

Types of Interventions Conducted by a Parenting Expert

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TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS CONDUCTED BY A PARENTING EXPERT

What is a Parenting Expert

A parenting expert is a member of a regulated profession with a combination of education, training, experience, continuous learning and judgement such that they would be recognized by the Court as an expert witness in the area of service they are providing.

A parenting expert is normally a member of a regulated profession who has a combination of education, training, experience, continuous learning and judgment that would ensure recognition by the Court.

Most commonly, Parenting Experts are Psychologists, Clinical Social Workers, Mediators and Parenting Coordinators. Often Mediators and Parenting Coordinators are members of other professions (Law, Psychology and Social Work).

Members of a government regulated professions (Law, Psychology and Social Work) also have ethical codes and standards of practice to follow and are accountable to their professions and are expected to meet the minimum requirements of that profession.

Types of Interventions

There are two primary types of Interventions conducted by a Parenting Expert: an Evaluative Intervention which provides information to the court to assist in decision-making, and a Therapeutic Intervention which attempts to work towards resolution, manage conflict and make changes in the existing family dynamic. (PN7, 2012)

Evaluative Interventions can include:

- Triage
- Views (Voice) of the Child
- Parent Psychological Evaluation
- Child/Adolescent Psychological Evaluation
- Focussed Assessment to address a specific question
- The Arbitration component of Parenting Coordination might also be viewed as evaluative

Evaluative Interventions are not an Assessment of Parenting Time and Parenting Responsibilities (also known as Bilateral Assessment, or Open Custody Assessment or Child Custody Assessment, or to use an even older term a Home Study). If that is what is needed an assessment under Practice Note 8 is required.

An assessor can only make recommendations that affect parenting time / parenting responsibilities (access, residence or decision-making, elements which potentially change the rights of one parent over the other) after conducting a thorough evaluation of the entire family. Even if a Parent Psychological Evaluation is first conducted with one parent and later conducted with the other parent the processes used and data collected does not make the equivalent of an PN8 Assessment of Parenting Time and Parenting Responsibilities.

Therapeutic Interventions can include:

- Educational Sessions
- Mediation
- Therapeutic Intervention with One Parent (counselling for one parent)
- Therapeutic Intervention with Both Parents (post-separation/divorce counselling)
- Therapeutic Intervention with the Child only (counselling for the child)
- Therapeutic Intervention with Parents and Children (counselling involving the entire family)
- Parent-Child Reunification (also known as remedial facilitated access)
- Parenting Coordination

All of the different (therapeutic or evaluative) interventions listed above can be undertaken by a parenting expert pre and post-settlement. In addition these are services families can access on a voluntary basis (which often eliminates the possibility of report writing or communication with lawyers or the Court), they can be initiated by legal counsel for the parties (which often allows for report writing and communication, thus increasing accountability of participants) or Ordered by the Court (with direct communication with the Court allowed and limitations on the parents ability to have copies of any reports).

Some of the above processes are more amenable to the direction of the Court under Family Law Practice Note 7 than others. For example the mediation process generally is closed and without

prejudice, with feedback only being provided if an agreement is reached, while PN7 may be with prejudice.

Arbitration is a consensual intervention and normally is under a Court Order (PN7). Arbitration is under the Arbitration Act of Alberta and although it is a mediation-arbitration model, with consent, it is binding in nature. In addition as mediation/arbitration (Parenting Coordination Arbitration) needs to be voluntary it may make more sense to go under a Consent Order under Practice Note 7 than a PN7 Order. These processes have traditionally been listed in the Practice Note 7 document so that when considering what can best help a family in transition these processes are not forgotten.

EVALUATIVE INTERVENTION: TRIAGE

The Parenting Expert will evaluate the family and make recommendations to the Court concerning the type of intervention(s) that may best meet the needs of that family. The recommendations may be to provide various forms of therapeutic support to the family, to obtain additional information, to identify issues or needs that need to be addressed in more detail or to obtain an assessment under Practice Note 8 to determine parenting time, parenting responsibilities, custody or access. (PN7, 2012)

Informal Triage

Most processes involving a parenting expert begin with consultation with that expert. This often takes place through a conference call involving the lawyers or communication between the Court and the parenting expert is at the first stage of providing a service. The discussion focusses on the problems the family is facing and helping select the best service(s) to assist the family. A guiding principal is to find the least intrusive process that has a chance of helping the family.

- Advantages of the informal process include that it steers the family towards the most appropriate services faster, it eliminates a costly step and it does not disqualify to Parenting Expert from further assisting the family.
- Disadvantage of the process is that it does not provide a written report although the subsequent service agreement sent out to the Court and lawyers will describe the process agreed upon.