

Introduction to the Parenting Consulting Process

A Parenting Consultant has essentially three functions: facilitation, coaching, and arbitration of parenting issues. When I am appointed as a Parenting Consultant, **I begin by meeting with both parties together.** This meeting is administrative in nature and serves to explain the Parenting Consultant process, schedule appointments, gain familiarity with background information, learn about the children involved, and establish an agenda of items to be addressed. If either parent is uncomfortable with a joint meeting, s/he may discuss these concerns with me before the appointment. **Note that no actual parenting consulting will take place during this initial session**—it is completely administrative in nature, and serves to build a foundation so that I can better help the couple I am working with.

The next step is for me to meet individually with each parent. This is a two-hour meeting, and provides each parent an opportunity to state his/her concerns about parenting. **Following this will be a one to two hour meeting with the child or children in the family.** The purpose of this meeting is to establish a relationship with the children and evaluate their developmental needs. My role will be explained, as well as the fact that information will be shared with both parents to aid them in their planning and decisions. The child or children can ask for confidentiality to discuss issues that are not related to the parenting plan or specific issue being consulted on. The age(s) and developmental needs of the child or children will always be at the forefront of any recommendations made in the process of working together.

Subsequent meetings may be conducted with both parents together or each parent alone; they may also include meetings with the children, new spouses, significant others, teachers, therapists, etc. These meetings will take place at my office in Eagan unless it is possible/preferable to proceed by phone, e-mail, or through written correspondence (as will usually be the case with other professionals).

I will always give parents the opportunity to settle their disputes. I believe that they are in the best position to make decisions about their children and should be assisted in doing so whenever possible. However, as a Parenting Consultant, it is my responsibility to make recommendations or decisions when parents are unable to agree. Even though I will facilitate negotiations when I am the Parenting Consultant, there is no confidentiality of information such as that provided when I work with parties in mediation or psychotherapy. All communications with the parents and others the Parenting Consultant has contacted are subject to disclosure among parties. Statements made to me as the Parenting Consultant by the attorneys and parents do not have the protection of the attorney-client privilege.

As a Parenting Consultant, I am a neutral party, and therefore I do not take cases in which I have any conflict of interest or bias toward either parent. However, it is part of my job as a Parenting Consultant to develop opinions about what best meets the needs of your child or children, and to advocate for their best interests.

Getting Started

Once it is agreed upon that I will be working as your Parenting Consultant, the Parenting Consultant Fee Agreement must be signed. **The initial deposit, the signed agreement, and a copy of the court order appointing me as the Parenting Consultant must be received prior to scheduling or holding any additional appointments.**

Parameters and other points to keep in mind

Calling on experts: I may need to use other experts to advise or consult on specialized issues (e.g. school choice, evaluation). Experts utilized in the process of arbitration will be paid separately from the deposit.

Acting in the best Interests of the child/children: As a Parenting Consultant, I will not provide either party with therapeutic or evaluative services, nor will I offer legal advice. As a mental health practitioner, I cannot be expected to apply legal principles in rendering arbitration decisions. The decisions shall be based on what I believe to be in the best interests of the child or children.

Mandatory reporting: Although I am not providing clinical services in my role as Parenting Consultant, as a mental health practitioner I am considered by state law to be a mandated reporter (Minn. Stat. §572.08). I am therefore obligated to report to the proper authorities any evidence of physical or sexual abuse or neglect of minors, elders, or vulnerable adults; or any direct threat to harm oneself or another person.

Crisis situations: I cannot respond to crisis situations, and I am unlikely to be available at the immediate request of one party or the other. Therefore, much of the contact with me will be scheduled.

Emails: I will accept email communications from either party. Emails not directly and specifically relating to scheduling will be charged at a rate of .20/email minimum. **Note that the content of email communications is not confidential!** If either party is sending more emails than I can reasonably handle, limits will be put on this form of communication.