





NEWS

**POLITICS** 

ENTERTAINMENT

LIFESTYLE

IMPACT

VOICES

VIDEO

ALL SECTIONS

Q

THE BLOG 09/30/2016 05:22 pm ET

## The Pros and Cons of a Co-Parenting Coordinator





WESTEND61 VIA GETTY IMAGES



## Co-authored by Alan Plevy, Co-founding Principal at SmolenPlevy

Tensions can run high when former spouses have to work together and oftentimes, divorced couples feel like they are no longer allies. Yet, when they have children, there are numerous decisions that the divorced couple needs to make together. Enter professional decision makers, also known as co-parenting coordinators. A co-parenting coordinator is a neutral third party who serves a divorced or separated couple as a decision maker and a facilitator of communication.

Your ideal co-parenting coordinator is someone who will work themselves out of the job. It is important for parents to learn to work effectively with their ex-spouse and their children, and a good co-parenting coordinator will help the parents not only resolve the immediate issues but also establish a method by which the two parents can resolve future issues by themselves.

Several years ago, there was a notable increase in the number of co-parenting coordinators/counselors and a related spike in the number of problems associated with their use. However, since then, the trend in using co-parenting coordinators has leveled off to a certain extent and parties have become more discerning about what they want from a co-parenting coordinator, including how long they want to pay the fees to employ one.

Co-parenting coordinators are professionals, often psychologists or other mental health counselors, whose role is to help reduce, mediate and settle conflicts between divorced parents on matters regarding their children. Sometimes the coordinator can even be the decision maker if the parents are at an impasse. The role and the limits of what a coparenting coordinator can do are set forth either in a contract signed by both parents or in the court Order appointing them. During regularly scheduled meetings (or emergency meetings if the contract or Order permits these meetings), co-parenting coordinators serve as an impartial third party to listen to and resolve issues like:

- Schooling;
- Visitation and custodial arrangements;
- · Holidays;
- Camps;
- · Non-emergency medical care; and
- · After-school activities.

Ideally, the co-parenting coordinator listens to both parents and helps the parents come to a decision. The process is intended to avoid the escalation that may result when small issues become larger arguments, and to reduce the delay and legal expenses associated with litigating parental disputes. The role of the co-parenting coordinator is to help parents during that difficult period following a divorce when parents are learning how to co-parent while living in different homes.

During the period when the use of co-parenting coordinators was growing dramatically, they were often treated as a panacea. But unfortunately, co-parenting coordinators do not magically cure the communication issues between the spouses which often led to the divorce. Nor do co-parenting coordinators eliminate the different perspectives and opinions parents have when it comes to various challenges of raising children, like whether the child should go to an overnight camp or when a child should get a smart phone.

Parents have learned that their inability to come to a resolution on issues, like whether the child can bring their pet from one parent's home to the other's, or whether the child would participate in a specific activity, was costly in the time and money that was spent in coparenting sessions. If co-parenting coordinators are used as a permanent decision-making mechanism by parents, parents can spend significant funds during the period between their divorce and when their child becomes an adult.

Previously, there was no time limit set for the use of a co-parenting coordinator, and parents who had been divorced for years were still required to use the co-parenting coordinator to resolve any disputes. Another problem with the lack of a termination date is that parents are not forced to figure out how to work with each other. Instead, they expect the coordinator to continue solving their problems; this does not encourage parents to move beyond the often dysfunctional relationship they were in at the time of their divorce. Additionally, if the parents and the co-parenting coordinator are unable to reach a resolution, either parent can take the matter to court and litigate the issue, however small, in front of a judge.

Further, the expense of a co-parenting coordinator, who is usually paid for by both parents in equal share to maintain their neutrality, can work to the disadvantage of the parent who has a less disposable income. There are some parents who "win-at-all-costs", who try to bully the coordinator and their ex-spouse. In some cases, one parent will repeatedly call and email the coordinator, trying to dominate the process and to wear down the coordinator in order to "win" whatever issue is raised in the co-parenting session. There have been parents who have demanded meeting after meeting with the coordinator and presented the coordinator with multiple binders of documents just to run up the costs of co-parenting, hurt their former spouse and to ensure that no resolution is reached.

If you want to incorporate the use of a co-parenting coordinator, consider the following:

- Before you hire the coordinator, thoroughly interview the coordinator. Find out what experience,
  education and training they have, what their approach is to the communication challenges of
  your situation, what their experience and approach is to the needs of your children, particularly if
  your children have special needs, and what processes they have found to be most effective in
  resolving differences between parents.
- Ensure that your former or estranged spouse also wants to use a co-parenting coordinator and that the two of you have similar expectations from the process. This is not marriage or family counseling, nor should it be a place to rehash the issues from the marriage.

Set an end date for the use of a co-parenting coordinator - ideally this date is within 3-6 months
of their appointment.

Remember that a co-parenting coordinator is a neutral third party whose ultimate goal is to reduce the conflict between the parties and set up a process through which the parents can resolve issues without the co-parenting coordinator's intervention. Used judiciously, a co-parenting coordinator can be an effective and cost-efficient tool for divorced parents.

## Follow Kyung (Kathryn) Dickerson on Twitter: www.twitter.com/SmolenPlevy



Kyung (Kathryn) Dickerson 🔰

Principal at SmolenPlevy, an award-winning Washington, D.C.-area law firm.