

Parenting Coordination CLE

Primary objectives of Parenting Coordination (PC):

1. Improve parties' coparenting skills (better communication, reduce conflict kids are exposed to, better negotiation and problem solving skills)
2. Implement existing parenting plans- flesh out details, fill in gaps, clarify responsibilities

Israel study and results

There are elements of mediation, law, counseling etc. in PC- PC can also complement those other areas

Process is some combination of the following (varies among parenting coordinators):

Ramping up:

Speak with attorneys to get up to speed on issues identified, personalities, problems to be aware of

Receive appointment formally by way of court order if attys involved- some PCs work with unrepresented parents

Have parties complete short questionnaire and sign any contract

Review relevant documents- pleadings, reports

Payment made

Meet with parties individually – PC introduces self, explain basics of PC and answer questions; opportunity for them to share info – not confidential but one on one

PC gets underway (again, can vary):

Meet with parties jointly (rarely separate meetings as a rule) remote and in person options

Usual Components of Joint Meetings (again can vary)

A. First part of joint meetings

Communication exercises/skills building/homework

B. Second part of joint meetings

Agenda items the parties identify that they want to work on

Examples: holiday schedule; exchanges, communication, extracurricular activities

Summary of important points from meetings (topics discussed, issues resolved (specifics), what is not working, what is not resolved)

PCs often monitor parties' communication to provide constructive feedback to help it improve

Other options/variations:

Individual coaching or caucusing

Talk with atty or attys to facilitate situation improving

Meetings with children

Meeting with step-parents

Discussions with therapists and or FOC/GAL

Other collateral professionals might become involved- individual counseling, co-parenting counseling, family counseling, other assessments and treatment

Co-parenting counseling- relationship with PC- what behaviors PCs see that suggest co-parenting counseling would be beneficial- Example

Goal is to eventually move parties away from needing regular PC meetings- move to "as needed" where PC remains available as a resource when parents hit speedbumps- what that looks like varies- could be email to get back on track or meeting; fees running out

Caution:

PCs typically stay away from financial issues (except if truly about implementation and doesn't stray too far into mediation); all must agree to undertaking these issues

PCs generally stay away from MAJOR decisions or MAJOR adjustments to existing Agreements- sometimes an AO to allow for tie breaking on specific issues

Impediments to success:

PC doesn't work when both sides are not committed to at least a minimal goal of success and genuinely willing to try

Personality disorders- particularly narcissistic - can make improvement quite difficult (inability to acknowledge role they play)

Significant mental illness or DV issues

Lack of motivation to try- "checking a box"

Looking for us to punish or "hold other parent accountable

Parties with history of not following court orders often will not cooperate with PC either

In some of these very difficult cases, the goal becomes containment, minimize problems rather than achieve true growth in relationship- parallel parenting might come into play here, at least temporarily

Other useful info:

Parents often struggle with understanding that PC is more solution oriented and learning to problem solve- does not mean history is not important but PC has a different focus that often avoids rehashing the past at the expense of figuring out how to handle matters going forward

Many parents have developed an adversarial relationship from being in court- PC is an opportunity to pivot to a new mentality- looking to collaborate

PCs work hard to stay neutral and avoid bias- ask “what is going on with this family?”, gathering information from various sources, and looking for ways to help

Whereas attys learn a lot about their own client’s perspective and having this information can be very useful, PCs have the additional benefit of meeting with folks over months- seeing them interact and negotiate, watch how they talk to each other and about each other, observe tension and body language

Co-Parenting Counseling may benefit co-parents that are stuck on issues related to their unsuccessful relationship, such as lack of trust, infidelity, unmet expectations, parenting deficient, which they continue to rehash and repeat in their co-parenting roles. The romantic relationship is over, but the unresolved and unprocessed emotional disputes may be creating obstacles to an effective co-parenting relationship that can lead to constant confusion and anguish for the parents, but even more for the children, who may feel caught in the middle of it.

For some individuals, co-parenting is viewed as a competition instead of a collaboration effort. Competition is based on the need for one parent to be the winner and the other parent to be the loser without putting the child's best interest at the forefront. Collaboration empowers and recognizes both parents in a positive humanizing connection that can be strong and responsive. Co-parenting counseling allows parents the opportunity to address the underlining causes that are hampering productive Parenting Coordination sessions.

The issues to be discusses include:

- Core issues: counseling fosters opportunities for individuals to be vulnerable with each other and creates a safe space to address lingering and damaging concerns so they can have the opportunity to become emotionally healthy co-parents for their children.
- Types of therapeutic interventions: Depends on the core issues of the co-parents but replacing resentment and contempt created by past relationship issues with effective behavioral modification skills and understanding of self to facilitate positive co-parenting interaction to improve the overall well-being of the child is at the forefront of co-parenting counseling.
- Benefits to parent-child relationship: May reduces a child's stress level and provide the child with security and comfort by not being place in the middle of repeated conflict and allows the child to enjoy childhood with minimal disruptions.
- Co-parents that may benefit from co-parenting counseling: co-parents that continue to repeat patterns, such as repeating past conducts or subject matters unrelated to the present or specific to the child.

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