FAMILY DYNAMICS

I. Characteristics of High-Conflict Separated Parents
   • Relationship Impairments:
     • Remain engaged to one another through conflict/hostility
     • Negative stories of marriage and separation
     • Unable to trust one another
     • Loss of companionship, control/competence is unbearable
   • Parenting Impairments:
     • Do not know how to realign as co-parents
     • Chronic inability to communicate about child-rearing matters
     • Lack knowledge necessary to shield children from conflict
     • Differing perceptions on how to parent
     • Concern about adequacy of other parent’s ability to parent
   • Thinking Errors:
     • Poor reality testing
     • Distorts/misinterprets information
     • Rigid thinking
   • Self-Focused:
     • Denies any contribution to the problem
     • Blames others
     • Inability to view situations from another’s perspective
     • Extremely sensitive to criticism

Estimated approximately 10% of total number of divorce cases in Hong Kong each year involve disputes on ancillary matter which need to be settled in court.
A. The Child’s Perspective

1. Factors that Influence a Child’s Adjustment to Divorce (Garrity & Baris, 1994)
   • Age of the child
   • Gender of the child
   • Temperament of the child
   • Environmental stability
   • Parental stability
   • Parental access
   • Parental relationship

2. Protective Factors Reducing Risk for Children
   • Good adjustment of residential parents
   • Competent parenting or mother and father
   • Greater involvement of adequate non-residential father
   • Type of involvement and activities of the father
   • Reduced or encapsulated conflict between parents
   • Parallel or cooperative coparenting relationship and style
   • Limited number of family transitions
   • Economic stability
   Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Emery, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Kelly, 2007; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992

3. Risk Factors for Children of Divorce
   • Stress of separation
   • Psychiatric illness & personality disorders of parents
   • Diminished and inadequate parenting
   • Loss of important relationships
   • High-conflict using the child
   • Re-partnering and remarriage
   • Moves to new locations
   • Reduced or unstable economic resources
   Amato, 2000; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Emery, 1999; Hetherington & Kely, 2002, Kelly, 2000; Kelly and Emery, 2003

4. Impact of High-Conflict on Children
   • Interferes with responsible parenting
   • Alters the nature of parent-child relationships
   • Threatens the protective nature of parents
   • Child becomes adult
   • Caught in the middle of their parents’ animosity
• Places a burden on the child’s development and identity formation
• Impairs reality testing
• Externalizing symptoms more common
• Increases anxiety and distress
• Twice as many teenage births
• Academic and achievement problems

PARENTING COORDINATION

II. The Evolution of Parenting Coordination
A. Problem: The Legal System
• Unable to limit or monitor parental behaviors
• Encounter depleted resources
• Relitigation rates burden the court system
• Unable to provide therapeutic interventions effective for separating families
• Limited by therapeutic resources
  o Due to confidentiality
  o Information proved by biased sources or professionals without knowledge working with both parents

B. Definition of Parenting Coordination
• A non-confidential, child centered process for conflicted divorcing parents.
• A form of dispute resolution for parents
  o Implements the parenting plan
  o Provides education
  o Coordinates coparenting
  o Facilitates information exchange
  o Resolves disputes
• Hybrid role performed by an impartial third party.

C. Parenting Coordination Across the Country
• Stage of the Divorce Process
• Professional Background
• Training Requirements

D. Appointment of the Parenting Coordinator

E. Role & Responsibilities of the Parenting Coordinator
1. Assessment
• Review of evaluations and reports
• Identify parents’ contribution to conflict
• Identify impasses to effective communication and coparenting
• Assess the child’s functioning and needs
2. Educational Responsibilities
   - Educates parents regarding the impact of parental conflict on the child(ren)’s development.
   - Introduces child development (emotional, cognitive, educational and social needs/abilities of different ages)
   - Teaches parents anger management, communication and negotiation skills and children’s issues in divorce.

3. Mediation Responsibilities
   - Mediates parenting concerns in order to reach a mutually satisfying resolution that is in the child(ren)’s best interest.

4. Monitoring Responsibilities
   - Advocates for the child(ren) and safeguards their emotional and physical needs
   - Monitors time-sharing arrangements
   - Encourages both parents to maintain ongoing relationship with their child(ren).
   - Records and monitors family progress and compliance.

5. Case Management
   - Consult with all professionals involved with the family.
   - Communication with family members, stepparents, and significant others
   - Manage the coparenting relationship & communication
   - Structure the engagement between the parents
   - Implement the parenting plan

   The parenting coordinator cannot change the legal or physical custody status of the child(ren) or offer a recommendation on custody arrangements.

