



London Custody & Access Project

A SERVICE OF

THE LONDON FAMILY COURT CLINIC

254 Pall Mall Street, Suite 200, London, Ontario N6A 5P6 (519) 679-7250 Fax 675-7772



Referral Requirements for Parenting Coordination Sessions

When making a referral to the London Custody and Access Project for Parenting Coordination sessions, the following requirements must be completed by both parents:

1. A brief letter outlining the relevant background and the issues to be addressed.
2. Completed questionnaire.
3. Copies of all relevant agreements/orders that pertain to custody and access.
4. A cheque for \$1100.00 from each parent is required, which represents 5 hours at the hourly rate of \$200.00/hr, plus an administrative fee of \$100.00. If more time is required, it will be billed at \$200.00/hr on a monthly basis.
5. Your signature on the enclosed undertaking as to your commitment to the parenting coordination sessions and payment of our fee beyond the required retainers.
6. Signatures on the Terms of Reference form.
7. Signatures on Release of Information forms, as required, to speak with collaterals.





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PARENTING COORDINATION UNDERTAKING

To: London Custody and Access Project
254 Pall Mall St., Suite 200
London, ON N6A 5P6

Re: _____ and _____

I _____

HEREBY UNDERTAKE to co-operate with the London Custody & Access Project's personnel assigned to this case for Parenting Coordination sessions.

AND I FURTHER UNDERTAKE to be responsible for my portion of the hours billed monthly beyond the retainer submitted initially. I understand that the fee rate of the London Custody and Access Project is \$200.00 an hour.

I FURTHER UNDERSTAND the terms of payment of the London Custody and Access Project account are Net 30 days, after 30 days interest will be charged at the rate of 2% per month (24% per annum).

Please consider this your good and sufficient authority to open a file and commence work immediately in the matter, (contingent upon the receipt of a similar undertaking and authority from _____).

Dated at _____, Ontario, this _____ day of _____, _____.

Signature of Parent

Witness





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PARENTING COORDINATION INFORMATION SHEET

Description of the Parent Coordinator Role:

- Assists in the creation of a parenting plan
- Monitors compliance with it
- Mediates disputes as they arise over implementation of a parenting time/visitation schedule and modifications thereto
- Serves an educative role teaching parents how to minimize conflict, disengage from each other and about child development and children's issues in divorce

Scope of Authority:

- Helping the parents to focus on the needs of the children and promote positive exchanges between the parents
- Ensuring that issues related to the children and the parents are communicated and wherever possible resolved to the benefit of the children
- Helping to determine time sharing arrangements including holiday and summer planning
- Helping to standardize, where possible, daily routines in the two homes
- Helping to problem solve daycare/babysitting issues
- Helping to determine transportation and exchange plans
- Helping to communicate and plan for medical, dental, vision care needs
- Helping to determine psychological counselling, testing or other assessments plans
- Helping to determine extra-curricular activities and arrangements for the children
- Helping to determine education needs, including but not limited to school choice, tutoring, participation in special education programs
- Discussing discipline strategies
- Discussing issues related to clothing, equipment, and personal possessions of the children
- Discussing and problem-solving issues related to the alteration of appearance of the children
- Discussing plans related to travel with the children
- Discussing and problem-solving related to certain minor financial issues
- Helping resolve conflicts related to other parenting issues raised by either parent or ordered by court





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QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTING COORDINATION REFERRALS (A service of the London Custody and Access Project)

Please fill in or circle:

Date: _____

1. Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

2. Address: _____

Phone: (w) _____

City: _____

Phone: (h) _____

3. Relationship to Child(ren): Mother Father Other _____

4. Present Occupation: _____

5. Place of Employment: _____

6. Hours of Work (include shifts): _____

7. Other persons (adults and children) in your home and their relationship to your
child(ren): _____

8. Spousal History

Married/Common-Law
Relationship(s)

Dates of Marriage(s) or start of
Common-Law Date of Separation

Date of Divorce



9. Information about Child(ren) (only those involved in current negotiations)

Name	Age	Date of Birth
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

10. Details of Current Custody/Access Arrangement

Sole Custody to mother:

