

Practice Note 7 Interventions

When families are experiencing difficulty resolving parenting matters, a Practice Note 7 Intervention (PN7) can be helpful to refocus the attention to the needs of the children. There are several evaluations and Interventions considered under a PN7 which is essentially described as a tool developed by the Courts of Alberta to assist in the litigation process, recognizing that it is in the best interests of the children that families in high conflict have quick and effective intervention.

Under Practice Note 7 a Psychologist can provide written feedback to parents, lawyers and the Court to help resolve the family conflict.

Limitations and Restrictions:

This process is not an assessment of the parents and no opinion is given regarding parenting time or the suitability of the child(ren) being in the care of either parent. Under Practice Note 7, "a Parenting Expert conducting an Intervention will not provide an opinion or recommendation on parenting time, parenting responsibilities, decision making, or relocation." The Parenting Expert can describe what is happening with the child(ren) and within the family dynamic.

Practice Note 7 can be Evaluative or Therapeutic in nature. Below is a description of the services we offer related to PN7. All services are billed at the Psychology Association Rate of \$330 per hour.

VOICE OF THE CHILD (12-20 hours dependent on the number of children)

Hearing the child's views may result in early resolution for families as parents are provided with information that allows parents to refocus on the needs of the child. A *Voice of the Child* evaluation can be completed within six to twelve weeks (depending on parenting schedules and amount of children involved) from date of referral. Compared to a *Custody Assessment/Evaluation*, which can take six (6) to twelve (12) months from date of referral.

The process for meeting with children includes a semi-structured interview and play based activities. We engage children in a calm and supportive environment, allowing the child's narrative to unfold naturally. Most children really enjoy coming to the office and many are prepared to provide their story and share their experiences in the home. *A Voice of the Child* focuses on children sharing their views and thoughts regarding their parents, including the parents' dispute. Parents also engage in a session aimed at gathering information to provide context to the children's views.

It is important to know that Psychologists do not make recommendations about parenting time but rather provide information to allow the parents (with their lawyers) or Judge to make decisions based on the views of the children.

The process will include:

- Consultation between legal counsel, parents and the Psychologist to determine the scope of practice.
- A Court Order that clearly outlines the intervention and terms.
- A retainer agreement created by the Psychologist outlining the process. Parents are encouraged to ask questions at any time and seek clarification prior to providing consent.
- The parents will meet separately with the Psychologist for an 1.5-2 hour session. Each parent will be asked about the history of the marriage, the impact on the children and the nature of conflict with the other parent. Screening for Domestic violence, interpersonal violence or coercive control will be completed at this time. Parents are encouraged to send any relevant additional information by email.
- The Psychologist will meet with each of the children, brought to the office once by the Mother and once by the Father. The Parents will join the session at the beginning to review the reason for the session and to ensure the children are comfortable with the process. Each child typically has their own session. If more than one child, the children may be seen together to observe the dynamics between siblings.

- Sessions are 1-2 hours and the first session is focussed on rapport building and gathering information from the child. At the second session, the Psychologist will review the information from the initial session and confirm if their views remain the same.
- The Psychologist will prepare a written report to be shared with the lawyers and Judge. Parents do not receive copies of the report but may review the report in the presence of their legal counsel or court clerk.
- Often, after hearing their child's view, the parents will resolve issues related to parenting time by mutual consent without going to court. The hope is that once the child is heard, parents may make adjustments in their behaviour and begin to focus on what is best for the children.

Please click this link to explore more about Voice of the Child Interventions
https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/fl-lf/divorce/2004_2/p4.html

REUNIFICATION/ REPAIR THERAPY

Reunification Therapy (repair or reconciliation therapy) is a specialized form of family therapy with the goal of working through the dynamics that led to a parent being out of their child's life for an extended period of time.

Children and parents come to the reunification process at varying stages of readiness. For children with heightened feelings of anxiety, worry, anger, or resistance to the process, reconnecting with an estranged parent can be challenging. A parent's stage of readiness is often quicker than the child's and the parent is requested to learn about the process, take responsibility for their actions and learn about how their child has been impacted prior to resuming contact.

It is common for parents to attend individual therapy to help support them through the process as parents may struggle with their own anxiety and/or conflict with the other parent that can be detrimental to the process if not supported.

Reunification, like any therapeutic approach, does not guarantee the successful reunification of child(ren) and parent. Rather, it is a supportive process, providing psychoeducation and counselling support. Success is driven by the parents' ability to work together and put the needs of their child first. There are multiple factors influencing resist-refuse dynamics including the child's developmental needs, sibling dynamics, co-parent conflict, the child's experiences with the parent, the parent's temperament, and the parent's ability to meet the child's emotional and physical needs, including co-regulation.