F. Parenting Coordination Referrals
   1. Appropriate Referrals
      - Children being harmed and caught in the middle of parental conflict
      - Parents refusing to communicate with each other for the child’s welfare
      - Parents requiring monitoring for compliance with court orders/parenting plans
      - High rates of litigation
   2. Inappropriate Referrals
      - Ongoing domestic violence, child abuse and chronic mistreatment of a parent
      - Past domestic violence having a significant degree of distress

COOPERATIVE PARENTING INSTITUTE MODEL
OF PARENTING COORDINATION

III. Stabilizing and Structuring Family Dynamics in the Parenting Coordination Process
   A. Cooperative Parenting Institute Model of Parenting Coordination
1. Goals
   a. Primary Goal of Parenting Coordination
      • The overall emphasis is to offer children the opportunity to grow in a home
        environment free from being caught in the middle of parental hostility.
   b. Secondary Goal of Parenting Coordination
      • To foster a constructive post-separation parental alliance in order to
        simultaneously assist parents to:
        1. Disengage from the physical and emotional relationship of the marriage
        2. Clarify new boundaries for relating to each other
        3. Effectively manage conflict
        4. Make effective mutual decisions
        5. Increase positive collaborative behaviors
        6. Understand the impact of separation and parental conflict on their children
        7. Implement the parenting plan
2. Principles
   • Primary focus on the child’s functioning
   • Present child-rearing matters vs. past relationship issues
   • Recognition that parental participation in the decision-making process yields
     more satisfaction and compliance with agreements
3. Types of Sessions
   • Initial Interview/Individual Session
   • Joint Sessions
   • Child Interviews
   • Caucus
   • Coaching
   • Significant Others/Stepparents
   • Stepparent and Bio-parent
   • Extended Family
   • Family Session

INTERVENTIONS: TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

IV. Techniques and Strategies Addressing Family Dynamics
   A. Communication Approach
E-Mail Format

Dear Mary,
FYI:
1. Kathy has been having difficulty falling asleep lately
2. Jeff got asked to feed the neighbor’s cat. His first real job!

RR:
1. Jeff wants to play soccer with his friends Josh. What do you think?
2. Kathy has an opportunity to go with the church youth group on a retreat over your next weekend. Do you want to change weekends with me?
3. Do you want to take Jeff to his next therapy appointment?

John

Returned E-Mail

Dear John,
    1. I agree to Jeff playing soccer.
    2. I agree to Kathy going to the retreat. I will change weekends with you.
    3. I am not available to take Jeff to his therapy appointment.

Weekly Email Protocol
• Select the day or weekly communication such as Sunday prior to 10:00 pm
• FYI/RR bulleted format
• When nothing to report send email
• Question answered within 24-hours
• Not respond if not weekly email

Email -Rules of Engagement
• Child focused topics only
• Use salutations
• Use black font
• Be brief
• Refrain from capital letters
• Don’t use profanity
• Omit personal feelings and emotions
• Review before sending

Urgent Communication Protocol
• By phone or text immediately or same day
• Urgent examples:
   • Child is ill and needs to be picked up at school
   • Child is on the way to the emergency room
   • Car broke down and cannot pick up the child

B. Mission Statement
C. The Three Ps
P = Focus on the PRESENT not the PAST
P=Focus on the PROBLEM not the PERSON
P=Focus on ONE PROBLEM not the UNIVERSE

D. Maintaining a Child Focus
1. Photograph of child/ren
2. Photograph of absent parent
3. Three Rings

E. Facilitating Parental Responsibility
1. Divorce Rules
2. Coparenting Rules
3. Fair Fighting Rules for Coparents

F. Positive Parenting Qualities
• Think of qualities and characteristics your child’s other parent has that can be valued as positive parenting qualities.
• Now, consider your child’s other parent’s qualities and characteristics from your child’s point of view.
• “How can stopping and thinking about the other parent’s positive parenting qualities help you?”
• “How can it help your coparenting relationship?”
• “How will your life be when you continue to stop and think about the other parent’s positive parenting qualities?”

G. Dealing with Aggressive Adults/Inappropriate Behavior
1. 4-Step Procedure
   Step 1: Empathic Response
   Acknowledge the feelings
   “It seems that you are having to struggle to contain your anger. Knowing this is not the place for you to express your anger, can you think of anything that will help you control your reactions? Would it help if you left the room to get a drink of water?”

   Step 2: Clarify
   Expectations/Set Clear Limits
   “I know that circumstances can tempt you to react, but one of the goals of this process is to practice impulse control and manage your anger. I expect you to practice these skills during our sessions. When you start to yell it undermines your relationship with your coparent and therefore hurts your child. I would like you to take a short break.”

   Step 3: Limits with Consequences
   “If you can’t calm down immediately, I will end the session. If that happens I will let your coparent leave while you stay here in the waiting room and calm down. You decide.”