Sole Custody to father:

Sole Custody, shared residence:

Joint Custody, primary residence with father:

Joint Custody, primary residence with mother:

Joint Custody, shared residence:

Other: _____

11. Access Arrangements: _____

12. Is the arrangement finalized by order of the court, and if so, on what date? _____

13. What form of communication with the other parent do you use to resolve questions about your child(ren):

Face to face:

By email:

By telephone:

By letter/communication book:

Through lawyers:

Through child(ren):

Other: (e.g. third party) If so, please specify: _____

14. Has the marital conflict ever resulted in police involvement or necessitated a restraining order? Yes No If yes, please explain: _____

15. Has the marital conflict ever resulted in intervention by the Children's Aid Society?
Yes No If yes, please explain: _____

16. Please provide a brief history of the conflict around the child(ren) that has resulted in a referral for a Parenting Coordinator.

17. What interventions have you attempted in the past to resolve the conflict and issues regarding the child(ren):

18. What are you hoping to achieve or change through the involvement of a Parenting Coordinator?

19. Prioritize your child(ren)'s needs which are an issue and you would like to discuss in Parenting Coordination. Please note a few thoughts on your concerns.

20. Would you be able to meet with the Parenting Coordinator and ex-partner in a joint session? Yes No
21. Name, address and phone number of your lawyer:

22. How would you like to be contacted by the Parent Coordinator?
 phone # _____ text (provide cell # _____)
 email _____



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THIS IS AN AGREEMENT FOR PARENTING COORDINATION SERVICES

BETWEEN:

FATHER

- and -

MOTHER

- and -

Dr. Dan Ashbourne, C.Psych or Ms. Mary Kay Arundel, MSW, RSW

PRINCIPLES

1. The parents acknowledge that their child(ren) will benefit from a meaningful relationship with both parents, that parental conflict will impact negatively on their child(ren)'s adjustment, and that every effort should be made to keep the child(ren) out of the parents' disputes.
2. The parents wish to retain the services of _____, as Parenting Coordinator (may subsequently be referred to as PC), to assist them in implementing, maintaining and monitoring the terms of the existing Minutes of Settlement ("Minutes" or also referred to as the Parenting Plan), dated _____, and any subsequent Court Orders and previously arbitrated decisions.
3. The parents agree to voluntarily enter into this Agreement because of a desire to:
 - a. de-escalate parental conflict;
 - b. prioritize the child(ren)'s best interests;
 - c. promote the child(ren)'s optimum adjustment
 - d. resolve issues/disputes in a time and cost efficient manner;
 - e. benefit from the direction of a qualified professional.



ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PARENTING COORDINATOR

4. The parents agree to retain _____ in the role as Parenting Coordinator to act as a neutral third party to expeditiously resolve issues that arise from the implementation of the Minutes (Parenting Plan) in a manner consistent with the child(ren)'s best interests and in a manner that attempts to minimize parental conflict. The Parenting Coordinator may provide consultation to the parents and may coach and educate them about ways to better communicate about the child(ren) and about ways to better communicate with each other, with a goal to helping the parents to ultimately resolve issues amicably and efficiently on their own without involving the Parenting Coordinator.
5. Parenting Coordination involves two components: (1) The Parenting Coordinator attempting to resolve issues arising out of the Minutes/Parenting Plan through facilitation, consultation, coaching and education, all being non-decision making functions; (2) If it is apparent to the Parenting Coordinator that continued similar efforts are unlikely to resolve the issue, then the Parenting Coordinator may resolve the dispute by providing binding arbitration in accordance with the Minutes/Parenting Plan and as set out in the decision-making process of this Agreement.
6. The non-decision making component as described in #5 above stands distinct from that typically referred to as "mediation". Any efforts to "mediate" occur in the context of Parenting Coordination.
7. _____ is a registered _____ and has relevant knowledge, including that in the areas of child development, family dynamics, the effects of separation/divorce on children and adults, high conflict families, and psychological functioning, which the parents wish to benefit from. Notwithstanding, she/he is not functioning as a psychotherapist for either of us, our family, or our child(ren).

