

Parenting Coordination Information Booklet

Family First Mediation/
The Mediation Centre



The
Mediation
Centre



FAMILY FIRST
MEDIATION AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Parenting Coordination

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What is Parenting Coordination?

Parenting Coordination is an emerging form of alternate dispute resolution used in cases whereby parents generally already have final parenting orders or a final parenting plan in place but require additional help adhering to the orders/plan.

Parenting Coordination is offered in Australia by specialist practitioners known as Parenting Coordinators who work with parents whereby high levels of conflict continue to make co-parenting difficult.

Parenting Coordination combines assessment, education, case management, conflict management and negotiation in a tightly managed process with the aim of supporting parents to resolve disputes without further court intervention.

Who can be a Parenting Coordinator?

Typically, a Parenting Coordinator is someone with a mental health or legal background who also has training in child development, family law, family systems, domestic violence, mediation, arbitration, and conflict resolution.

Generally, a Parenting Coordinator should have at least five years of experience working with families in the above fields and be committed to helping families resolve conflicts.

Essentially, a Parenting Coordinator needs to have the requisite skills in rapport building, knowledge of ethical legal standards, be familiar with, and up to date with, current social science research, be sensitive to individual and cultural diversity and participate in reflective practice.

Who Can Benefit from Parenting Coordination?

Because of its specialist nature, Parenting Coordination is aimed at helping separated parents who continue to have moderate to high levels of conflict post the making of Court orders or a final Parenting Plan.

Sometimes parents will engage a Parenting Coordinator to help them interpret Court orders if they have different views about its meaning and interpretation.

Parenting Coordination can benefit parents who wish to stay out of the Court system.

How to Engage a Parenting Coordinator?

A Parenting Coordinator can be contracted by agreement between the parents in their Parenting Plan or by Court order. Your chosen Parenting Coordinator should be

able to provide you with a template of the Order needed to appoint them as your Parenting Coordinator. You can download a free Parenting Coordinator Order template on our websites.

A referral for Parenting Coordination can be made by the parents themselves, family law lawyers, family counsellors or the Court.

Confidentiality

Unlike other forms of alternate dispute resolution like mediation, Parenting Coordination is **NOT** confidential.

The only part of the process that is confidential is the individual parent intake which is conducted before any joint sessions occur.

All other sessions are 'on record' and 'with prejudice'. This means that session notes may be admitted into evidence if the matter returns to Court, thereby holding parents accountable for their behaviours.

Your Parenting Coordinator may also discuss your case with other third parties who are assisting the family, with your consent, such as counsellors, psychologists and/or the children's schools. There will be further details about this in your Parenting Coordination Agreement.

Duration of Parenting Coordination

During your initial intake appointment, you will be guided through a detailed Parenting Coordination Agreement which will state the duration of the process.

Generally, a Parenting Coordinator is appointed to work with separated parents for between 12 - 24 months.

In certain circumstances, Parenting Coordination may be terminated earlier. The details of which will be outlined in the Parenting Coordination Agreement.

What Issues can be Addressed in Parenting Coordination

Parenting Coordination can help separated parents to resolve any parenting issues that may arise between parents.

Often, this will include changes to time arrangements, clarification of orders, travel disputes, health and education decisions, issues around communication, individual boundaries, and child rearing.

Court orders do not give parents the answers for all issues that may arise in the parenting of children and parents who experience high conflict with their co-parent often need support in resolving these issues.

