

THE VERMONT FAMILY COURT MEDIATION PROGRAM

PARENT COORDINATION

WHAT IS PARENT COORDINATION?

Parent Coordination is a child centered process for separated parents to help them resolve issues about their children with the help of a trained and experienced professional. The Parent Coordinator helps parents work out issues such as: when and how the children will be with each parent, arrangements for pick up and drop off, how parents will communicate, etc...

WHO ARE THE PARENT COORDINATORS?

The Parent Coordinators are highly trained and experienced professionals who are under contract with the Court Administrator. They have specialized training in (among other things) family dynamics, child development, conflict resolution, the effect of divorce and separation on children, family law, domestic abuse and substance abuse.

WHAT IS THE PARENT COORDINATOR'S ROLE?

The Parent Coordinator's role is as a go-between the parents while acting as an advocate for the child(ren).

The Parent Coordinator assists parents in understanding their child(ren)'s needs as the child(ren) spends time with each parent. The Parent Coordinator assists the parents and/or the Court in determining the needs of the child(ren) in regard to issues of parenting and parent child contact.

DOES IT MATTER IF WE WERE NEVER MARRIED?

Parent Coordination helps separated parents whether they were never married, are looking to divorce, are dissolving a civil union or are already divorced.

WHEN CAN PARENT COORDINATION OCCUR?

Parent Coordination can occur before, during or after a separation or divorce.

DO I NEED AN ATTORNEY WHILE I AM WORKING WITH A PARENT COORDINATOR?

It is not necessary to have an attorney while working with a Parent Coordinator, although some people find it very helpful to get legal advice while engaging in this process.

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HOW DOES THE PROCESS OF PARENT COORDINATION BEGIN?

1. The process begins with an Order from the Court.
2. Each parent will be given an information packet along with their Court Order.
3. Each parent is required to call the Parent Coordinator (noted in their Court Order) within 7 days.
4. The Parent Coordinator will schedule to meet with each parent separately soon after the initial call.
5. Each parent shall fill out the *intake questionnaire* and the *application for subsidy form* (if that parent qualifies) and review the *Agreement to Enter Into Parent Coordination* before the first meeting. All of these forms are in the parent's information packet.
6. Each parent shall mail a copy of the completed *intake questionnaire* to the Parent Coordinator no later than 5 days before the first scheduled meeting with the Parent Coordinator. Each parent shall keep a copy of the completed *intake questionnaire* and bring the copy of that form and the other forms to the first meeting with the Parent Coordinator.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE FIRST MEETING WITH THE PARENT COORDINATOR?

1. Each parent shall bring the completed application for subsidy form (if they qualify) and any supporting documentation (paycheck stubs) to the first meeting with the Parent Coordinator.
2. At this first meeting, the Parent Coordinator will further explain the process to the parent. The parent will have the opportunity to ask questions and will review and sign the *Agreement to Enter Into Parent Coordination* with the Parent Coordinator.
3. The Parent Coordinator will then determine the fee (based upon the sliding fee scale) each parent will be expected to pay (range from \$5 - \$80 an hour) based upon that parent's household income. Fees are paid in advance to the Parent Coordinator at that meeting, in 10 hour increments.
 - a. Example of fee structure:
 - i. If a parent's household income is \$20,000 per year, that parent shall be required to pay a fee of \$15 an hour to the Parent Coordinator, based upon the sliding fee scale.
 - ii. At this first meeting, the parent shall pay up to 12.5 hours fee in advance for the Parent Coordinator's services. In a 20 hour case, for example, this parent (the one whose household income is \$20,000 yr) would pay for ½ the time (10 hours), a rate of \$150.00.

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- iii. If the Parent Coordinator believes that more time than the original estimate is needed, the Parent Coordinator will request the additional time at a status conference or hearing.
4. The Parent Coordinator will listen to the concerns of each parent and take notes.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE FIRST MEETING WITH THE PARENT COORDINATOR?

1. After the first meeting with each parent, the Parent Coordinator begins to talk to and work with counselors, teachers and others who know the children. The Parent Coordinator meets with the children to get to know them and to try to understand their needs.
2. After getting a lot of information from each parent, children and others, the Parent Coordinator attempts to see if the parents can agree upon a suggested parent-child contact plan and/or parenting issues. This is usually accomplished after several telephone calls and/or meetings between each parent and the Parent Coordinator.
3. When detailed and specific agreements have been made with the help of the Parent Coordinator, a document reflecting the arrangements is filed with the court.

WHAT IF WE CANNOT COME TO AGREEMENT ON ALL ISSUES?

1. If parents are not able to come to agreement on all issues raised, the Parent Coordinator makes specific recommendations to the court after notifying the parents.
2. The Judge then may order these recommendations at a status conference and/or hearing.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARENT COORDINATION?

- The process hopes to minimize the children's exposure to conflict and danger.
- Parent Coordination gives both parents and children a chance to be heard.
- The Parent Coordinator helps the parents to better understand the needs of their children.