

Parenting Coordination Policies and Procedures

The Parenting Coordination process is designed to meet the best interests of children by reducing conflict between parents. The process helps parents implement their parenting plan and to resolve conflicts quicker than when filing motions in court and waiting for hearings and the judge to make decisions. Many families find that structure and clear expectations help them to be successful in the parenting coordination process.

This handout outlines basic policies and procedures for participation in the Parenting Coordination process. This is not an exhaustive list. We can discuss any changes or additions.

It is important to remember the following key points about Parenting Coordination:

- It is a *present* and *future* focused process.
- By participating in the process, you agree to focus on the best interests/needs of your child(ren), and to disengage from ongoing conflict with the other parent.

The Parenting Coordinator (PC) will try to use the communication schedule set out here and respond to emergencies as needed, Monday through Friday. However, sometimes this may not be possible and the Parenting Coordinator will let you know if s/he is unavailable.

Communication between the Parenting Coordinator and Parents

Most communication between the parents and the Parenting Coordinator will happen through email and occasionally by telephone or in-person meetings. The Parenting Coordinator will respond to requests from either parent or may initiate discussions.

Either parent may raise issues no more than one time per week. The Parenting Coordinator will try to facilitate an agreement between the parents. If the parents cannot reach an agreement, the Parenting Coordinator will make the final decision. The Parenting Coordinator will provide you all decisions in writing, usually by email. The Parenting Coordinator will address the vast majority of issues and resolve them within a few weeks, unless the Parenting Coordinator determines that a decision needs to be made more quickly.

Neither parent will tell the child(ren) about the discussions that happen through this process or share any emails, except to the extent that everyone agrees to a limited disclosure.

Timing of Communication between the Parents and Parenting Coordinator

- Either parent may submit an issue/question 1x per week, **only on Mondays**.
- The other parent shall respond within one week, by the following **Monday**. If additional information or clarification is needed, the request must be made within **three days**.
- The initiating parent (who sent the first email) shall respond by **Friday** of the same week that the other parent responds.
- If the parents do not reach agreement through the emails, the Parenting Coordinator will spend no more than 2 weeks trying to work out an agreement/compromise before making a decision.

- Both parents must copy the Parenting Coordinator on all email communication between them.

Email Structure 3 Steps for Making and Responding to Requests/Proposals

Step 1: Parent Makes Requests/Proposals

- Your request should be very specific and provide all necessary factual information (Who, What, When, Where, Why).
- Avoid all personal comments or references to past issues and problems.

Step 2: Ask Clarifying Questions

- Do you need additional information before you can respond?
 - If yes, explain what information you need.
 - Ask for the information, or if you are able to get it explain how you will do that.

Step 3: Other Parent's Response

You have 3 options to respond. You say either:

- Yes (meaning you agree to the request or proposal)
- No (meaning you don't agree). Make a counter proposal immediately. See above under "Requests/Proposal" for how to structure your counter proposal.
- I will respond by Monday. (meaning you need more time to think about it or make arrangements).

Agreements / Decisions

- Both parents are able to reach an agreement, either on their own or with the PC's help.
- If the parents cannot agree after making requests/proposals, the PC makes the final decision.

Reports

- The Parenting Coordinator will summarize agreements/decisions and send by email to both parents.
- The Parenting Coordinator will submit a Report to the Court annually, or more often as necessary.

Examples:

Request/Proposal

Proposal 1: I would like to pick up Jayne's school computer and Daniel's hockey skates on Monday 5/24/2016. I propose we meet at the Starbucks in the Fred Meyer on Northern Lights.

Proposal 2: I would like to pick up Jayne's school computer and Daniel's hockey skates on Monday 5/24/2016.

Option 1: Meet at your house at 12:00 pm on Monday.

Option 2: Meet at Fred Meyer on Northern Lights to exchange the items at 5:30 pm on Monday.

Reason/Rationale: Jayne needs her computer to complete her final paper for social studies. Daniel has hockey practice on Monday at 7:30 pm at Ben Boeke Arena.

Response (Ask clarifying questions if needed. Then respond.)

Yes: “I agree to your request” or “I agree to your request and choose option 1”.

No: Counter proposal: “I propose we meet at Fred Meyer on Northern Lights at 3:00 pm”.

Types of Communication Between the Parents

Emails - This is the preferred form of communication between parents. Copy the Parenting Coordinator on all email communication between the parents.