PARENTING COORDINATION SERVICES

8. The Parenting Coordinator is not entitled to supersede the Minutes and any subsequent Court Orders.
9. The scope of the Parenting Coordinator's role may include the following (circle those that apply):
 - a. assist with the implementation, maintenance and monitoring of the Minutes/Parenting Plan, Court Orders and/or arbitrated decisions;
 - b. address any anticipated conflicts in the child(ren)'s scheduling that occur;
 - c. develop any additional clarifying clauses that may be required given situations and events that unfold that were not initially anticipate when the Parenting Plan was developed;
 - d. monitor the child(ren)'s adjustment;

- e. assist in the maintenance of the child(ren)'s relationship with each parent;
- f. assist the parents to communicate more effectively;
- g. assist with the exchange of information about the child(ren) (i.e., health, welfare education and religion) and his/her routines that may be otherwise impossible and/or ineffective in accordance with the methods provided for in the Parenting Plan;
- h. make final decisions relating to "major" decisions (i.e., relating to education, child(ren) welfare, medical, and/or religion) if the parents are unable to come to a mutual Agreement and if this method of dispute resolution is consistent with the Court Order and/or Parenting Plan;
- i. if necessary, make binding decisions pertaining to temporary changes to the usual and/or holiday parenting time schedule to accommodate special events and circumstances for the child(ren) and/or the parents;
- j. resolve conflicts between the parents concerning the child(ren)'s participation in recreation, enrichment or extra-curricular activities and programmes;
- k. address movement of clothing, equipment, toys and personal possessions between households;
- l. address child(ren)'s travel arrangements;
- m. clarify and resolve different interpretations of the Parenting Plan;
- n. resolve conflicts concerning health care, education, passports, risky activities, religious education and events that are not otherwise allocated for in the Minutes/Parenting Plan.

EXCLUDED FROM PARENTING COORDINATOR'S ROLE

- 10. The following specific issues are excluded from the Parenting Coordinator decision-making authority:
 - a. changes in the usual parenting time (residential) schedule that substantially reduce or substantially expand the child(ren)'s time with one or both parents;
 - b. a change in the geographic residence of the child(ren);
 - c. a change in legal custody, i.e., decision making authority previously outlined in the Minutes/Parenting Plan.

TERMS AND AGREEMENT TO COOPERATE

- 11. The parents have stipulated to this appointment and the decision-making granted herein to the PC, and that _____ has the requisite professional qualifications and professional skills to do the work required.
- 12. The parents shall cooperate with the Parenting Coordinator and agree to be bound by this Agreement.
- 13. Each parent has obtained independent legal advice prior to the signing of the Agreement.

14. The Parenting Coordinator and the parents shall set a time and place for an information meeting within _____ days of signing this Agreement.
15. The parents will sign all releases of information required to implement the process. The parents shall provide all records, documentation and information requested by the Parenting Coordinator as soon as possible upon the request of the Parenting Coordinator from time to time. The Parenting Coordinator may not, however, request materials that are subject to solicitor and client privilege.
16. The parents agree that the Parenting Coordinator can perform the function of Parent Coordination, including both the decision-making and non-decision-making components as described above. They further agree that the fact that the Parenting Coordinator performs the non-decision making component does not disqualify him/her from arbitrating the same issues. In this regard, the parents waive s.35 of *The Arbitration's Act, S.O. 1991, c.17*.
17. The term of the Parenting Coordination shall be for a period of _____ months from the date of the Agreement. If the Parenting Coordinator wishes to withdraw, she/he shall appoint another Parenting Coordinator, who is agreeable to both Father and Mother. If the appointment is not made, then either parent may ask the Court to appoint a new Parenting Coordinator.
18. As described above, Parenting Coordination includes efforts to resolve issues/disputes by way of facilitation and other means, including education, coaching and consultation. These functions stand distinct from that typically referred to as "mediation". Any efforts to "mediate" occur in the context of Parenting Coordination. The above-noted agreed to term will be upheld notwithstanding that facilitation is part of the process and with the understanding that in other contexts, separate and apart from Parent Coordination, a parent may withdraw from mediation proper at any time.
19. Neither parent may withdraw from this Agreement during its term, however, with their joint consent in writing, both parents may terminate this Agreement. Should one parent choose to withdraw unilaterally, the Parenting Coordinator may proceed and fulfill his/her decision-making role.
20. The PC process is "open", _____ may issue a report to counsel and the Court. Any such report may be submitted as evidence in legal proceedings between us, and either one of us may call _____ to provide evidence in Court concerning his/her work with us.
21. The Parenting Coordinator is not a lawyer and will not be providing legal advice.

