
Family Court

Docket #

Agreement to Enter Into Parent Coordination

1. Parent Coordination is an alternative dispute resolution service to help separated parents develop safe, workable parenting plans on behalf of their children.
 - 1.1 This service is offered to parents for whom mediation is inappropriate due to the high level of conflict between the parents and/or issues of abuse. Parent Coordination helps parents who are unable or unwilling to meet face-to-face with a neutral third party.
 - 1.2 Parent child contact, changes in the schedule and holiday or vacation planning, and transitions between homes may be among the issues considered. Communication between parents and relationships with extended family members may also be addressed.
 - 1.3 Financial matters, including child support, will not be addressed as part of Parent Coordination. Changes in child support may only be made by order of the Magistrate.
 - 1.4 Changes in Legal and Physical Parental Rights and Responsibilities may only be ordered by the court.
 - 1.5 If the parties reach agreement regarding a parenting plan, a signed stipulation shall be submitted to the Judge for approval and to be ordered.
 - 1.6 If the parties cannot agree on a parent-child contact/ parenting plan, the Parent Coordinator shall submit a report to the court, including a narrative summary of the Parent Coordinator's meetings with the parties and others and detailed recommendations for a parent-child contact/ parenting plan. The Parent Coordinator's recommendations may also address the need to have certain issues heard by the court at a contested hearing and/or the need for a home study, psychological evaluation, or forensic evaluation. The report shall be filed with the court and mailed to the parties at least fourteen(14) days prior to the date set for the status conference.
 - 1.7 A party who objects to the parent-child contact plan proposed by the Parent Coordinator shall file written objections with the court within fourteen (14) days after the mailing (postmark) of the Parent Coordinator's report and recommendations. The court may schedule a hearing on any objections filed with the court within fourteen (14) days.
 - 1.8 The Judge may generate a temporary order based on the Parent Coordinator's recommendations, which shall remain in effect until the hearing on objections.
 - 1.9 The Judge may choose to adopt and order all or some of the Parent Coordinator's recommendations if no objection is filed by a party within fourteen (14) days, with or without a hearing.
 - 1.10 Motions for hearings with either the Judge or Magistrate must be filed by either the parties themselves or by their attorneys.

Vermont Family Court Mediation Program

- 1.11 During the process, if parents are in disagreement, the Parent Coordinator is authorized to direct the parties only on minor issues of parent child contact schedule such as; pick up and drop off times, telephone times and procedure, exchange of children's clothing, etc. if he/she believes that this is in the best interests of the children.
- 1.12 Parties are expected to participate in Parent Coordination with a good faith commitment to a non-adversarial process. While periodic status conferences with the Judge are a normal part of the planning process, threats of contested custody hearings or motions for contested custody hearings may result in termination of Parent Coordination.
- 1.13 Participation in Parent Coordination may be requested by either parent, by the Family Court Judge or by the parties' attorneys. In most cases, participation is a voluntary effort by the parents to resolve child-related issues in a non-adversarial process.
2. The Parent Coordinator works with parents in a structured process.
 - 2.1 Conferences with the Parent Coordinator are ordinarily held during regular court hours (8:00am and 4:30 pm) and usually take place either at the Parent Coordinator's office or at the courthouse.
 - 2.2 Initial meetings with each parent shall be held separately. If there are ongoing issues of safety, subsequent meetings shall be held separately. If there are no issues of safety, subsequent meetings may be held separately or together at the Parent Coordinator's discretion and the parties' wishes.
 - 2.3 If the Parent Coordinator detects the use of alcohol or other drug-related impairments during a conference, that conference will be canceled.
 - 2.4 In addition to developing parenting plans, the Parent Coordinator may assist with referrals to services in the community that are needed in order to implement the plans.
 - 2.5 Fees for Parent Coordination services are arranged directly with the Parent Coordinator. Payment is expected in advance of service and is based upon the *Subsidized Fee Scale*. Fees cover time spent in consultation with parents, children, attorneys and other professionals. Time spent in documentation and at court is also billed to parents.
3. Parent Coordination is a non-confidential, child-centered process.
 - 3.1 The goal of Parent Coordination is to develop plans that reduce the risk of children's exposure to parental conflict.
 - 3.2 Parents are required to sign a release of information so that therapists, attorneys, physicians or other professionals and individuals involved with the child and family may speak with the Parent Coordinator. This release will direct agencies or schools to authorize a release of information directly to the Parent Coordinator.
 - 3.3 The Parent Coordinator is an advocate for your child(ren) and may make recommendations about visitation schedules, safety issues, drop-off and pick-up arrangements, and other child-related concerns.
 - 3.4 Parent Coordination may include one or more meetings with the child(ren) either in their home or in a community setting. These contacts are intended to provide children with an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings directly to the Parent Coordinator.

Vermont Family Court Mediation Program

- 3.5 Recommendations and referrals made to the parents by the Parent Coordinator will be made in writing, with copies to the parties, attorneys, the court and other relevant parties.
- 3.6 Signed stipulations, parenting plans and interim parenting plans will be submitted to the Judge for approval and to be ordered.
- 3.7 The Parent Coordinator may also write summary memos to both parents describing the level of participation in the process, agreements reached and child-related concerns. Copies of memos to both parents will be placed in the court file.
- 3.8 If the Parent Coordinator discovers that a child is being inappropriately touched, otherwise abused, or neglected, a report will be made to the Department of DCF. Likewise, if threats of violence are directed at one parent by the other, or at any another party, those threats will be reported to either or both the police and/or the court.
- 3.9 The Parent Coordinator reserves the right to terminate the dispute resolution process for reasons of safety and/or a party's refusal to cooperate and/or a party's refusal to pay for the parent coordinator's services.

"I have read and understand the terms of this agreement and agree to abide by them."

Signature_____ print name_____

Date _____

Signature_____ print name_____

Date _____

(For parents with attorneys of record)

"I have discussed the terms of the Parent Coordination Program with my client"

Signature_____ print name_____

Date _____

Signature_____ print name_____

Date _____