

**Parenting Coordinator:
An alternative to running back to Court**

In high-conflict separations or divorces, parenting issues may arise with greater frequencies that continue to bring parents back to Court for resolution. This strategy is both untimely and expensive. An alternate strategy to manage such disputes as they arise is through the use of a Parenting Coordinator.

A Parenting Coordinator is a neutral person to whom parents can turn when in dispute on matters relating to the children. Parents may access the service of a Parenting Coordinator in a more timely fashion and costs are almost always less than going to Court.

The role of the Parenting Coordinator is to help parents come to a successful resolution between themselves.

However, the Parenting Coordinator may also be empowered by the parents or by Court Order, to make recommendations binding on the parents in the event they are unable to agree on solutions. If either parent feels there is sufficient reason to challenge the recommendations of the Parenting Coordinator, they still have recourse to the Courts, but may be subject to costs if the Courts support the recommendations of the Parenting Coordinator.

The Parenting Coordinator cannot change the Order of a Court, but may assist the parents in implementing strategies, consistent with Court Orders.

With regard to costs associated with the Parenting Coordinator service, parents typically divide these equally unless there is a prior agreement to do otherwise or unless there is an Order of the Court specifying how costs are to be distributed between the parties. The parents, lawyers or Courts should determine the matter of distribution of costs, prior to referral. It is not appropriate for the intended Parenting Coordinator to act as broker or negotiator with respect to distribution of costs because as of

yet, they have no knowledge of the case and issues therein.

Typically to commence service, the Parenting Coordinator must become acquainted with the parents, the children, the history of the parental conflict, and matters of current concern. While the actual process is at the discretion of the Parenting Coordinator or service agency, the process is likely to include a review of prior reports and/or Court documents, individual meetings with parents, meetings with the children and then joint meetings with the parents unless this is contra-indicated as in cases of domestic violence.

Once the Parenting Coordinator is familiar with the parents, children and issues, the Parenting Coordinator may then set out an agreement and any stipulations for the provision of service. Assuming agreement between the parents and the Parenting Coordinator to work together, then they may begin to address actual issues at hand. In so doing, the Parenting Coordinator is usually empowered to obtain any other information deemed necessary to help resolve matters. Generally speaking, children are excused from further meetings, unless at the discretion of the Parenting Coordinator their participation is required.

If you are running back to Court on issue after issue, consider the service of a Parenting Coordinator. You will likely experience more timely service, lower costs and generally greater control of the outcome as negotiated settlements are encouraged first.

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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.