22. Copies of all written reports provided to the PC must be provided to the other parent with a “cc” noted on the correspondence, unless otherwise directed by the PC.
23. The PC may disclose non-identifying information for research or educational purposes.

NON DECISION-MAKING COMPONENT (PROCESS PRIOR TO ARBITRATION)

24. If either parent has an issue relating to the child(ren) and/or the Parenting Plan that cannot be resolved with the other parent after efforts to do so, he/she shall contact the PC. The PC shall then determine the next steps by way of a meeting, telephone contact and/or e-mail. The parents shall participate in accordance with the Parenting Coordinator’s decision as to the time, place and format of the contact. The Parenting Coordinator shall have the authority to determine the protocol of all interviews and sessions and the power to determine who attends such meeting/contacts.
25. During this non-decision making phase prior to an arbitration, the Parenting Coordinator may communicate with one parent without the other being present. The Parenting Coordinator may communicate with the lawyers jointly and/or separately, unless determined otherwise at the start of the process. The Parenting Coordinator shall be entitled to pursue matters submitted to him/her by meeting with the parents jointly and/or individually, reviewing written materials, and considering any other information relevant to the matter to be decided. The Parenting Coordinator may consult with professionals, family members and others who have information about the parents and/or child(ren) such as therapists, custody assessors, school teachers and health care professionals if the Parenting Coordinator believes their information may be relevant.
26. The Parenting Coordinator may interview/observe the child(ren) privately and/or with the parents separately and/or together. The Parenting Coordinator will advise the child(ren) that while he/she will use discretion in the communicating their feelings, thoughts and/or wishes, there is no confidentiality concerning the communications between the child(ren) and the Parenting Coordinator.
27. There will be no confidentiality concerning communications between the parents and the Parenting Coordinator and other persons with whom the Parenting Coordinator may consult. The Parenting Coordinator shall be free to disclose to the parents whatever information he/she may have received from third parties, the other parent, and the child(ren) but he/she is not bound to do so.
28. Agreements reached by the parents during this phase will be drafted by the PCs, provided to the parents in draft form for their approval and final agreement.

DECISION-MAKING COMPONENT (ARBITRATION PROCESS)

29. If the issue remains unresolved after a reasonable effort or because one parent unilaterally withdraws, and the Parenting Coordinator believes that further similar efforts are unlikely to be productive, or that the time constraints of the issue presented do not allow for

further similar efforts, the PC will proceed to arbitrate the issue in accordance with the arbitration provisions of this Agreement. The decision is binding upon both parents regardless of whether or not they decide to have the Award incorporated into a Court Order. In the event one party maintains that issue cannot be arbitrated, the Arbitrator will determine the matter taking into account the submissions and counter submissions of each parent.

30. If the Parenting Coordinator is to arbitrate the issue, he/she will advise the parents in writing that they are now engaged in arbitration. The time and place of the arbitration and/or the time for submissions and counter-submissions shall be provided in writing. The arbitration may proceed at that time and/or as per the time-line as notified, even if one parent fails to appear at the previously designated time and place, if one parent fails to provide his/her submissions in the time-line provided, and/or if one parent does not provide the sufficient retainer. (See#44)
31. All communication during the arbitration phase will be 3-way, be it by conference call, e-mail, fax or in a meeting. Submissions (verbal and/or written) and reply submissions will be made available in the time-line determined by the PC, previously indicated to the parents in writing. Time-sensitive issues will require a shorter time-line as determined by the Parenting Coordinator. All submissions will be copied to the other parent, as will all communications to the Arbitrator during the arbitration.
32. In his/her role as Arbitrator, the PC may rely on any information, both written and verbal, that the parents have disclosed, including written records, during attempts to resolve the issues up to that point. Notwithstanding, the parents shall provide full submissions and counter-submissions, either verbal or in writing as per #30 above, and not assume any prior information provided will be taken into account in the decision-making process.
33. Prior to the commencement of the arbitration, the PC shall summarize information received during the non-decision-making phase from third parties, including the child(ren), that may be relevant to the issues being arbitrated.
34. The parents may attend the arbitration with or without counsel. If they choose to attend without counsel, they are waiving their right to do so.
35. There will be no recording of the proceedings by way of reporter and the arbitrator will, as soon as possible after hearing the arbitration, render an award in writing that will be delivered to the parents and counsel by fax or e-mail transmission. In addition, and upon the request of either parent, the PC shall be available thereafter to explain to the parents directly in a 3-way conversation the reasons for any decisions rendered.

CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

36. The Parenting Coordinator is required to report to the appropriate child welfare authority (i.e., Children's Aid Society, Catholic Children's Aid Society, Jewish Child & Family Service, or Native Child & Family Services) and/or other relevant authorities if she has a

reasonable suspicion that a child(ren) and/or adult may be in danger of harm and/or abuse.

RIGHT TO APPEAL

37. The parents hereby waive all rights to appeal on fact and law the Award of the Arbitrator and the parents' rights will be restricted to applications for judicial review. Arbitrated decisions are binding pending judicial review. The PC may be called as a witness.

FEES

38. Father and Mother shall pay all of the costs of the Parenting Coordinator at a rate of \$200.00 per hour. Fees are applied to all time expended in any/all professional activities, including administrative matters, associated with the PC process and/or arising from the PC process. This includes time spent in reviewing documents and correspondence, voicemail, e-mail, meetings, and telephone calls with Father and Mother, their counsel and other professionals involved. Also included are any unpaid fees charged retroactively from time to time that our services are initially requested and the file is opened. This also includes disbursements paid to collateral sources for verbal and/or written reports and agency/hospital reports. Fees will be applied to time required for deliberation and writing of memos and arbitrated decisions, testifying in court, preparation time for testifying and related travel time. Court-related fees (i.e., preparation time, attendance and travel) shall be obtained by way of retainer in advance of any services rendered.
39. Record keeping requirements make it necessary to log each e-mail, telephone call and/or message and make a record of even the briefest telephone call. For this reason there will be a minimum fee for 5 minutes charged for every phone and e-mail contact, with exceptions made for brief contacts about scheduling only.
40. Mother shall pay _____% and Father shall pay _____% of the fees. Father and Mother will each provide a retainer of \$1100.00 to the Parenting Coordinator. At all times each parent shall maintain a retainer of at least \$200.00 (one hour each) in the account of the PC, who shall advise in advance when a further retainer is required. The Parent Coordinator will provide a statement of account to the parents from time to time. If the above terms are not satisfied, the Parenting Coordinator will postpone all services until the retainer terms are met. Non-payment of fees shall be grounds for the resignation of the PC.
41. Regular statements detailing the date, service, time and hourly rate will be provided. Your insurance company may not cover all of the services, although insurance company policies vary. If you require an additional statement for insurance purposes a fee will be charge for the provision of an additional statement.
42. The clients will be billed for an appointment in which there is less that 24 (twenty-four) business hours notice prior to cancellation, except for an appointment scheduled for 8:00

a.m. and/or after 4:00 p.m., in which case 48 (forty-eight) business hours notice is required prior to cancellation. The parents will each be responsible for bills arising from his or her own cancellation with insufficient notice and/or failure to attend a scheduled appointment.

43. Notwithstanding the Agreement with respect to payment for services as stated in #39 above, the PC may modify this allocation if he/she finds that one parent is using his/her services unnecessarily and, as a result, is causing the other parent greater expense or, either parent may request that the fees be reallocated at any time during the Parenting Coordinator's term of appointment. Any decision will follow the same process as detailed for Arbitration.

