

PARENTING PLAN COORDINATOR/OR SPECIAL MASTER INFORMATION LETTER

Our general approach as Special Masters 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 three 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. In terms of fees, 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 and that you provide us a credit card number and signed authorization for us to bill any future unpaid fees. Thereafter, you will be billed at the end of each month for all work to date, and you must pay your fees promptly, or we will charge your credit card for payment of the current 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 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.

2. **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.

3. **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. Some decisions will be oral and some written as needed.

We look forward to helping you and your family.

Sincerely,

Mary Elizabeth Lund, Ph.D.
Angus Strachan, Ph.D.
Renee Lehr, J.D., Ph.D.