



Ask the Experts

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Ten Tips to Save Money Using Your Parenting Coordinator

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A PC is assigned to your case and you've paid a substantial amount of money to get started with that person. Between you and the other parent, you have brought somewhere between two and ten issues to the PC. How can you save some money and get the most out of your parenting coordinator to get those issues resolved?

1. Pick your battles

Just as you do with your children, decide if an issue is really something to fight about. Have a serious conversation with yourself about whether you want to spend money and time arguing over an hour of parenting time here or there. There's nothing wrong with first raising an issue with the PC, discussing it a bit, and then saying, "Never mind, let's remove that one from the list."

2. Determine if your position is logical and reasonable

If your position is that the other parent should do 100% of the driving for the children 100% of the time, ask yourself: is that logical? Is it reasonable to think that a PC and, later, a judge will have one parent do all of the driving? Is it logical that the judge will give one parent every Christmas Day with the children and deprive the other parent of ever having a Christmas Day?

3. Make sure the fight isn't costing you more than the issue

Although parenting coordinators don't usually handle financial things, some issues creep into money matters. If the parents are arguing about whether Johnny's baseball glove is at Mom's or Dad's house and who failed to get the glove to the practice field, involving the PC in those discussions will easily cost more than the glove (or tennis shoes, or school book). Asking the PC to get involved in issues of clothing left at the other parent's house will eat up money even more quickly. This is a variation of "pick your battles." Determine whether it's cheaper to buy a second school book or pair of shoes, rather than spend the money on the PC.

4. Use trusted friends to discuss the things above
Don't pick a friend or family member who will agree with you on everything. Choose someone whose opinion you trust and who you would consult with about an important decision like changing neighborhoods or jobs. Choose someone who has stayed neutral between you and the other parent. Bounce your ideas off of that person: is this a battle I should continue? Is my position logical and reasonable? Ask for real, truthful feedback.

5. Communicate with the other parent about the issue at hand in brief informative emails, or with brief questions about the issue

BRIEF is the key component here. If the other parent asks for something that infuriates you, go ahead and write your scathing, outraged, three-page response—but don't send it to the PC or the other parent. Send it to yourself, or that trusted friend, or even your mother, but keep it in your small circle. Sending it only to the PC is an option, but it's an option that will probably cost you money. After writing the full outraged response, sit down (a few hours or a day later) and edit it down to: "I don't agree to give up my parenting time on Fathers' Day this year," and stop. Saying more isn't helpful and will cost you money.

6. If you can't stop yourself from writing and sending the long, drawn-out emails...

...that re-hash what happened last Easter and state what an inconsiderate bum the other parent is, then carefully review the bills you receive from the PC. Make a point of adding up how much those emails cost you. If you realize that sending those emails cost you as much as a two-day admission to Disneyland, or enough to have your car repaired, or enough to pay for a nice children's birthday party, it may give you incentive to change your behavior.

7. Read your parenting plan and all court orders that might cover the issue

An amazing number of parenting coordination clients simply haven't read their court orders. Getting the PC involved means that you are paying someone to read your documents to you. If the issue is where the children will be for Thanksgiving this year, you need to find and read every court document that might mention Thanksgiving. These documents could be your parenting plan (sometimes called a joint custody agreement or joint legal decision-making agreement), or it could be in an order issued directly by the court. Read everything, thoroughly, before involving the PC.

8. Make sure your parenting coordinator has all your court orders and parenting plans

If you've been back to court several times, there may be several orders or modifications or a single order that mentions only one issue, like summer vacations. Organize all your parenting plans and orders and list them by date for the parenting coordinator to make sure they have everything. The court does not usually provide the parenting coordinator with everything, and having the PC track down multiple orders is an unnecessary expense.

9. Create a calendar

If the issues between you and the other parent involve a certain period of time, such as summer vacation, or the weeks from mid-November through the re-start of school in January, create a calendar showing who the children are with each of those days. That's what your PC is going to have to do, eventually, and if you start with one, it simplifies the process and may even end it. Pull up Google Calendar, or your own calendaring program, and fill in your understanding of the schedule for the weeks in question, including all exchange days and times, and list all holidays and special days. Then propose that specific calendar to the other parent and ask, "Do you agree with this? If you don't, tell me what parts you don't agree with."

10. If the calendar and exchange of emails does not resolve the issue without the PC's help, then organize everything for the PC

Telling the PC "My position is stated in all the earlier emails" is an expensive statement, because now the PC has to go through many emails to find your position. That is done at your cost. To reduce that cost, briefly re-state your position in one organized email. If the issue involves a long period of time, use a calendar to re-state your position. Refer the PC to the specific dates of the emails and court orders and the specific sections of a parenting plan that should be reviewed by the PC in making this decision. The more specific you are, with page and paragraph numbers, the less time your PC will spend looking for information.

Annette Burns has practiced law in Arizona since 1984, specializing in family law, and focusing on acting as mediator, arbitrator, family law master and parenting coordinator in family law cases. Her background and experience includes over 28 years of client representation in divorces, property valuations and divisions, and actions involving spousal maintenance, child custody and parenting time, paternity, and child support. Since 1994, she has been a certified family law specialist in Arizona. Annette is a Fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), and is a board member and secretary of the AFCC Board of Directors. This piece was originally published January 14, 2015, as Nine Tips to Save Money Using Your Parenting Coordinator on her blog www.heyannette.com.