

MARSHALL CLINICAL & FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY, LLC

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OVERVIEW OF PARENT COORDINATION

Parent Coordination is a service provided to parents who are initiating the separation process, are separated with divorce pending, have already completed the divorce process, or for parents who have never married. Parent coordination is focused on assisting parents to make joint, healthy decisions pertaining to their child/children.

Parents are typically to a parent coordinator by attorneys, mediators, therapists, custody evaluators, and/or judges. Some parents are court ordered to attend parent coordination sessions due to the intensity of the conflict and animosity between parents, and/or because the parents have begun to litigate parenting conflicts in court, rather than being able to talk through conflicts on their own. Some parents learn about parent coordination and voluntarily seek out the service to help address issues and barriers that impede positive co-parenting behaviors. Some parents seek Parent Coordination before or in the early stages of separation to obtain assistance in developing a parenting plan for their children that will reflect the needs of the whole family – with an emphasis on the needs of the children.

Parent Coordination is not therapy. It is not co-parent counseling. Parent coordination is not focused on marital issues, nor on resolving marital problems. Parent coordinators should have training in mediation and negotiation. Parent coordinators should also have expertise in child development and child psychology; conflict management and problem solving; basic divorce and custody laws, and knowledge of issues related to separation, divorce, custody and visitation as well as current research on these topics. Parent coordination does NOT provide evaluation of custody issues, and parent coordinators cannot make recommendations about custody or visitation. However, parents can receive education about child development, parenting plan models for different aged children, and ideas about how to move through separation and divorce in ways that protect children's emotional, social, and academic functioning.

Parent Coordination for Parents Wanting Help Creating Parenting Plans:

For those parents not yet divorced or not yet separated parent coordination services can offer a safe environment for parents to discuss concerns to include but not limited to: how to tell their talk with their child/children about divorce, discuss potential visitation schedules and have a forum to learn how to minimize exposure for their children to parent conflict . Parent coordination can help parents discuss various options for parenting plans that they will then review with their attorneys, or with a mediator, who will ultimately turn the parents' plan into a legal agreement.

Parent Coordination for Parents After Custody Litigation:

Sessions will consist of helping the parents discuss, and resolve, current parenting problems. During each session, each parent will identify agenda items for discussion. These items can relate to parenting issues or concerns **directly related** to the child(ren). Parent Coordination will also assist parents in learning how to effectively, yet respectfully voice their views, opinions and feelings, while also learning and practicing skills focused on listening to their co-parent while he/she is speaking. Sessions are also focused on helping the parents learn to brainstorm, problem solve, compromise, negotiate and resolve these conflicts themselves. *A long-term goal of Parent Coordination is to achieve an overall improvement in the communication and level of cooperation and trust between parents.*

Decision Making during Parent Coordination sessions will focus primarily on the parents' ultimate choices. Unless parents are court ordered into Parent Coordination, and the Parent Coordinator is specifically designated by the Court with decision making authority, parents ultimately have the right and the authority to determine final decisions. However, when parents enter Parent Coordination, they should agree to listen to the Parent Coordinator's recommendations, and to follow suggestions, rather than to return to using attorneys and court to litigate disagreements. *If one parent continues to threaten litigation during Parent Coordination sessions, the Parent Coordination will be rendered useless.* Parent Coordination is aimed at helping parents come to their own compromises and negotiated agreements. At times, parents may seek the Parent Coordinators recommendation when at an impasse. In these cases, Parent Coordinators will consider first and foremost the best interests of the child, and can offer a strong recommendation that the parents move in one particular direction rather than another. Following this recommendation is the parents' choice, unless court ordered to follow such a recommendation.

When parents enter into Parent Coordination, they are asked to follow basic behavioral guidelines to increase the effectiveness of sessions:

- Speak in a respectful tone to your co-parent.
- Be willing to listen with an open mind.
- Be willing to examine ways in which YOU can be a better parent and co-parent.
- Accept responsibility for your difficulties and mistakes.
- Be willing to increase your ability to apologize, express appreciation and increase your ability to compromise

- Be willing and able to express emotions such as anger towards you co-parent calmly. using calm, clear
- Do not insult, berate, curse at, threaten or raise your voice to your co-parent or Parent Coordinator to express anger or frustration.
- Do not interrupt when the others are speaking
- Do not lecture your co-parent.
- Do not focus on prior marital or relationship issues and grievances.

Your rights:

- You have a right to expect that your Parent Coordinator will keep the focus on the best interests of your child/ren at all times.
- You have a right to expect your Parent Coordinator to be fair, and neutral, though always with your child/ren's needs remaining the primary focus. You have a right to expect the Parent Coordinator to be respectful to both parents.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Parents will be asked to sign releases to allow me to communicate with relevant others to potentially include, but not limited to attorneys, the custody evaluator, and/or any therapists working with family members if the Parent Coordinator determines that such communication would be helpful or essential in working with the parents. If Parent Coordination is court ordered, the Parent Coordinator may be communicating with the Court with regard to the progress of such work, but the Parent Coordinator will likely notify parents before doing so, and parents will be informed of the content of such communication.

ROLE OF CHILDREN IN PARENT COORDINATION

A Parent Coordinator may meet with your child/ren at least once in order to understand their perspective and concerns, and to assess their current needs. A Parent Coordinator may suggest to parents that a child be seen by another therapist to assess the child's treatment needs.

FEES, PAYMENT, SCHEDULING

Parent Coordination sessions is \$350 per 90/min session with Dr. Marshall, to be paid at the time of each service.

Typically, sessions occur a monthly basis. Parents should be prepared to meet more often during times of intense conflict and/or when an urgent issue presents, and can meet less frequently when their collaboration is working well. Other fees are reviewed in the appropriate informed consent form for Parent Coordination.

Sessions must be cancelled AT LEAST 24 HOURS in advance or full fee will be charged to the parents for that session.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF PARENT COORDINATION:

- The majority of couples who divorce do so amicably, and without litigation. In cases in which parents litigate custody and visitation issues, a smaller percentage of parents return to court repeatedly to litigate parenting issues and conflicts.
 - In states that have documented the effect of parent coordination on frequency of court appearance, studies have found that among this group of parents, court appearances decrease by as much as 75% after the parents begin to participate in Parent Coordination sessions. This equates to significant savings for the parties with regarding to their time and emotional, financial resources.
 - Parent Coordination, in many cases, also results in a significant reduction in stress experienced by all family members, particularly the children. Research shows that children show better school, emotional and intellectual functioning five years after divorce in families where there is a cooperative, positive co-parenting relationship between divorced parents than in families with significant, ongoing parental conflict and hostility.

If you desire to seek Parent Coordination Services in my office, please contact Dr. Marshall. Services should not be construed or be communicated as occurring with Dr. Marshall until an initial appointment has occurred and Dr. Marshall has reviewed, the appropriate informed consent for Parent Coordination with each party and the document has been fully executed by the parties and Dr. Marshall.