   Step 4: Termination of Session
The Divorce Rules for Parents

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm just a kid, so please…

1. Do not talk badly about my other parent. (This makes me feel torn apart! It also makes me feel bad about myself!)
2. Do not talk badly about my other parent’s friends or relatives. (Let me care for someone even if you don’t.)
3. Do not talk about the divorce, child support, or other grown-up stuff. (This makes me feel guilty and sick to my stomach. Please leave me out of it!)
4. Do not make me feel bad when I enjoy my time with my other parent. (This makes me afraid to tell you things.)
5. Do not block my visits or prevent me from speaking to my other parent on the phone. (This makes me very upset.)
6. Do not interrupt my time with my other parent by calling too much or by planning my activities during our time together. (I feel frustrated because my time with both of you is special.)
7. Do not argue in front of me or on the phone when I can hear you. (This turns my stomach inside out!)
8. Do not ask me to spy for you when I am at my other parent’s home. (This makes me feel disloyal and dishonest.)
9. Do not ask me to keep secrets from my other parent. (Secrets make me feel anxious.)
10. Do not ask me questions about my other parent’s life or about our time together. (This makes me uncomfortable. So just let me tell you.)
11. Do not give me verbal or written messages to deliver to my other parent. (I end up feeling anxious about their reaction. So please just call, text, e-mail, or leave my other parent a message at work.)
12. Do not blame my other parent for the divorce or for things that go wrong in your life. (This really feels terrible! I end up wanting to defend them from your attack. Sometimes it makes me feel sorry for you and makes me want to protect you. I just want to be a kid, so please, please, stop putting me into the middle!)
13. Do not lean on me for your emotional needs or treat me like an adult. (This causes way too much stress for me. Please find a friend or therapist with whom to talk.)
14. Do not ignore my other parent or sit on opposite sides of the room during my school or sports activities. (This makes me very sad and embarrassed. Please act like parents and be friendly, even if it is just for me.)
15. Do not use guilt to pressure me to love you more, and do not ask where I want to live. (I should never have to choose between my parents! I love both of you!)
16. Do let me take items to my other home as long as I can carry them back and forth. (Otherwise, it feels like you are treating me like a possession.)
17. Do talk to each other weekly so things will go smoother for me. (When you don’t, I feel confused.)
18. Do help me make or purchase a card for my other parent on special occasions. (Until I am old older, I will forget, and that makes me feel ashamed. Please help.)

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19. Do realize that I have two homes, not just one. *(It doesn’t matter how much time I spend there.)*

20. Do let me love both of you and see each of you as much as possible! Be flexible even when it is not part of our regular schedule.

Love,

Your Child
Coparenting Rules

Dear Coparent:

The decision to divorce or separate was a grown-up decision. Let’s do everything in our power to minimize stress for our children by honoring these coparenting rules.

1. Let’s keep our children out of the details of our relationship and divorce.
2. Let’s separate how we view each other as parents from how we feel about each other as partners.
3. When we are in the presence of our child, let’s treat each other with respect by saying hello and good-bye.
4. Let’s remember our children benefit from a relationship with both of us.
5. Let’s include each other in all important parenting decisions. We should each be the first person we contact to discuss our children.
6. Likewise, if something is important to you then assume it would also be important to me. Pass along any information about our children.
7. Let’s be flexible when important opportunities or special occasions arise for our children.
8. Let’s not make plans with the children over the other parent’s time. We need to work these details out between us before we involve our children.
9. Remember we don’t have to do everything the same to be valuable to our children.
10. Let’s support each other’s discipline and consequences.
11. Let’s always give each other the benefit of the doubt when our children tell us things that may or may not have happened. Let’s check with each other before reacting or making assumptions.
12. Let’s share our household expectations and rules with each other so we can attempt to match each other’s whenever possible.
13. Let’s inform each other when we are ready to introduce someone special to our children so we can be positive and encouraging.
14. Let’s respect each other even when we have a difference of opinion.
15. Let’s remember that our children have two homes, not just one.
16. If we bring a stepparent into our children’s lives, let’s make sure they are respectful of the two biological parents as the primary parents.
17. No matter how complicated things may get between us, let’s always seek to resolve conflict between us or with a mediator and do all we can to avoid litigation or other adversarial actions.
18. When either of us registers our children for school or an activity, let’s make sure to enter both parents’ name on the registration card.
19. Let’s avoid referring to the children as mine and remember to say our children no matter how much time they live in each home.
20. Let’s give our children the best chance at success by putting our hurt to the side and focusing on developing the best coparenting relationship we can. Our children deserve this!
Fair Fighting Rules for Coparents

Dos:

1. Do remain calm and avoid overreacting to what your coparent is saying to you. By remaining calm, it is more likely you can breathe and think, and it increases the chance that your coparent will consider your viewpoint.
2. Do focus on solving the problem rather than blaming your coparent.
3. Do respect the other person’s right to have an opinion and to share his or her perspective without interruptions.
4. Do use “I” statements to tell the other parent how his or her actions may be impacting you instead of criticizing and using “you” statements.
5. Do stay in the present and let go of any old grudges.
6. Do tackle only one issue at a time. Don’t get distracted by other topics.
7. Do stick with the facts and only the facts you know directly.
8. Do acknowledge your contribution to the problem by accepting responsibility. Apologize whenever possible.
9. Do take a time out when you are getting too upset to problem solve. Allow your coparent to do the same. Be sure to come back to the topic as soon as possible and try again.
10. Do catch your coparent doing something right. Acknowledge and appreciate his or her efforts.