Phone Calls - You should not call the other parent unless there is a true emergency (i.e., medical/safety issue).

Response Time: *Return the call immediately.*

Text Messages - You should not send a text message to the other parent unless time is of the essence. Save all text messages and show to the Parenting Coordinator if requested.

Response Time: *Text back as soon as possible.*

Communication Requirements

All communication between the parents should follow the principles of BIFF* and TKN** (see below). The Parenting Coordinator may address emails, behaviors, or other forms of communication that are disrespectful, disparaging, or otherwise inappropriate.

**Brief, Informative, Friendly, But Firm*¹

Brief

- When writing emails, keep your request or response brief. This signals you don't want to get into an angry back and forth conversation.
- Avoid comments on the other parent's character (don't say he/she is rude, insensitive or stupid.
- If the other parent doesn't follow these rules, don't take their statements personally and don't respond with a personal attack. Make sure you use these communication rules.

¹ Bill Eddy, LCSW, ESQ. BIFF Quick Responses in High-Conflict relationships; the Personal Attacks, Hostile Email and Social Media Meltdowns.

Informative

- Stick with just the facts.
- Focus on the accurate statements you want to make, and not on the inaccurate statements the other parent made.
- Avoid negative comments, sarcasm and threats.

Friendly

- You are more likely to achieve your goals if you write in a friendly manner, not in anger.
- This doesn't mean you have to be overly friendly. Sound relaxed and non-antagonistic. If appropriate, say you recognize their concerns.
- Brief comments that show your empathy and respect will generally calm the other parent down, even if for a short time.
- Don't give the other parent a reason to get defensive and keep responding in an unhelpful way.

Firm

- In a non-threatening way, clearly tell the other parent your information or position on the issue.
- Be careful not to make comments that invite more discussion, unless you are negotiating an issue or want to keep a dialogue going back and forth.
 - Avoid comments that leave an opening such as "I hope you will agree with me that . . ." This invites the other parent to respond "I don't agree."

*****True, Kind, Necessary***

- Before communicating with the other parent, check to make sure that your message is *true, kind, and necessary*. All three must exist before you send.
- Remember, something can be *true*, you can find a *kind* way to say it, but that does not always mean that it is *necessary*.
- By only sending *necessary* communication, you will decrease the potential for conflict with the other parent.

Email Do's and Don'ts

- Keep emails to ½ page or less.
- Keep the information brief.
- Use bullet points if possible.
- *Do not* use excessive capitalization and excessive punctuation (!!! or ???) when making a statement or request.
- *Do not* make accusations.
- *Do not* include emotional content.
- *Do not* make "you" statements/directives, such as "you always . . ." "you need to . . ." "you should . . ."
- *Do not* use blaming language.

Sample Inappropriate Email

To *Other Parent*,

Child has a school performance next week. I'm sure you won't attend, because you're always too busy working (yet another reason why I left you) so I'll go to the performance so our child knows at least ONE OF HIS PARENTS LOVES HIM. Just because your father wasn't around DOESN'T MEAN you can abandon our son.

Child's class is having a bake sale next week. He signed up to bring cupcakes. I really hope you don't send him with that store bought crap again. It has too many sugars, dyes, and who knows what else.

I signed the permission slip so he can go to the field trip next week. You never remember to sign those things anyway, and I'd hate for him to miss out on an educational opportunity like that again because you couldn't get organized enough to sign a form. I don't know how you run a business as disorganized as you are?!?!?! I paid the \$20.00 for the field trip since I knew you wouldn't. You owe me \$10.00 for it and must pay me that by the end of next week.

From,
Other Parent

Sample Appropriate Email

To *Other Parent*,

- Want to let you know that *Child's* school performance is scheduled for Tuesday May 2 at 10:00 am in the auditorium.
 - I will be attending.
- *Child's* classroom is having a bake sale next week.
 - The bake sale announcement/sign-up from his teacher is in the folder in his backpack.
 - *Child* signed up to bring cupcakes in class.
 - Can you bring the cupcakes?
- *Child* has a field trip to the Museum next week.
 - I signed the field trip permission slip.
 - I paid the \$20.00 fee.
 - Please let me know when you can pay me back ½ of the fee: \$10.00. Thank you.

Please let me know if you have questions.
Other Parent