

The Process of Working with a Parenting Coordinator

If you have a parenting plan in place after a separation or divorce and it is no longer satisfactory for any reason*, you can work with a Parenting Coordinator (PC) to amend the plan to better suit your current circumstances. The process of working with a PC has three stages and each will be explained in turn.

Stage One: Screening. When couples agree to work with a PC to amend an existing parenting plan, it is imperative that both parents can actively participate in the process and ensure that their views and opinions are shared. To guarantee that both parents can engage fully in the process, a PC will interview each parent. The PC is trained to thoroughly assess the ability of the each parent to take part in the discussion and decision-making. Should the PC determine that, for any reason, there will not be fair and equal contribution by both parents, they will make a referral to an alternative avenue to amend the parenting plan.

Stage Two: Mediation. Once it has been established that both parents can actively contribute to the process, the PC will meet with both of them to facilitate a discussion about the issue to be considered. Generally it is a conversation which fully defines the issue and brainstorms possible solutions. The conversation in this phase is designed to ensure every possible strategy to achieve a reasonable outcome that both parents can be satisfied with is considered. If the parents are able to agree on a resolution in a cooperative way the decision becomes a legally binding addendum to the existing parenting plan.

As a psychotherapist, a value added aspect of the mediation phase is I attempt to improve communication skills while we work on the resolution. Many parents have said that they gained valuable insight into positive communication strategies that continue to help them long after their work with me has been completed. Unfortunately some co-parents are unable to agree on a resolution to the issue. When it becomes apparent we have become stuck, we move to the third phase which is arbitration. But we can also move to arbitration if a decision needs to be made quickly.

Stage Three: Arbitration. At this time, the PC collects information from each parent that the parent believes is important to consider and takes this information away to think it over carefully. Then the PC makes a decision on the issue and this decision becomes a legally binding addendum to the existing parenting plan. The important difference between mediation and arbitration is in mediation the parents are working with the PC to come to a resolution, but in arbitration the PC decides on a resolution that considers the contributions of the parents but is based primarily on what is in the best interest of the children.

It is important to note that only a Parenting Coordinator can do both mediation and arbitration. If you work with a mediator and cannot resolve your issue, you will be referred to a family lawyer or PC. In order to save time and money, choose the services of a Parenting Coordinator when you wish to amend an aspect of your parenting plan.

* The Parenting Coordinator may not make changes that would impact in the usual time (residential) schedule that substantially reduce or expand the children's time with one or both parents or impact the quantum of child support; change in the geographic residence of children; or change legal custody.