

PARENT INFORMATION REGARDING THE USE OF PARENTING COORDINATORS

Using a Parenting Coordinator to help make recommendations to the court about your children can be a useful alternative to repeatedly going to court.

A Parenting Coordinator is a professional appointed by the court to assist parents in resolving disputes about parenting their children and to make recommendations to the court for orders if the parents are unable reach a resolution.

Parents may want to hire a Parenting Coordinator when other avenues of problem resolution have not resulted in an ability to make recommendations to the court about their children and there are continued disagreements about such issues as schedules, overnight parenting time, choice of schools, extracurricular activities, exchanging the children, holiday scheduling, the handling of the children's behavior, religious training, health issues, and problematic behaviors on the part of one or both parents. Many times, the family has already participated in a legal decision-making/access evaluation.

Parents may agree to use a Parenting Coordinator and agree to a specific person or the Court may appoint a Parenting Coordinator and appoint a specific person to be Parenting Coordinator of the Court's own choosing.

The amount of time required with the Parenting Coordinator or the number of meetings with the Parenting Coordinator will be determined by the conduct of the parties. The Parenting Coordinator will determine the actual number of meetings that are necessary for any specific issue/issues.

When a dispute is presented to the Parenting Coordinator, the coordinator may try to assist parents in reaching a resolution. The Parenting Coordinator might want to get other information such as the children's opinion, information from doctors, therapists, schools or other caretakers. If the parties cannot come to an agreement, the Parenting Coordinator then makes a recommendation to the court for an order.

If one parent is opposed to the recommendation, he or she can file an objection within 10 days and the court can review the recommendations. The Court may accept, modify or reject the recommendations of the Parenting Coordinator. The Court may also set the matter for hearing. In a time-sensitive situation, a recommendation of the Parenting Coordinator may be effective immediately pending approval by the court and without prejudice to the parties.

Hiring a Parenting Coordinator is a serious matter. A parenting coordinator is especially helpful for families who continue to have disagreements. Parenting Coordinators are also useful for families where parents have concerns about drugs, alcohol, abuse or the stability of the other parent. A Parenting Coordinator may be appointed for a specific term. If the Parenting Coordinator feels that he or she cannot be helpful to the family, the Parenting Coordinator can resign. If one parent is unhappy with the Parenting Coordinator, that parent cannot alone discharge the Parenting Coordinator. If the Parenting Coordinator acts in a manner that seems unprofessional, the parent should first talk with the Parenting Coordinator about that parent's concerns. If the parent is still unsatisfied, that parent should submit a written statement of that parent's concern to the two attorneys (if represented), the Parenting Coordinator, the child's attorney (if there is one) and to the other parent. A conference may be set to resolve the concerns. If the concern is still not resolved after that meeting, the parent can ask the court to have the Parenting Coordinator removed. The judge will then review the complaint and make a decision. If the Coordinator is removed, a new Parenting Coordinator may be appointed.

The Parenting Coordinator's goals are somewhat different than those of a judge. A judge's job is to make orders that are based on the law, including the best interests of the children. A Parenting Coordinator's job is to assist parents in making parenting decisions in the best interests of the children and in accordance with the parenting plan, as set forth in their decree or the current court order. Whenever possible, a major goal is to help families develop their skills so they do not need a Parenting Coordinator. If this can be accomplished, the power to make decisions about their children is back in the hands of the parents.

The parents pay the fees for the services of a Parenting Coordinator as ordered by the court. Many Parenting Coordinators request a retainer before they begin their work with a family. Before a Parenting Coordinator is appointed, the judge will decide what portion of the fee each parent will pay.

Using a Parenting Coordinator will usually reduce the need to go to court, and, therefore, should be cost effective. In addition, the family will usually be seen sooner by the Parenting Coordinator than the Court, resulting in quicker decisions.