

Parenting Plan Coordinator (Child Custody Special Master) Information Letter

Our general approach as Parenting Plan Coordinators is to help the parties negotiate in face-to-face mediation or through our assistance in negotiating between them. We try to assure a respectful flow of information. If the parties cannot make a decision together about a particular issue, then we will make decisions or recommendations according to the scope of the stipulation agreed between the parties. We want to help parties reach resolution as quickly as possible so the children's needs are met and each parent's life can go on less affected by conflict.

There are four phases to our work:

1. **Negotiation of the stipulation:** Before the work can begin, we need a clear stipulation to define the levels of decisions and how we will work with you. If you have attorneys, they can be helpful in negotiating this, either by conference call or in person. We will help the parties and attorneys set up the stipulated agreement. The stipulation on our web-site was carefully put together by a panel of judges, attorney and mental health professionals who work in Los Angeles County as a model to be used.
2. **Payment of fees.** Because we are acting in a quasi-judicial function, we need to have clear arrangements about payment of fees so that there is no conflict of interest. We require an initial deposit of \$2000, which is held untouched to be available for emergencies and ongoing work. Additionally, we ask that payment be sent in advance for your first office appointments in the form of a retainer and that you provide us a credit card number and signed authorization for us to bill any future unpaid fees. Thereafter, you will pay each time you come in (unless there is a retainer on hand) and be billed at the end of each month for all work to date and we will charge your credit card for payment of the current month's fees due. Please call our office for our hourly rates. In addition, you will be billed an administrative fee of \$275 at the beginning of the process and extra administrative fees

each three month period which will cover the costs of our dispute resolution coordinator, relaying messages, the handling of incoming/ outgoing correspondence, typing, copying, mailing, coordinating phone and in-person appointments, etc. We do this so that your Special Master does not charge you for answering phone calls, making appointments, relaying messages and so on. No appointments will be scheduled or written materials reviewed if your joint balance falls below \$1000. Any money left in your account will be refunded upon termination of our work.

3. **Defining the issues:** After the stipulation is negotiated, we usually meet with each parent separately, meet with the children and review any court recommendations and /or custody evaluations. We will want to talk with any therapists involved and other significant people as needed.

4. **Ongoing work:** We will usually have joint face-to-face meetings with the parents to discuss and negotiate issues. For smaller and/or more urgent issues, we may use phone discussion and faxes. Children are only interviewed periodically about specific issues. We often ask parents to copy us in on their written communication so we can track issues efficiently, should we need to become involved. As indicated above, we will endeavor to make collaborative agreements but will make decisions when there is impasse according to the scope of the stipulation.

We look forward to helping you and your family.

Sincerely,

Mary Elizabeth Lund, Ph.D.
Angus Strachan, Ph.D.