Don’ts:

1. Do not raise your voice or use aggressive language.
2. Do not interrupt or share your thoughts before you have reflected what your coparent is trying to say.
3. Do not make assumptions or try to read your coparent’s motive.
4. Do not use degrading language or labels or attack your coparent’s character.
5. Do not accuse or threaten.
6. Do not speak in generalities such as using *always* and *never*.
7. Do not use defensive body language such as crossing your arms, pointing your finger, rolling your eyes, or balling up your fists.
8. Do not use any show of force. In addition to physical aggression, this includes not blocking your coparent from leaving, or refusing to let him or her end the discussion.
9. Do not be rigid and try to demand your way. Be willing to compromise.
10. Do not get into any conflicted conversation with your child present or within earshot.
Parenting Coordination
_A program for separating or separated parents_

Parenting Coordination is a psychoeducational program that addresses the relationship between separate households created as a result of divorce or family separation. Parenting Coordination is a service designed to improve the quality of the parental relationship by minimizing conflict. The overall emphasis is to offer children the opportunity to grow in a home environment free from the devastating stress of being caught in the middle of parental conflict.

The goals of Parenting Coordination are to:

1. Educate parents regarding the impact of their behaviors on their child(ren)’s development.
2. Reduce parental conflict through anger management, communication and conflict resolutions skills.
3. Decrease inappropriate parental behaviors to reduce stress for the child(ren).
4. Diminish the child(ren)’s sense of loyalty binds.
5. Help parents identify their contribution to conflict while increasing impulse control.
6. Encourage both parents to maintain an ongoing relationship with their child(ren).
7. Work with parents in developing a detailed plan for issues such as discipline, decision-making, communication, etc.
8. Create a more relaxed home atmosphere allowing the child(ren) to adjust more effectively with the new family structure.
9. Collaborate with professionals involved with the family in order to offer coordinated services.

Parenting Coordinator

Responsibilities:
The role of the parenting coordinator is to assist both parents and any significant others in resolving conflict in a manner that is beneficial to their child(ren). The parenting coordinator has the following responsibilities:

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**Assessment**

- Review of custody evaluations, reports, and court orders.
- Identify parental contributions to conflict.
- Identify impasses to effective communication and coparenting.
- Assess child’s functioning and needs.

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Educational Responsibilities

- Educates parents regarding the impact of parental conflict on the child’s development.
- Teaches parents anger management, communication and negotiation skills and children’s issues in divorce.
- Covers the concepts highlighted in the eight chapters in the Parent Guide – *Cooperative Parenting & Divorce: Parent Guide to Effective Co-Parenting*.

Monitoring Responsibilities

- Advocates for the child and safeguards their emotional and physical needs.
- Monitors time-sharing arrangements.
- Encourages both parents to maintain an ongoing relationship with their child(ren).
- Records and monitors family progress and compliance.

Mediation Responsibilities

- Mediates parenting concerns in order to reach a mutually satisfying resolution that is in the child(ren)’s best interest.
- Works with parents in developing a detailed parenting plan for issues such as discipline, transitions between homes, decision-making procedures, communication, etc.

Case Management

- Consults with all professionals involved with the family.
- Communication with family members, stepparents and significant others.
- Manage the coparenting relationship and communication.
- Structure the engagement between the parents.
- Implement the parenting plan/court order.

The parenting coordinator is impartial and facilitates a non-confidential process regarding issues where the parents are unable to reach agreement. The parenting coordinator is not employed for the benefit of either parent but rather for the benefit of the child/ren.

The role of parenting coordinator also includes the responsibility of documenting parental compliance with any court order, program agreements and program guidelines. The parenting coordinator may determine if and when to videotape joint sessions. The purpose of videotaping will allow the parties to view their behavior for educational purposes, and for the parenting coordinator to assess progress. Any videotapes shall remain in the parenting coordinator’s possession unless ordered to be released by the Court.

Unless otherwise indicated by the court order, the parenting coordinator’s responsibilities include those outlined above. The parenting coordinator has full discretion regarding program implementation including, but not limited to, “temporary” modification of time-sharing plans (visitation), holiday and vacation planning as well as recommending additional educational and/or therapeutic resources, evaluations and therapeutic or supervised visitation. The parenting coordinator may utilize consultants as necessary to assist in the performance of the duties herein. The parenting coordinator cannot change the legal or physical custody status of the child(ren) nor offer a recommendation on custody arrangements.
In the event that parents are unable or unwilling to reach a mutual decision after two or three joint sessions have been dedicated to the issue, the parents may wish to involve their attorneys in the resolution of this specific parenting matter. In the meantime, the process of parenting coordination will continue as it relates to parenting of the children.

Withdrawal of the Parenting Coordinator:
The parenting coordinator may withdraw from the role as parenting coordinator should he or she feel that effective change is no longer occurring in keeping with the best interests of the child(ren). The parents, as well as their respective attorneys, will be given 30 days’ notice of the decision to withdraw. The names of two professionals competent to assume the role of coordinator will be provided to both parents. The parenting coordinator reserves the right to confer with any subsequent parenting coordinators, under any circumstance, and bill for their time, to ensure continuity of care for the parents and child(ren) prior to the commencement of the service of the new parenting coordinator. The parenting coordinator will continue to act as coordinator until parents have established contact with the new parenting coordinator.

The parenting coordinator reserves the right to withdraw at any time without 30 days’ notice as required elsewhere in this agreement for non-payment of fees, harassment by either parent, or unreasonable, harassing or disrespectful behavior of either attorney toward the parenting coordinator, who has sole authority to designate it as such. The parenting coordinator is not obligated to prepare any documentation or reports if the fees have not been paid.