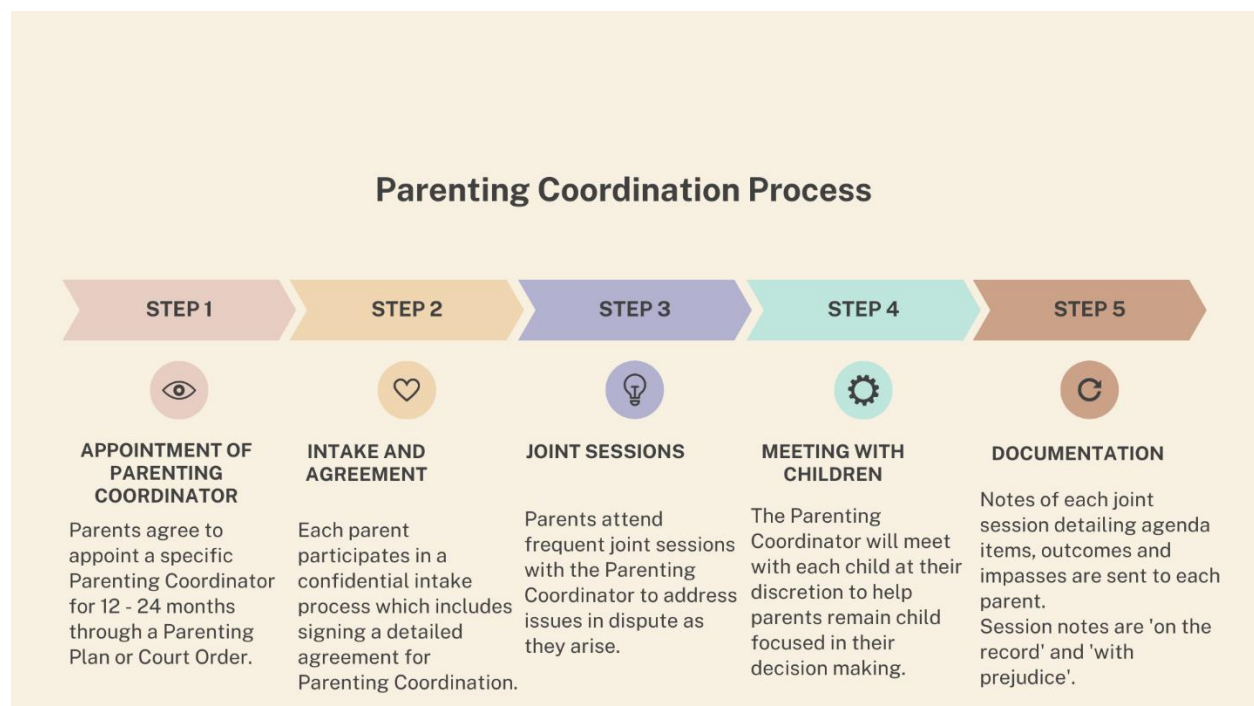
Suitability

Parenting Coordination is not always appropriate.

Your Parenting Coordinator will conduct rigorous safety screening in your initial intake appointment. Even if you have been ordered to participate in Parenting Coordination, or your lawyer feels that it will be of assistance to you, your Parenting Coordinator must first assess that it is a suitable and safe process for you. It would be unethical to offer a process that is not suitable.

Parenting Coordination Process

The below infographic demonstrates how the Parenting Coordination process works:



Often, there will be several joint sessions in the first month of Parenting Coordination to help ease conflict. Further joint sessions will be held at the discretion of the Parenting Coordinator or at the request of a party.

Involvement of Children in Parenting Coordination

Whether your child/ren meets with your Parenting Coordinator or not will depend on who you engage as your Parenting Coordinator.

We work in a child-centered model of Parenting Coordination which means that your child/ren **WILL** meet with our Parenting Coordinator at their discretion but at least once in the process.

This is to ensure that parents remain focused on their child/ren in their decision making rather than their individual needs or desires.

Documentation

At the end of each joint session your Parenting Coordinator will prepare 'Session Notes' which diligently detail what the agenda was for the meeting, what the outcomes were of the joint session and what was impeding a resolution.

These notes are generally provided to both parties by email within 24 hours of the joint session.

The Session Notes are 'on record' and 'with prejudice' and can be admitted into evidence in Court if necessary.

Risk Factors Affecting Children's Adjustment Post Separation

How well a child adjusts and develops into adulthood, after separation, largely depends on how well parents manage conflict, which is why Parenting Coordination can be a great alternative to further litigation for parents.

Research has demonstrated that there are several risk factors that affect how well a child adjusts and develops post separation, which include:

- The level of parental conflict, which also applies to families that are intact;
- Legal or court proceedings;
- Multiple stressors and changes for the child;
- Pre-existing vulnerabilities such as social or emotional problems;
- Whether a child blames themselves for their parent's separation;
- Whether a parent has an unmanaged mental health issue;
- If a child becomes alienated or estranged from a parent.

If these factors can be reduced or eliminated children have a much better chance of becoming well-adjusted individuals.

Co-operative Parenting vs Parallel Parenting

There is a plethora of research that shows that co-operative parenting will benefit children's adjustment and development after separation. However, we know that this is not always possible. Research shows that the next best thing to co-operative parenting is 'Parallel Parenting', sometimes referred to as 'good enough parenting'. The below table highlights the differences between the two post separation parenting styles and may highlight areas where change can occur through Parenting Coordination.

| Cooperative Parenting | Parallel Parenting |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child focused• Regular phone and in person communication between the parents• Major decisions are jointly discussed• Parents work together to resolve child-related issues• Facilitation of smooth transitions between homes• Flexible to schedule changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adult focused• Parents only communicate via email, third persons, Apps or text message• Major decisions are communicated with the other parent rather than discussed• Each parent makes decisions about the child during their time with the child• Abrupt transitions between the two homes i.e., no interaction between parents, curb-side transition• No room for flexibility. Follows agreements strictly. |

Parenting Coordination Order Template

Please visit our website to download a free Parenting Coordination Order Template or contact us by email. We will gladly provide this to you.

Fees:

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Individual Parent Intake | \$330 per parent |
| 1 Hour Joint Session | \$400 per parent |
| Additional Work Outside of Joint Sessions/Correspondence with Third Parties | \$300 per parent |

Please contact us with any questions. We hope to be able to assist you!