# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING OF PARENTING COORDINATORS

An appendix to the AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination

Developed by the AFCC Task Force on Parenting Coordination

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**APPENDIX A:**

<u>**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING
OF PARENTING COORDINATORS**</u>

This document is a companion to the AFCC's Guidelines for Parenting Coordination (2019) and should not be utilized as a stand-alone document.

A Parenting Coordinator ("PC") should have training in each of the following subject areas as reflected in the modules below. It is anticipated that a licensed mental health or family law professional, or a certified, qualified or regulated family mediator under the rules or laws of their jurisdiction, with practical professional experience with high conflict family cases, will have acquired the knowledge and experience in the areas listed in Guideline I - Competence. Training programs may want to accommodate different levels of prior training and experience by offering training in these eight modules and developing a process for exempting certain professionals from any of the modules where competency is established. Individual jurisdictions should set guidelines, approve trainings, and assign trainers to ensure that candidates can demonstrate minimum competencies in order to begin practice, and should require the completion of scheduled follow up trainings to achieve mastery within a reasonable amount of time. Jurisdictions might consider developing programs (e.g. mentoring, internships, supervision) to provide consultation and support for beginning "PCs" to reinforce and develop the skills that are covered in the recommended subject areas.

**Module 1:  <u>The Parenting Coordination Process</u>**

    A.     Definition of parenting coordination

    B.     Development of parenting coordination as a dispute resolution process

    C.     Differences between parenting coordination and other conflict resolution processes and professional services relevant to parents in dispute

    D.     Roles and functions of the PC

          1.     Intake process
          2.     Assessment or appraisal
          3.     Eliciting parent goals for their coparenting relationship, for communication, and for their children during and after the parenting coordination process
          4.     Education
          5.     Coordination/case management
          6.     Communication and conflict management
          7.     Decision-making
          8.     Parenting plan implementation

9.      Submit written agreements
10.    Limitations on functions

E.      Models of parenting coordination (such as the integrated model, med/arb model, special master model, therapeutic model, dual person model, bifurcated model and other relevant models)

F.      Screening for suitability for parenting coordination process (see Modules 3A.2 and 5D)

G.      Professionals Services Agreement/Contract, to include:

1.      Roles and functions
2.      Scope of authority
3.      Goals and objectives of the process
4.      Fees and costs
5.      Release and sharing of information with collateral sources
6.      Confidentiality
7.      Grievance procedures
8.      Duration of service
9.      Termination procedures
10.    Other provisions as required by the jurisdiction

H.      Stages of the parenting coordination process

1.      Referral, intake, screening for intimate partner violence (IPV) and suitability, and data gathering
2.      Orientation
3.      Infrastructure: rules of engagement; coparenting relationship; establishment of the support team; communication and information-sharing between coparents, with the PC and with the support team; and transitioning the children
4.      Agreement facilitation and conflict resolution
5.      Decision-making and arbitration
6.      Application of protocols and progress maintenance (integration/consolidation of skills, change in perspective, and practicing coparenting)
7.      Termination phase

I.      Research on parenting coordination: benefits and risks

J.      Working with parents who are self-represented

K.      Managing and maintaining boundaries for self-care

**Module 2: <u>Family Dynamics in Separation, Divorce and Other Coparenting Constellations Related to the Parenting Coordination Process</u>**

A.  Psycho-educational issues in separation and divorce and family dynamics

1.  Impact of separation, divorce, married, and never married individuals on family dynamics
2.  Continuum of parent-child contact problems (e.g., affinity, alignments, realistic estrangement, alienation, hybrid) and levels of severity in cases involving resist-refuse family dynamics
3.  Impact of IPV on coparenting and family functioning (see Module 5)
4.  Useful psychological research and theories applicable to interventions for families experiencing high levels of conflict