The parenting coordinator may issue a recommendation with regard to any matters under consideration at the time of resignation or end of the parenting coordinator’s term.

Program Implementation

Initiation of the Parenting Coordination Process:
The parenting coordination process will only begin when the information noted below is received from each parent, the initial retainer is paid, and each parent has participated in the initial intake appointment.

The initial meetings with the parents will not be scheduled until the parenting coordinator receives:
   a. Court order signed by the judge;
   b. Retainer from both parents;
   c. Parenting Coordination Intake & Assessments forms from both parents;
   d. Release form from both parents;
   e. Current court orders regarding parenting time and custody and other decrees and judgments including protective orders;
   f. Parenting Plan;
   g. Copies of all evaluations that have been performed on both the parties and their children.
Procedure and Rights of Parenting Coordinator:
The parenting coordinator may conduct sessions that are informal in nature, by telephone, email or in person. The parents are expected to schedule sessions when requested by the parenting coordinator. A parent’s failure to do so will be brought to the attention of the court via written correspondence.

The parenting coordinator will attempt to facilitate disputes. Settlement discussions conducted by the parenting coordinator are not considered mediation. As such, they are not confidential.

The Parenting Coordinator will have:

a. The authority to determine the protocol of all interviews and sessions, including, in the case of meetings with the parents, the power to determine who attends such meetings, including individual and joint sessions with the parents, interviews with collateral contacts, the children, significant others or both;
b. Reasonable access to the children;
c. Notice of all proceedings, including requests for examinations affecting the children;
d. Access to any therapist or psychological evaluator of any of the parents or children, and access to school or medical records;
e. Copies of all evaluations and psychological test results performed on any child(ren) or any parent or custodian or guardian of the children, including Guardian ad Litem reports, psychological evaluations, etc.
f. Access to principal/teachers/teacher’s aides of the children;
g. The ability to use consultants as necessary to assist the parenting coordinator in the performance of the duties in this agreement;
h. Copies of all past and future pleadings relating to custody and parenting issues within seven (7) calendar days after filing.

Time Commitment:
The parenting coordination process conducted over a period of eight to twenty-four months. Sessions are scheduled in this manner to better ensure a positive and cooperative transition over an extended period of time. Other significant individuals (i.e.: grandparents, aunts, etc.) in the life of the child(ren) may be asked by the coordinator to attend joint sessions.

Parents are encouraged to return to the parenting coordinator in the future to address any difficulties interfering with their ability to co-parent prior to seeking legal counsel. Under these circumstances, both parents are expected to work in good faith under the direction of the parenting coordinator for at least four sessions, and will share the expenses associated with this service. This acknowledges that co-parenting improvements do not have to end with the completion of the program or that future issues do not have to create a setback for the child(ren).

Telephone Contact:
All telephone contact initiated by a parent should be limited. Only emergency calls and change of appointment calls will be returned. An emergency is defined as any situation that seriously endangers the child(ren) emotionally or physically. In order to remain objective, the parenting coordinator must maintain an attitude of open-mindedness and objectivity. The parenting coordinator must be able to have the freedom to view the situation free from fixed preconceptions,
biases and expectations. Therefore, telephone consultations will be at the discretion of the parenting coordinator. Parents are discouraged from calling the coordinator as a replacement for problem-solving and conflict resolution. Letter writing and phone messages used in this same way are discouraged. Likewise, all matters and concerns of the parents must be disclosed during joint sessions.

**Communication with the Parenting Coordinator:**
The parents and their attorneys have the right to initiate communications with the parenting coordinator. Any person may initiate contact in writing with the parenting coordinator, provided that copies are submitted to the other party. This applies to e-mail as well. Confidential communication over the internet cannot be ensured. If a parent and/or attorney choose to use this method of communication they assume all risks regarding the confidentiality of any information sent via e-mail.

The parenting coordinator may discuss with either attorney, the process of parenting coordination and details regarding their own client. The other party shall not be discussed unless joint conference calls with attorneys, joint meetings, or status memos are used or by deposition or testimony. The parenting coordinator will not communicate *ex parte* with the court.

The parenting coordination process is non-confidential and the parenting coordinator may exchange information with any screener, evaluator, therapist or guardian ad litem or other party. The parenting coordinator may speak with any combination of parties, counsel, and collateral contacts (including but not limited to therapists, teachers, caregivers, relatives, friends and employers) outside of the presence of other parties or counsel. The parenting coordinator will contact and discuss the family situation with any person involved with the family. An “Authorization for Release of Information” will be utilized for obtaining information. Although issues discussed during sessions might be discussed with other professionals involved with the family, the principle of confidentiality as it relates to parenting coordination implies that all consultations are intended for the direct benefit of the child(ren). This arrangement will not be exploited or abused. The parenting coordinator will not casually communicate information learned in his or her performance of these responsibilities to those who are not involved with the family.

