

## Custody: from sole to shared

Working with high conflict coparents

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- *“Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict— alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence.” –Dorothy Thompson*

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## Impasses to Divorce\*

- Intra-psychic
- Interpersonal
- Contextual/Systemic
- Johnston, J.R. & Campbell, L. (1988). Impasses of divorce: The dynamics and resolution of family conflict. NY: Free Press.

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## Parallel Parenting

- Kelly, J.B. (March, 2007 Family Process)
- “Cooperative coparenting promotes resiliency in children because of the parents ability to resolve differences on their own or with mediators or therapists as they arise. It has been reported that children whose parents engage in conflict-free parallel parenting also appear to thrive, as long as they have adequate parenting in both homes and well articulated parenting agreements and orders specifying contact and when joint decision-making is required will occur”
- The “interface” role
  - Disengagement\*

\*Coparenting and the PC Process, JCC, vol. 1, 2008, Sullivan

## Parallel parenting

- **Conduct of Parents In Parallel Parenting:**
  - Nothing is assumed, everything is spelled out in the parenting plan
  - Polite, businesslike, but not personal - There is a wall between your parenting relationship and the rest of your personal life; nothing personal is shared with the other parent
  - Meetings are public and formal, not private and scheduled by appointment at a mutually convenient time.
  - Meetings and calls should take place during regular working hours and last no more than thirty minutes.
  - Following meetings or communications, the parent initiating should send the other parent a written summary of understanding reached and the other parent should send back a confirming understanding, that includes any different understandings, if any.
  - Meetings may require the presence of a third party

## Management of Coparent Communications as a Disengagement Process

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## Constructing the interface between the parents

### – Titrating the communication/contact so that it is functional and manageable

- Face to face meetings - structure
- Telephone conference calls
- Email - timely, can control receipt, response, documented
- Fax, letter
- No contact, except through PC

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## Email Communication

- Asynchronicity
  - Disconnects the sender and receiver temporally
  - permits discretion
- Documentability
  - Written medium, date and time stamp
  - Becomes part of the case file

See “tips for email communication”

## Using email to structure conjoint meetings

Scheduling client appointments

Agenda (example)

Prioritizing

No surprises

## Documentation

- See attached summary example
- Email letter to clients (PDF)

## Online Resources

- A Cyber “space” to access to assist coparents with parenting time schedules, children’s activities, travel, special events, etc.
- Joint access, accountability (PC can access as needed), asynchronous, planning, disengagement
  - Google calendars – Posting, alerts, access
  - [www.ourfamilywizard.com](http://www.ourfamilywizard.com)
    - Shared custody site – communication, scheduling, etc.
  - [www.allaboutthechildren.us](http://www.allaboutthechildren.us)

## Case Management

- Communication with other professionals
  - Ease of connection – scheduling, information exchange
    - Sometimes essential for quick decisions
  - Copying, blind copying – keeping in the loop
    - Protecting the child therapist
  - Updates – facilitating team work
    - Example of therapist update letter
    - Example of PC letter to professional team
    - Conference call line is essential

## Disengagement using the Parenting Plan

- “crafting” the Parenting Plan
  - Handout “Parenting Plan Components”
- Implementing the Parenting Plan
  - The devil is in the details, conflict breeds in the grey areas
  - Training in using “our” constitution