

### Considering a Parenting Coordinator?

Some separated or divorced parents continue to find themselves in ongoing disputes, even in view of separation agreements and parenting plans. The high-conflict nature of those disputes interferes with the well-being of the children and continually brings these parents to Court for resolution.

In view of the cost and cumbersome nature of utilizing Courts to resolve disputes, some parents opt for the services of a Parenting Coordinator.

Parenting Coordination is a mutually agreed upon service as usually is the actual service provider. In other words, parents choose to use this dispute resolution alternative and service provider. The service provider is empowered by the parents to hear their dispute and then depending on the nature of the service agreement, will provide guidance and/or mediation and/or arbitration to resolve it. In view of arbitration, the parents are bound by the Parenting Coordinator's *binding recommendation* as if it were an order of the Court. Thus the parents in dispute have access to a more timely resolution service, often provided at lower cost.

Clinical experience and anecdotal information suggests a Parenting Coordinator is helpful in keeping parents in high conflict situations from continually reaching the courts. The efficacy of service depends both on matters originating with the parents being served and upon characteristics of the service provider.

Given that the Parenting Coordinator will be working with some of the most cantankerous situations, clinical wisdom suggests there may be underlying issues of abuse, domestic violence, power/control, mental health, drugs and alcohol affecting people involved in those situations. Hence the service provider must possess considerable training, knowledge and experience in these matters as well as management of people and situations thereby affected. Further, the service provider must be apprised and knowledgeable of issues related to child custody and access/visitation, child

development, separation and divorce, and issues related to estrangement and alienation.

Given the personal issues underlying some of these parents who continually find themselves in such ongoing high conflict, there is also a propensity amongst some of them to turn their sights upon the service provider when matters do not resolve, as they would prefer. Thus the same behaviour directed between parents to each other, may be directed towards the service provider. Hence, apart from the considerable training, knowledge and experience a Parenting Coordinator must possess, of equal or greater importance is the ability of the Parenting Coordinator to withstand the intensity of the parents between themselves. The Parenting Coordinator must also be able to withstand either parent's consternation and intensity if personally directed.

When considering a Parenting Coordinator, it is wise to then look for someone with considerable training, knowledge, experience and expertise as well as a considerable ability to handle emotional intensity, particularly when personally directed. Further, the Parenting Coordinator should provide a clear written agreement specifying the terms of service to thus hold all persons accountable to a set of processes for managing the issues of dispute as well as disputes that may arise, the result of the process or personal variables. The service providers must also be clear as to their own boundaries, fees, dispute resolution, complaints and termination of service.

Grey hair may also be an asset.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW  
(905) 628-4847  
gary@yoursocialworker.com  
<http://www.yoursocialworker.com>

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.