The parenting coordinator may communicate with the child(ren) outside the presence of the parties. The parenting coordinator may communicate with the therapists who are treating the parents’ children. If the parenting coordinator is of the opinion that the information or notes generated by the parenting coordinator’s communication with the children or with the children’s therapists contain information that may be detrimental to the children or that may be damaging to the children’s relationship with his or her therapist or with either parent, the parenting coordinator may withhold that information in her discretion. If either parent wishes to review such information, a review may only be allowed on a noticed Motion, after an *in camera* review of the information by the Court, in consultation with the parenting coordinator. If, after such a review, the Judge agrees with the parenting coordinator that the divulging of such information could be detrimental to the children or damaging to the children’s relationship with his or her therapist or either parent, the Court may order that such information need not be divulged.
If necessary, the parenting coordinator may function as a communication conduit between the two parents until they are able to successfully do so without the assistance of the parenting coordinator.

**Confidentiality**

The parenting coordinator’s notes and transcriptions of communications between confidential sources and notes with the children will be kept confidential and are not subject to discovery or subpoena, unless required by the Judge, if the parenting coordinator determines it would not be in the best interest of the child(ren) or the parents.

In the following situations, the parenting coordinator is required by law to reveal information to other persons or agencies without permission from the participant:

- If a parent threatens grave bodily harm or death to self or another person.
- If there is any reasonable suspicion that a minor is being neglected or abused.

Pennsylvania law requires that all health care practitioners (Physicians, Marriage Counselors, Family and Child Counselors, Psychologists, Teachers, Social Workers and others) report to Child Protective Services any information regarding suspected child abuse.

Health care practitioners who are required to report allegations of child abuse are immune from civil suits or liability for making their required reports. They may not be sued either for the report or for the violation of the confidentiality privilege. Specific statutes provide for the immunity for civil suits and also provide an exception to the confidentiality privilege.

**Privilege Does Not Apply:**

Although the parenting coordinator is a psychotherapist, the nature of confidentiality as it applies to the parenting coordination is substantially and qualitatively different from confidentiality as it pertains to therapist-client privilege in situations of psychotherapy.

The parenting coordinator is not acting as therapist or attorney to the parties, and as such, no client-therapist relationship or client-attorney relationship is established with the parenting coordinator, and that communication is not privileged.

No attorney-client relationship or privilege is created between the parenting coordinator and the parents. When the parenting coordinator is a mental health provider the parents recognize that no legal information is being offered but rather experience. Therefore, the parents are encouraged to speak with their attorney.

**Confidentiality and the Courts:**

Since written reports may be submitted to the Court, and the Court may require testimony from the parenting coordinator, it is understood that parenting coordination is not a confidential process. Parents are encouraged not to subpoena the parenting coordinator to produce notes or person for the purposes of litigation. Parenting coordination is a process that provides services designed to promote a cooperative relationship between parents on behalf of their child(ren). It is not the intent of the parenting coordination process to gather information that can be used in the attempt of one
parent to discredit the other. The parenting coordinator is not employed for the benefit of either parent.

The parenting coordinator who is subpoenaed by an attorney or the Court to testify in either a court of law or by deposition will do so only in the child(ren)’s behalf pursuant to their best interests. All testimony requested from the parenting coordinator will be focused solely on the interactions observed between co-parents or between parents and child(ren). If any records or information are needed or helpful to the Presiding Judge in order to make an informed decision, they will be provided for a processing fee, with the exception of the notes regarding the child(ren) or notes gathered from confidential sources such as psychotherapists. The parent requesting the appearance of the parenting coordinator will be responsible for the fees associated with this request.

Unless ordered by a Court or other lawful authority to release records or portions thereof, records will not be released if requested by only one individual. The records are the property of both parents. Therefore, the records will only be released if both parents approve and sign an authorization to release information with the exception of the children’s and psychotherapist records as noted above.

The parent who chooses to subpoena the parenting coordinator to testify or be deposed shall be responsible for the full fees associated with testimony. A four (4) hour minimum fee payable seven (7) business days in advance is required. The balance will be due seven (7) business days from the date of testimony. No written material will be presented and no work will be performed without the presence of a retainer. The Judge, at their discretion may determine if both parents shall share the cost of testimony.

It may be required or permitted to disclose personal information without the parents’ written authorization. The following examples of when such disclosures may or will be made:

1. If disclosure is compelled by court pursuant to an order of that court.
2. If disclosure is compelled by a board, commission or administrative agency for purposes of adjudication pursuant to its lawful authority.
3. If disclosure is compelled by a board, commission, or administrative agency.
4. If disclosure is compelled by a search warrant lawfully issued to governmental law enforcement agency.
5. If disclosure is compelled or by the Pennsylvania Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (for example, if I have a reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect).
6. If disclosure is required or permitted to a health oversight agency for oversight activities authorized by law, including but limited to, audits, criminal or civil investigations, or licensure or disciplinary actions.
7. If disclosure is required by the collection agency for non-payment of fees.

**Written Reports:**
All information shared during the parenting coordination process, including reports, may be requested and/or ordered by the Court, and will be promptly provided. If reports are written, copies of all reports will be sent to each of the parents, parent’s attorneys and guardian for the child(ren). Timing and frequency of these reports will be at the discretion of the Court and/or the parenting coordinator.
The parenting coordinator's written recommendations, reports and/or memos will be mailed, emailed or faxed to each parent, their attorneys and guardian ad litem. The parenting coordinator may send status memos to document any impasse or non-compliance by either parent. If required by the Judge, the parenting coordinator shall mail, e-mail or fax a copy of recommendations and memos to the Judge with copies to the attorneys, guardian ad litem and the parents.

