develop, implement and monitor protocols for transitions of the children, who may be present and what items go with the children
- Resolution of temporary variations to the access schedule due to special or life events of the parents and/or children
- Resolution of the choice and joint compliance with the educational and recreational enrichment activities of the children
- Establish and monitor joint routines for the children across the households such as homework, bedtimes, the child's communication with the other parent, etc.
- Establish protocols for the role of significant others and other involved family members in the ongoing parenting plan and related issues

These lists are far from exhaustive and designed to provide information regarding the resources available for high conflict families as they move into post judgment status. In establishing Parenting Coordination for a family, the parents and their counsel play a vital role in setting the scope of the issues that may be addressed by the Parenting Coordinator, the length of commitment to the process and any decision making authority the Parenting Coordinator may have over the parents (subject to the right of de novo review by the court). The choice in post judgment interventions best suited to the needs of the family will direct the best success as they move forward.

Since 1995, William RJP Brown's legal career has focused on domestic relations litigation representing children, parents and parties in all aspects of divorce, custody and parenting access disputes. That background is integrated with the training and work he has performed as a mediator, a Family Special Master at the Regional Family Trial Docket, his extensive experience as a guardian ad litem across the state, and his network of mental health professionals. Attorney Brown received his Parenting Coordination training through the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts. For additional information about Parenting Coordination, please feel free to contact us.