B.  Issues concerning the needs of children

1.  Children's developmental stages and how they relate to separation, divorce, and parenting arrangements
2.  Benefits of appropriate parenting on children's well-being
3.  Impact of parental conflict, other adverse childhood experiences on physical and psychological development
4.  Short- and long-term consequences on children involved in resist-refuse coparenting and family dynamics
5.  When and how to involve children in the parenting coordination process

C.  High conflict coparenting and personality functioning

1.  Family dynamics, including family of origin issues
2.  Sources of divorce/separation impasses including parental alienating behaviors
3.  Dynamics and implications of parent-child contact problems, including the continuum noted above (see Module 2.A.2), on parenting, coparenting and child adjustment
4.  Management strategies, specialized interventions, and techniques

D.  Family dynamics beyond the coparenting unit

1.  Multigenerational and blended families
2.  Impact of significant others important in the children's life
3.  Effects of mental illness, substance misuse or dependence, and other vulnerabilities in the family system that may affect the parenting coordination process
4.  Social network support systems and connection with community resources

E.  Models of coparenting (cooperative, disengaged, parallel, and conflictual) and how they impact children

## Module 3: <u>Parenting Coordination Techniques and Interventions</u>

A. Structuring the parenting coordination process

1. Initial queries/referral, establishing protocols, policies, and boundaries
2. Intake (e.g. questionnaires, review of relevant documentation, communication with attorneys, and interviews with parents)
3. Clarifying objectives and expectations of the parenting coordination process
4. Establishing the time, location, and format of parenting coordination meetings, including virtual meetings (see Module 8)
5. Conducting joint and individual sessions, telephonic and electronic communication
6. Maintaining appropriate records and documentation

B. Orienting parents to the parenting coordination process

1. Reviewing parenting coordination order of referral
2. Obtaining informed consent
3. Explaining practice policies (e.g., cancellation, response time, expectations of the PC and of the clients) and structure of the parenting coordination process (e.g. meeting frequency and virtual appointments)
4. Reviewing fees and costs, including retainer agreement, and failure to pay procedures
5. Reviewing professional services agreement, including the objectives and scope of authority

C. Assessment or appraisal

1. Conducting ongoing assessment regarding appropriateness for continuation in the parenting coordination process
2. Assessing the need for referral of a family member or family members to another professional for additional services
3. Appraisal of efficacy of techniques and interventions utilized
4. Assessing compliance and violations of the parenting plans or court orders and agreements and recommendations or decisions by the PC
5. Assessing the need for implementation of additional safety parameters/protocols

D. Utilizing the parenting plan and agreements in the parenting coordination process (where permissible and may vary across jurisdictions)

1. Development of the parenting plan
2. Monitoring the parenting plan
3. Modifying the parenting plan

4.      Memorializing agreements

E.    Interviewing approaches and skills

    1.      Interviewing adults
    2.      Interviewing children
    3.      Enhancing motivation of resistant clients

F.    Setting appropriate boundaries

    1.      Safety protocols and procedures for those participating in the parenting
            coordination process
    2.      Office safety policies and working with clients who have current restraining
            and protective orders
    3.      Establishing appropriate limits for client expectations
    4.      Staying within the scope of the parenting coordinator's authority

G.    Educative role including evidence informed research in the parenting coordination
      process

    1.      Impact of separation/divorce and parental conflict: risk and resiliency factors
    2.      Parenting skills, styles, and effective parenting
    3.      Factors impacting outcomes: interrelationship between parental conflict,
            parenting, and coparenting
    4.      Adolescent decision making (brain development)
    5.      Continuum of parent-child contact problems and resist-refuse family
            dynamics, including affinity, alignments, realistic estrangement and
            alienation;  differentiation of nature of the contact problem and level of
            severity; continuum of differentiated clinical and educational responses

H.    Using outside experts and resources effectively

    1.      How to build professional and non-professional resources
    2.      PC roles and functions on the collaborative/support team
    3.      Team structure and processes: hierarchy, organization, communication, and
            confidentiality
    4.      Collaborative interventions: planning, review of progress, decision-making,
            and documentation