In the case of an emergency, the parenting coordinator shall have discretion to issue oral emergency recommendations, if they believe they are warranted. Emergency recommendations, including the need for an emergency hearing, shall be communicated to the parents, their attorneys and the Court by the means most likely to ensure that each is aware of the request, with a confirming letter, fax or email to follow as soon as possible. The parenting coordinator may subsequently issue a written recommendation, as described in the paragraph preceding.

The Presiding Judge may request a final written report along with the Parenting Plan. Parents are required to pay for all fees including the fee for the final report prior to the conclusion of the program. These documents will not be released until each parent has paid the fee associated with this service.

Disruption of the Parent

The intent of the parenting coordination process is to provide services agreed by all participants as outlined in this document. While every precaution – short of physical intervention – shall be taken to secure the safety of participants, it cannot be assured. Appropriate medical and law enforcement notification are the extent of the Parenting Coordinator’s responsibilities at times of physical danger to any one participant involved in the program. A guarantee that no harm will occur during each session is neither stated nor implied.

Should a parent choose to engage in disruptive behaviors, the Parenting Coordinator may:
1. Redirect the parent.
2. Ask the parent if they would like to leave the room for a short break.
3. End the session. The disruptive parent will be responsible for the full fee for the session.

In situations in which a parent has made alternative financial arrangements with the court, the disruptive parent will still be responsible for the full session fee.

At any time, either parent is welcome to invite their attorney and the guardian ad litem to be an observer in the process as long as arrangements are made with the parenting coordinator a minimum of one week ahead of the scheduled session. In the event that one parent invites their attorney to attend a joint session, the other parent’s attorney shall also be invited to attend the session.

Responsibilities of the Parents

One of the goals of the parenting coordination process is for both parents to learn strategies for problem-solving and conflict resolution. Therefore,
-Parents shall employ these strategies in solving their conflict and will delay the
impulsive expression of anger.
-Parents shall schedule appointments in advance. Appointments will be held during business hours.
-Parents shall attend appointments on time and prepared.
-Parents shall abide by all program requirements and expectations.

Parents are encouraged not to initiate any legal action after beginning the process of parent coordination with the exception of matters governed by Domestic Relations. Since one of the program goals is to increase trust and cooperation, parents must advise their respective attorneys not to do anything that might be conceived as adversarial. If either parent is considering returning to court, this parent must inform the other parent and the parenting coordinator during a joint session, and state the issue. The parenting coordinator will attempt to assist the parents’ reach a resolution without court intervention. However, as noted above, in the event that parents are unable or unwilling to reach a mutual decision after two or three joint sessions have been dedicated to the issue, the parents may wish to involve their attorneys in the resolution of this specific parenting matter. In the meantime, the process of parent coordination will continue as it relates to parenting of the children.

Parents are encouraged to return to the parenting coordinator at any point in the future as a means of resolving parenting issues that they have been unable to resolve on their own. Both parents will participate and share the costs of any future sessions.

Process Regarding Complaints:
If either parent is dissatisfied with the performance of the parenting coordinator they can make their opinion known by following these procedures:

Step 1: Discuss the problem with the parenting coordinator in a joint session.
Step 2: Request an individual session with the parenting coordinator in an attempt to work through any difficulties.
Step 3: Request that their attorney or the guardian be invited into a joint session.

If either parent files any form of complaint, suit or grievance against the parenting coordinator, he/she agrees to fully compensate and reimburse the parenting coordinator for her time and expenses incurred in defending any frivolous complaints ("frivolous" is defined as a complaint that is dismissed as unfounded), including attorney fees.

Compensation of the Parenting Coordinator:
A retainer of ____________ is expected from each parent by the date noted in the cover sheet and will be required to initiate the parenting coordination process unless stipulated differently in the Court Order. On a monthly basis, both parents will be provided with an itemized copy of their bill. An additional retainer will be requested as needed. Otherwise, payment is due at the beginning of each session.

The parenting coordinator shall not be required to perform any services until the retainers have been paid. If there is any retainer balance at the conclusion of the parenting coordinator's work, the parenting coordinator will return the balance to the parents when the parenting coordinator deems the work complete.
If a balance occurs, the parents shall pay the additional fees within ten (10) days of the receipt of a bill sent for services. If for any reason, the parties have not met their financial obligation and have a balance they shall be charged a 9% finance charge every month full payment is not made. The parenting coordinator will report to the Court in writing, with a copy sent to both parents and both counsel, concerning a parent’s apparent failure to cooperate in making such payments as are or may become due under this agreement, and the Court shall have the continuing authority under the Pennsylvania Rules of Civil Procedure to sanction a party for non-cooperation.

