



# What's a parenting coordinator and what do they do?

A parenting coordinator is a dispute resolution professional who provides mediation or arbitration services on parenting issues for a fee. They may be a lawyer, psychologist or social worker or someone with experience mediating civil law disputes. Under BC's *Family Law Act*, judges may order or parents may agree to have a parenting coordinator help them implement an agreement or court order about parenting arrangements or contact with a child.

## What they do

Parenting coordinators help parents implement the parenting arrangements that have been established for their family by an agreement or a court order.

They typically ask parents to sign a parenting coordination agreement explaining the process, setting out fees, and lasting 12 to 24 months. They will usually start by interviewing each parent separately and reviewing agreements or court documents. They must screen for family violence. They then work on specific tasks based on the family's needs, such as creating communications guidelines.

Parenting coordinators encourage parents to resolve disputes independently and turn to the coordinator only if they cannot agree. When that happens, they will usually try to resolve the dispute by helping the parents reach an agreement. If that doesn't work, the parenting coordinator will make the decision.

The decision will be in writing and it may be filed and enforced in court. Either parent may ask a judge to review the decision if the parenting coordinator acted outside their authority or made an error of law or mixed fact and law.

Throughout the process, the parenting coordinator must consider only the children's best interests. They will focus on providing the parents with resources and tools for independent, low-conflict decision making.

## What they cost

The fees charged by a parenting coordinator depend on the coordinator's location and training. However, for those who can afford it, parenting coordination can be less expensive than hiring lawyers to take their disputes to court.

## **When they can be helpful**

Parents might have an agreement or a court order about issues relating to their children but disagree on the details. For example, they may have agreed that they will enroll their child in one extracurricular activity per year but disagree on the activity. They might have a court order with a term that the parents share the children's summer vacation time equally but disagree on the exact dates.

A parenting coordinator can provide a neutral forum where each party's concerns can be heard. Instead of arguing in court about whether or not a child can participate in an activity or how to share summer vacation the coordinator can mediate, and if necessary, decide the issue very quickly. A parenting coordinator can also work with the parties to set up detailed guidelines on communication and how information will be shared.

## **How to get one**

There are three ways to get a parenting coordinator:

- Parents may sign a parenting coordination agreement at any stage
- One parent may apply for a court order appointing a parenting coordinator. A judge will decide whether the possible benefits justify the appointment and whether it's in the children's best interests.
- A judge may appoint a parenting coordinator without an application and whether or not the parties consent.

[Family Law Act, sections 14 - 19](#) Division 3 of the Act dealing with Parenting Coordinators

[BC Reg. 347/2012, section 6](#) - Family Law Act Regulation setting out parenting coordinators' qualifications, standards and authority

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