



Making Wise Choices During Divorce

Navigating child custody

It's hard to decide the best way to settle issues regarding your children when going through a divorce. KKKJ Forensic and Psychological Services offers many options to help you decide.

Mediation – Mediation is a dynamic, structured, interactive process where a neutral third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques. Mediation is primarily focused upon the needs, rights, and interests of the parties. The main goal of mediation is to open and improve communication between parties so they can come to an agreement to end conflict and avoid going to court.

Communication Skills Coaching: Communication skills coaching is not individual therapy, it is educational in nature. It addresses the specific issues you are facing during the divorce process. Coaching is targeted to help you successfully build communication skills to use with your co-parent to benefit your child(ren).

Co-parenting Education and Consultation: Co-parenting services are designed to assist you develop parenting strategies that are effective. Some common issues addressed in the process include identifying role expectations, developing effective communication skills, setting appropriate limits, and creating developmentally appropriate schedules. This may occur individually or as co-parenting team.

Parenting Plan Consultation: Parenting plans collaboratively establish the framework of the custody agreement. Topics discussed can include: parenting time (physical custody), decision making (legal custody), transportation and exchanges, annual vacations and school breaks, a dispute resolution process, physical and mental health care, relocation and foreign travel, social activities and school functions, communication and mutual decision-making, medical insurance and related expenses, and contact with relatives and significant others.

Collaborative Coach and Child Specialist: Divorce Coaches prepare you for successful amicable negotiation of a settlement agreement. They help you identify your underlying needs/interests/concerns, prioritize issues, and develop a plan for effective communication of the

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importance of those issues for you. Coaches can also help handle emotional issues that might otherwise get in the way of the settlement process so each person can think clearly about the future, prioritize issues, communicate effectively, and move forward. The Child Specialist provides the child a voice in the divorce process by meeting with each child to assess the child's needs and concerns. The Child Specialist can work with the child(ren) to address any specific emotional and practical day-to-day needs as they relate to the divorce process, and can help the parents do this. The Child Specialist can also help parents design a parenting plan that specifically address the defined needs of the child(ren) and family.

Reunification Therapy: This may be ordered when there have been allegations of abuse, parental alienation, gatekeeping, or a prolonged period of absence of a parent from a child's life for any reason. Our team approach follows research based recommendations to include the 'favored parent', child and disenfranchised parent in the therapy process. The goal is to help reduce anxiety, increase secure attachment, and diffuse conflict for the family.

Guardian ad Litem: GALs may be appointed in contested civil district court custody cases. They are appointed before an original custody order or a modification of a custody order is submitted to the court. GALs investigate the needs of the child in a custody dispute and make recommendations to the judge regarding what is in the child's best interest. They interview the child and other persons involved in the child's life and gather information from many sources to formulate a comprehensive and balanced picture of a child's needs in the family. GALs provide written reports to the judge and may be questioned by the court and the litigants. Custody orders are formulated after the GAL investigation and report is complete.

Psychological and Substance Abuse Evaluations/Parenting Capacity: If there is concern regarding whether the mental fitness or substance use of a parent might interfere with the safety and best interests of your child(ren), a psychological or substance abuse evaluation may be recommended by your lawyer, parenting coordinator, or the court. The evaluation will be prepared through the use of testing, interviews, and observations. This report will be provided to the requesting party or parties, and can be used as evidence when going to court. A parenting capacity evaluation directly addresses the issue of custody and involves an observation of the parent and child.

Parenting Coordinators: PCs may be appointed in highly conflicted child custody cases to help carry out the provisions of a child custody order and reduce your family's reliance on the court. The main purpose of the PC is to reduce conflict between parents. PCs educate and improve communication while negotiating differences parents may have. A PC may help with decisions

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regarding visitation schedules and transportation, vacation and holidays, as well as the health, education and emotional needs of your child(ren).

Custody Evaluations: If you and your child's parent are not able to develop a custody agreement, the court may order a custody evaluation. The evaluation itself is a document that an evaluator prepares for the judge to review, giving the evaluator's opinion about the best custody arrangement for the family. The evaluator's recommendation is not binding but is neutral information for the judge's review. A custody evaluator is a mental health professional with special training and experience in reviewing family dynamics and making recommendations to judges.

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