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Ten of the Toughest Challenges in Parenting Coordination Work

By Christine Coates, M.Ed., J.D., Robin Deutsch, Ph.D. and Matthew Sullivan, Ph.D.

1. Fees, please!

Never commence work on a case until you have retainers in the bank. Never continue to work on a case when one or both parents have exhausted that retainer. Have an office policy that demands that the retainer is refreshed when it falls below four hours of your hourly rate. If you cannot adhere to these rules, you should probably not do PC work. We are there to help our clients with boundaries and need to model how to do that.

2. One parent who continually violates custody orders, agreements between the parents, and PC rules and directives during the process

When both parents are non-compliant, PC is not a process that will serve that case, and chaos and anarchy will reign. When only one parent is non-compliant, the work is challenging as the PC's sanctions and decisions are one-sided (leading to a perception by the offending parent that you are biased), and the other parent is often frustrated that you allow their co-parent to get away with the breaking rules that the non-offending parent is following.

3. Having a parent file a complaint with your professional licensing board/professional organization while you are still active in their case

Can you continue to act in an objective, unbiased manner in the PC role? If not, you must withdraw from the case. If you think you can, consider how the reviewing agency will view the fact that you are now in multiple roles—PC and subject of professional review.

4. Not having the support of the judiciary

Not infrequently, clients object to a PC's recommendations and decisions or make grievances to the judicial officer who is involved in the case. Knowledgeable and supportive judges are able to keep parents from undermining the process and the authority of the PC. Make it a point to reach out to judicial officers in your jurisdiction and educate them about the nature of PC work. This will help reduce the likelihood of being undermined.

5. Having an attorney who is not collaborative

The first place an unhappy client voices concerns is to the attorney. Thinking of attorneys as part of your "collaborative team" means educating them about the process and informing them prior to contact

from their client when you know the client is becoming hostile. This is an effective way to keep the client in the process.

6. Dealing with a "true" domestic violence case

The [AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Coordination](#) take great care to urge caution in taking on domestic violence cases where intimidation, power and control continue to be evident post-separation. The engagement between perpetrator and victim in a less-formal alternative dispute resolution process, such as parenting coordination, can actually facilitate ongoing domestic violence in such cases.

7. The helping hand strikes again

PCs occasionally need to address problems created when a child's therapist has been procedurally biased (only dealing with one parent and the child) or who is completely aligned with one parent in the case. These therapists can be part of the problem and should be confronted with their biases and possibly asked to end their roles. The new [AFCC Guidelines for Court-Involved Therapy](#) can be a useful tool in confronting therapists with such problematic professional conduct.

8. One parent is uninvolved

In most jurisdictions, and in most private consent agreements, the PC cannot force or mandate participation in the PC process. Often the PC feels pulled by the participating parent who is raising real concerns but cannot get any communication going. It is tempting for the PC to rule without the input of the uninvolved parent. If one parent refuses to participate, the PC should resign and/or the other parent can seek assistance from the court.

9. The antisocial parent

This parent will often not comply (unless it benefits his or her agenda), will recount an event with a spin that makes him or her look good, will deny what others have observed, will have no remorse, and will present themselves as charming until challenged. Managing this person requires clear limits and expectations, and clear sanctions for noncompliance.

10. Balancing the work load

Do not have too many active cases at a time as individual case demands can vary significantly over time. Before accepting a case, inquire into the immediate needs of the parents. If you have a lot on your plate already, regretfully decline the case. You'll be glad you did. Self-care is very important to avoid burnout and to be an effective PC.

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