The fee schedule is:

$_____: Individual Session (50-minutes)
$_____: Per parent for each 50-minute Joint session
$_____: Per parent for each 80-Minute Joint Session
$_____: Per 10-Minutes: Telephone/e-mail consultations with parent/guardian or professionals
$_____: Per Hour: Preparation of written reports/memos/e-mail/facsimiles
$_____: Per Hour: Home/School/Work Visits including travel to and from the location
$_____: Per Hour: Court time including travel to and from the proceedings
$_____: Monthly fee for monitoring e-mail and text messages
$_____: Per Hour: Reading extensive reports and records
$_____: Book: Cooperative Parenting and Divorce: A Parent Guide to Effective Co-Parenting per parent

Since the process of parenting coordination is not therapy no third party insurance reimbursement shall be accepted.

The parenting coordinator shall be reimbursed for any expenses he or she incurs in association with his or her role as a parenting coordinator. These costs may include, but not limited to, the following: photocopies, messenger service, reading and responding to email correspondence, long distance telephone and fax charges, express and/or certified mail expenses, parking, tolls, mileage, travel expenses and word processing. Payment for services involved in the intake process shall be deducted from the retainer prior to the initial meeting.

The amount charged for the program will be equally divided (with the exception of individual sessions) unless the parenting coordinator is provided with a certified copy of the divorce decree or court order that states otherwise. However, each party shall pay the full fee for their intake appointment, partner’s or extended family member’s intake appointment and any coaching sessions.

In either situation of individual or joint sessions, if either parent must cancel, it must be done within 24-hours of the scheduled session. It is the canceling parent’s responsibility to reschedule the session. When the session is a joint session, the canceling parent must notify all participants of this change and the date and time of the rescheduled session. If a parent cancels less than 24 hours in advance or misses a session, without exception, this parent will be charged the full (fee for both parents) session fee. This provision will be reinforced in all circumstances regardless of the financial arrangements with the Court.
In the situation of a joint session, if a parent is fifteen minutes late, the session will be canceled and the absent parent will be charged the full session fee. This provision will be reinforced in all circumstances regardless of the financial arrangements with the Court. If a session is ended due to a parent’s disruptive behavior, this parent will be charged the full session fee. This provision will be reinforced in all circumstances regardless of the financial arrangements with the Court.

If the court order stipulates that only one parent is financially responsible for the fees and the non-paying parent cancels without 24-hour notice or misses a session, the non-paying parent is responsible for the charge. The same procedure applies to termination of a session due to a parent’s disruptive behavior and phone calls made by the non-paying parent. Phone calls will be billed to the parent who initiates the call. However, any emergency phone calls and services associated with emergencies will be billed at the discretion of the parenting coordinator.

If one parent insists that the parenting coordinator read extensive reports and the parenting coordinator agrees to do so, this parent alone will pay for the time involved. The parenting coordinator shall have the right to reallocate payment of his or her fees in her discretion, for example, if he or she believes the need for former services is attributable to the unreasonable conduct, misuse of time during joint sessions and/or intransigence of one parent, or if one parent makes legitimate but disproportionate use of services.

Any objection to the parenting coordinator’s billing statements must be brought to the coordinator’s attention in written form within 10 business days of the billing date. Otherwise, the billing statement shall be deemed agreed to by the parent and collectable. The parenting coordinator reserves the right to utilize a collection agency to obtain overdue balances. Fees associated with the use of the collection agency shall be charged to the delinquent party. If arbitration proceedings or a legal action become necessary to enforce any provision of this order, the non-prevailing party must pay any attorney fees and costs that are incurred.

Summary

I understand that the parenting coordinator cannot change the custody status of my child(ren). I understand that the parenting coordinator has full discretion regarding program implementation including, but not limited to, the recommendation of additional therapeutic and education resources as well as therapeutic and supervised visitation.

I understand that my participation in the parenting coordination process is instrumental in reducing the conflict between the parents. I agree to maintain a serious commitment to the process by abiding by the guidelines and requirements of the program as noted herein. Furthermore, I agree to maintain scheduled appointments and will not interfere in the process by refusing to attend sessions or frequently rescheduling appointments.

I agree not to discuss the information shared in the parenting coordination sessions with my child(ren) or others who may share this information with my child(ren).

I agree that I will not request the parenting coordinator to produce records or require the parenting coordinator to testify in Court against the other parent. Should the parenting coordinator be
requested to testify, I understand that he or she reserves the right to speak in the best interest of the child(ren).

In agree to abide by any new agreements made between me and the other parent during the parenting coordination process.

I agree to limit my telephone contact with the parenting coordinator to only emergency situations and/or to change an appointment.

I understand that a therapist-client relationship in a therapeutic setting is not created by this agreement.

Signature

Keep this document and return the signature page on the next page

By their signatures below, the parties acknowledge their understanding that if either or

My signature reflects that I acknowledge my understanding of the terms set forth in this document and will abide by all the conditions outlined in this 12-page agreement.

This Parenting Coordination Agreement is executed by:

__________________________  __________________________
Mother                                          Father

On _________________________                    On ______________________________
  Date                                                                 Date
Parenting Coordination
_A program for separating or separated parents_

**Signature Page**
_Return this page with your paperwork._
_Keep pages 1-12 for your records._

My signature reflects that I will abide by all the conditions outlined in this 12-page agreement.

This Parenting Coordination Agreement is executed by:

__________________________________                    __________________________________
Mother                                      Father
On _______________________________                    On _______________________________
Date                                                                                 Date