



## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PARENTING COORDINATORS



*Q: What is a Parenting Coordinator?*

**A:** A Parenting Coordinator is a professional with mental health, mediation and/or legal training that is trained in a child-focused alternative dispute resolution process to help parents in high conflict after their separation/divorce. The Parenting Coordinator assists parents to implement their parenting plan in a timely manner and monitors the parenting plan follow-through in order to protect and sustain safe, healthy and meaningful parent-child relationships. The PC helps to assess the parenting issues, educates the parties, manages the parenting plan, manages ongoing potential conflict and provides recommendations and/or decisions within the scope of a court order, or a PC Agreement

*Q: Do I need a Parenting Coordinator?*

**A:** You would likely benefit from a Parenting Coordinator if you have had difficulty establishing a consistent, detailed parenting plan or if you have had trouble following a parenting plan. If you and your ex-spouse have been in conflict for 2 years or more and have been involved in a protracted legal battle, you may need the assistance of an alternative dispute resolution process.

*Q: What does a Parenting Coordinator do?*

**A:** The Parenting Coordinator serves a few roles. The person will meet with you individually and together. He/she will help to facilitate an agreement through the process of negotiation. In addition to helping you to negotiate an agreement, the PC will provide education to each of you about important issues to consider post-separation in relation to your children. The PC will meet with your children to gain an understanding of their issues and needs. The PC may also gather information from 3<sup>rd</sup> parties and past interveners. The information gathered may be provided back to legal counsel or to the

court if parents have received a court order. The PC makes recommendations and assists you to follow an agreement you have made. The PC is typically trained in Arbitration and if agreed upon, the PC may also assist the parties to make decisions.

*Q: How do I choose a Parenting Coordinator?*

**A:** You may approach your legal counsel for names of professionals who engage in this practice. You may also contact the Alberta Family Mediation Society for a list of names of qualified professionals. Parenting Coordinators have a specific set of expertise including: 1) Clinical Masters degree in a mental health discipline, 2) Mediation training, 3) Training and experience in domestic violence, 4) Training in issues related to separation and divorce, 5) Training in high conflict situations 6) Training in Parenting Coordination process. 7) Training in Arbitration.

*Q: Do I have to sign an agreement to enter into this service?*

**A:** Yes. A Parenting Coordinator will provide the following in their agreements: Definition of roles and PC activities, fee structure, time-lines, limits of confidentiality, and the option to arbitrate. The agreement defines how you and the PC will work together.

*Q: What if I don't really want to follow the structured agreement once I have entered into it?*

**A:** Once you have entered into an agreement with a PC, it is typically incorporated into a court order. This process ensures that the parties do not continually move from one service provider to another, rather stay involved (in a time-limited way) until a settlement has been reached and is being followed.

*Q: What if the process does not work?*

**A:** Entering into an agreement to work with a Parenting Coordinator and finding a reasonable outcome can be highly successful. In the few cases that it is not, there is typically a provision in your agreement with your PC to proceed to use the services of an external Arbitrator or the Parenting Coordinator will shift to an Arbitration role. An external person will be provided all of the information about your situation and they will deliberate and make a binding decision for you or the PC will assist you in this way.

*Q: What if I just do not trust the other party?*

**A:** It is not necessary to be on “good” terms with the other party to enter into this process. In fact, the PC can act as a neutral helper in matters where high levels of mistrust and conflict are present. The PC is neutral in that all parties are viewed from an equal opportunity position but the PC can begin to raise issues that have been critical in stopping you from reaching a resolution. This role is different from that of a Mediator in that the PC addresses issues through education and recommendations.

*Q: Is this just the same service as I would get if I went to a Mediator?*

**A:** No. The Mediator is a neutral, third party who can help you work out your separation details including a parenting plan by way of a specific process, but this person cannot provide education or recommendations to the parties. The role of the Mediator is less intrusive and is typically completed in a closed, confidential way (unless the parties sign a consent for the release of information). The Mediator does work with parties in high conflict, but the duration of the conflict is typically shorter and the role of the Mediator is to help you develop the parenting plan. The Parenting Coordinator may need to speak to a variety of professionals that have been involved with your family in order to be of assistance to you. Information shared is not necessarily confidential/closed. The process is very transparent and the parties are typically both involved in all communications unless directed by the Parenting Coordinator. The Parenting Coordinator helps to organize frequency of visits and manages time-lines.

*Q: Who pays for the service?*

**A:** Parents pay for the service and generally divide the fees 50/50 unless they decide they will share the costs in an alternative way.

*Q: Can the Parenting Coordinator do the same thing as a child therapist or my lawyer?*

**A:** No. Although the child therapist or lawyer may have the expertise to provide a Parenting Coordinator service, if you hire one of these professionals to act as a legal representative for yourself or a counselor for your children, these professionals cannot operate as a Parenting Coordinator as well. These individuals should not act as a PC if they have already been providing another service to you and your family. You may need a child therapist and you will need legal counsel, but each of these roles should remain separate and distinct.