I.    Case management

    1.      Managing and responding to non-compliance with parenting plan, court
            orders, and parenting coordination agreements
    2.      Managing impact of clients' high conflict behavior on the parenting
            coordination process and avoiding professional burnout, compassion fatigue

3.       When to decline an appointment and withdraw from a case
4.       Canceling, postponing, and suspending the parenting coordination process
5.       Interfacing with individual and family therapist(s) concurrently involved to assist with resist-refuse family dynamics in parent-child contact problem cases

J.  Decision-making

1.       Moving to decision-making phase of the parenting coordination process
2.       Process for gathering information and making decisions
3.       Process for review of decisions, including parent assent or objection
4.       Urgent decisions
5.       Memorializing decisions
6.       Responsibility to the court

## Module 4:  Court Specific Parenting Coordination Procedures (Subject to PC's Jurisdiction)

A.     The PC's responsibility to the court

B.     Knowledge of and adherence to jurisdiction-specific qualifications for a PC

C.     Local, state, and provincial laws governing the parenting coordination process

D.     Legal concepts as they relate to the parenting coordination process including: parenting time adjustment, relocation, and modification of parenting plan/agreements

E.     The appointment and discharge processes of the PC

F.     Whether, how, and when the PC should interface with the court system

G.     Decision-making/arbitration process

H.     Report writing, recommendations/orders

I.     Grievance procedures, if applicable

J.     Procedures for providing testimony or evidence

## Module 5:  Implications of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Other Safety Issues on the Parenting Coordination Process

A.     Legal and nonlegal definitions of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and IPV; effects of abuse, neglect, and exploitation on relationships, family dynamics, and the potential influence on the parenting coordination process

B.      The effects of coercive controlling behaviors on parenting, coparenting, and parent/child relationships

C.      Research-based patterns of IPV

D.      Procedures for initial and ongoing screening for abuse, neglect, exploitation, and IPV

E.      Safety interventions and protocols in the parenting coordination process

F.      Mandatory reporting of child abuse/neglect to the appropriate legal authority

G.      Reporting safety concerns and violations to a judicial officer according to the laws of the jurisdiction or the court order

H.      Procedures for notifying the court regarding modifications necessary in relevant court orders, include safety parameters

I.      Reference AFCC Guidelines for Examining Intimate Partner Violence: A Supplement to the AFCC Model Standards of Practice for Child Custody Evaluation[1]


**Module 6: <u>Ethical Considerations Pertaining to the Parenting Coordination Process</u>**

A.      Interplay between AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination (2019), other ethical guidelines, and other professional practice guidelines

B.      Risk management for parenting coordination practice

C.      Reference ethical considerations included throughout the AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination[2]

D.      Explicit and implicit emotional, cognitive, and behavioral biases


**Module 7: <u>Diversity Awareness and Responsiveness as it Affects the Parenting Coordination Process</u>**

A.      Socio-economic, cultural, racial, ethnic, language, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and disability issues that affect ability or willingness of coparents to engage in the parenting coordination process

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[1] See AFCC Guidelines for Examining Intimate Partner Violence: A Supplement to the AFCC Model Standards of Practice for Child Custody Evaluation, *Family Court Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4, October 2016, 674-686.

[2] See AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination, AFCC Task Force on Parenting Coordination 2018-19.

B.      Effects of the PC's personal biases, values, and styles

C.      Process and protocol modifications in response to diversity needs

D.      National guidelines and laws that impact individuals with disabilities and knowledge about how to provide accessibility

**Module 8: <u>Use of Technology Within the Parenting Coordination Process</u>**

A.      Considerations prior to engaging in long distance & virtual practice

B.      Utilizing technology effectively

C.      Issues related to security, confidentiality, and privacy

D.      Including technology issues in the professional services agreement

E.      Use of online shared parenting support platforms (e.g. coparenting communication platform, calendar/scheduling, etc.)

F.      Remaining knowledgeable about advances in technology that are relevant to the parenting coordination process.