In addition to reallocating fees, the Parenting Coordinator shall have the power to impose an award of costs if the Parenting Coordinator is required to arbitrate any issue. Here, the Arbitrator shall have the power to require one party to reimburse the other for any costs and/or expenses they may have suffered as a result of any breach of the Parenting Plan, or any breach of an arbitral award of the Parenting Coordinator. For example, if Mother incurs additional day care expenses as a result of Father not picking the child(ren) up on time, then the Parenting Coordinator shall have the power to require Father to compensate Mother for that expense. Or, for example, if Father has to cancel a scheduled trip for the child(ren) that was pre-paid, as a result of Mother's default of any terms of the Agreement or the breach of an arbitral award, then she shall reimburse Father for his loss and expenses occasioned by her default or breach. By way of another example, if one parent has not provided sufficient retainer, but the other chooses to provide retainer for both, the PC will proceed with arbitration and make an award of costs. This award will take into account the retainer that has been paid and make the necessary adjustments.

COMPLAINTS

44. If either parent has a complaint about the way the Parenting Coordinator is dealing with him/her or any issue, he/she shall discuss it in person with the Parenting Coordinator before pursuing it in any other manner. If, after the discussion, the parent is not satisfied that the complaint has been dealt with to his/her satisfaction, then he/she must submit a written letter detailing the complaint to the Parenting Coordinator, to the other parent and to any lawyers representing the parents and/or child(ren). The Parenting Coordinator shall provide a written response to the parents and lawyers within twenty (20) days.
45. The Parenting Coordinator will then meet with the complaining parent and his/her lawyer to further discuss the matter.
46. If the complaint is not resolved after this meeting, the complaining party may file a motion with the Court to remove the Parenting Coordinator as per the Arbitration Act. The motion shall proceed on the written documents submitted by both parents and the Parenting Coordinator, unless the Court Orders a hearing.

- 47. The court shall determine if the Parenting Coordinator should be replaced and shall determine who shall be responsible for any portions of the Parenting Coordinator’s time and costs spent in responding to the complaint and the Parenting Coordinator’s lawyer’s fees, if any.
- 48. The binding arbitrated decision shall be implemented and adhered to during the time the complaint process is in effect.
- 49. Neither party shall complain about the Parenting Coordinator to the Parenting Coordinator’s licensing board without also complying with the above-noted grievance procedures.

WAIVER OF ARBITRATOR’S LIABILITY

- 50. The parties waive any claim or right of action against the Parenting Coordinator for any matters arising out of the functions performed by her under this Agreement.

TO EVIDENCE THEIR AGREEMENT, FATHER AND MOTHER HAVE SIGNED THIS AGREEMENT BEFORE A WITNESS.

<p>_____</p> <p>FATHER</p>	<p>DATE: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Witness</i></p>
<p>_____</p> <p>MOTHER</p>	<p>DATE: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Witness</i></p>
<p>_____</p> <p>Dr. Dan Ashbourne, C.Psych or Ms. Mary Kay Arundel, MSW</p>	<p>DATE: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Witness</i></p>

Ten Tips for Successful Parenting Coordination

by Betsy Barbour Duvall, M.S.W.,
Denver, CO, and Christine A. Coates,
M.Ed., J.D., Boulder, CO

A parenting coordinator (PC) is a professional appointed by the court to help parents implement a workable parenting plan. A PC is typically used in a case that the court or other professionals have determined is "high conflict," that is, typified by chronic litigation and inter-parental conflict that is negatively affecting the children. The PC often has arbitration authority to decide issues when the parties reach an impasse. A PC must have expertise in diverse areas, including conflict management skills, child development, family systems theory, adult psychodynamics, family law, special issues affecting families (such as domestic violence, child abuse and child alienation), and extensive experience working with families who are involved with the courts and the legal system. Being a PC is challenging, and one should give careful thought before extending one's practice into this area.

If you decide to accept PC appointments, here are some tips, based upon our experience (including our mistakes) with these families:

1 First and foremost, be clear about your role. If you are a mental health professional, be clear that you are not providing therapy to the parents or the child. If you are a lawyer, clarify with your clients that you do not represent either or both of them or their children as a legal advocate. Avoid dual roles! The role of PC should not be mixed with any other role. This is the most important thing you can do, both to be successful in your work and to avoid grievances.

2 Seek clarity about your role from the initial intake. Talk with both parties and the attorneys (on both sides) about their expectations, any court orders, your policies, etc., before you commit to taking the case. Consider offering a free consultation with both parties present so you can be sure you said exactly the same thing to each one—even if they may hear it differently. Encourage parties to check out other parenting coordinators before selecting one, especially if they have reservations about you or some of your credentials or procedures. Decide if you want to and can work with them. If you don't want to work with them or are concerned that you can't for any reason, don't take the case.

3 Take the time necessary to get a good agreement with the parties at the beginning of the process. Clarify

exactly what (if any) issues are open to arbitration, fees, retainers, confidentiality, involvement (or not) of children, collaboration with other professionals, written decisions, process, when you will or will not have communication solely with one party, etc. If you are going to do any parent education or coaching, be clear with the parties about individual versus joint contact. The more clearly and exactly you have defined your role, the smoother the work will go. Make sure that you have a court order appointing you as parenting coordinator before proceeding.

Be clear about your boundaries and parameters regarding your role and policies. The more you know about your own tolerances, frustration points, etc., the better you are able to structure your work effectively. For example, be clear with yourself first then with your clients about how you will handle phone calls, "urgent" requests, phone conferences versus in-person meetings, etc.

4 Absolutely do not let anyone (the parties or the attorneys) force you into deciding an "urgent" issue before you have a court order, a signed agreement, and a retainer for your fees. These folks managed somehow before they got to you and can do so for a few more weeks (or months), if necessary.

5 When the parents reach an impasse and you must make a decision for them, establish clear guidelines for the submission of any further material for you to consider. The goal is to enter decisions efficiently and quickly, but make sure you have enough information about the issue to make a decision. Don't agonize over decisions—what is needed is a *good* decision, not the perfect decision. Use common sense along with your professional knowledge and experience.

6 Always put your decisions in writing. Only issue decisions in person or over the phone when time is of the essence, but always follow up with a written decision in the format your court/jurisdiction requires. Do not allow the parties to engage you in debating the correctness of your decision. Be brief with the findings and the award—it is not an evaluation report. Include in your parenting coordination agreement that you will also put their agreements in writing. It is important to have a paper trail and documentation for future reference of all decisions made by them and by you.

7 Don't expect yourself to change these people much, if at all. You will be successful if you can get issues decided. They may *never* learn how to communicate well or make joint decisions. That's why they hired you. In our experience, most clients do not want you to help them change, although they very much want you to change the other parent. The goal of parenting coordination is to implement the parenting plan and to reduce the conflict between the parents for the sake of the children. Transformation may certainly occur—we remain eternally optimistic—but the goal is to protect the children from the harmful effects of unresolved conflict between the parents.

8 When you make a mistake, it is better to admit it than to ignore it or try to cover it up. You will make mistakes; we all do. It is effective modeling to the parents to admit mistakes, correct them and move on.

9 When your work gets derailed, be willing to consider reworking your agreement by changing or adding guidelines to fit the particular problems with the case. Recognize when you have hit an impasse that precludes your continuing to be effective—know when to withdraw and refer the case to someone else. There is no shame in passing cases on.

10 Our last tip, but certainly not the least important one, is to take care of yourself. PC work is demanding and stressful. Develop a network of colleagues with whom you can debrief and consult. Have a mentor or be a mentor to a new colleague. Balance your PC work with other professional, family and personal activities that provide satisfaction and joy. Have a massage, take a run, eat a chocolate ice cream cone, or read a joke book—whatever refreshes and relaxes you. Leave your PC work at the office. And remember to give yourself an occasional pat on the back for the good that you are doing for families and children.

Betsy Duvall and Christie Coates are two of the authors of Working with High Conflict Families of Divorce: A Guide for Professionals (Jason Aronson, Inc., 2001). Christie currently chairs AFCC's Task Force on Parenting Coordination. For more PC information, see the AFCC Parenting Coordinator Task Force Report on the member area of AFCC's website at www.afccnet.org and the article, Parenting Coordination for High-Conflict Families, in Family Court Review, April 2004.