We follow a child-centred model, which means the needs and concerns of the child(ren) involved must be understood and addressed by the therapist before joint parent-child sessions can be arranged.

Process: 20 hours \$6600

- One session with primary care parent (Mom)- 2 hrs
- One session with estranged parent (DAD)-2 hrs
- Follow-up sessions with parents (2 hours)
- 2 sessions with each child (2.5 hrs each child- 5 hours for 2 children)
- 2 joint sessions with estranged parent & children (4hrs)
- Report Writing (2-3 hours)
- Documentation review and consultation with counsel (1-2 hours)
- Email and additional consults or document review (1 hour)

The procedure and timing for the reunification sessions is dependent on the individual child and parent dynamics. Here is an example of how the process progresses.

1: Meeting with primary care parent (favored parent)

- The process to be fully explained, including expectations of this parent's role in meeting with the children.
- Perception of the problem between the other parent and child
- Ascertain how supportive the parent will be of the process
- May require referral for individual therapy to support through the process.

2: Meeting with estranged/resisted parent

- The process to be fully explained, including expectations of this parent's role in meeting with the children.
- If necessary, parent is prepared to hear the concerns of the children. "In the first session your child is going to tell you all of their concerns, and problems they have with you, from his/her perspective. You are going to listen without showing upset or anger and when the child is done you will compliment her/him on his/her bravery for raising issues with you and assuring your child you are not mad"
- Assess if parent can be child-focussed- if they cannot, additional services such as individual therapy may be needed.
- Focus is not on the truth but how things can be done in the future so that the parent and their children can be comfortable together.

3: Meetings with the child

- Build rapport and establish feelings of security within the office
- Establish understanding of concerns and past experiences- separate child from parent concerns.
- Prepare for emotional safety, e.g., if become uncomfortable, take bathroom break.
- Prepare what to say to parent in first joint session.

4: Parent-child meetings: Two-Three 2-hour sessions over a 6 week period with follow-up at 1 month, 3 months and 6 months.

- Discuss past experiences and concerns.
- Make commitments to be different in the future
- Establish new start and acknowledgment of favorite past memories.
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5. Follow up sessions- sessions designed to check in once the child begins more consistent contact with the parent to ensure they are feeling secure and adjustments to be made as needed to support health interactions.

CO-PARENT COUNSELLING

Parent Coordination (without Arbitration) intervention services as described in Practice Note 7 under the Family Law Act. This intervention is designed to support parents in post separation to allow them to support their children by reducing the conflict between them. This process provides the following:

- Opportunity for healing and repair in relationships after family separation.
- Education on the effects of inter-parental conflict on children's well-being.
- Education on child development, children of divorce and what to expect.
- Information on how specific parent-child factors are associated with development of positive and healthy child outcomes.
- Discussion of plans proposed by parents for the child's care and upbringing.
- Assistance in developing parenting plans to meet their child's long term need and/or assist with the maintenance and monitoring of parent plans.
- Communication to allow children to be loved by both parents and extended family.
- Information on the psychological functioning of the child, his/her developmental needs and perceptions from the child's point of view.
- Reduces chronic litigation by assisting the parents to communicate more effectively and resolve issues in a manner that is consistent with the Child's developmental needs and best interest.

What we cannot offer:

1. A substitute for Practice Note 8- "Assessment of Parenting Time and Parenting Responsibilities".
2. Changes to the legal or physical custody status or recommendations on custody arrangements such as parenting time, access or relocation. We will work with you to make parenting decisions that make sense for your family.
3. Co-Parent Counselling is not considered mediation or arbitration.

Consenting for Services:

Since Co-Parenting counselling is either court ordered or an agreement between two parents, the process is not confidential. Please be aware of disclosure of information in the context of potential forthcoming litigation. Therefore, information is not considered confidential and may become part of the public record. The Co-Parent counsellor is not employed for the benefit of either parent.

In this Program, Parents will learn skills to:

1. Maintain a child and present focus to decrease the stress for their children
2. Focus on present child rearing matters rather than past relationship issues
3. Improve communication and negotiation skills while improving impulse control
4. Treat each other as partners in parenting and reduce the emotional attachment to the relationship
5. Remain focused on one issue at a time
6. Separate the issue from the person

Goals of the Co-Parent Counsellor:

1. Offer children the opportunity to grow in a home environment free from the stress of being caught in the middle of parental conflict and create a more relaxed home atmosphere.
2. Encourage both parents to maintain an ongoing relationship with their children
3. Reduce parental conflict through communication and impulse control.
4. Diminish loyalty binds for the child
5. Observe family progress and compliance with parenting plans
6. Support parenting concerns in order to reach a consensus
7. Assist parents to create a detailed Cooperative Parenting Plan for issues such as discipline, transitions, decision making, holidays, etc.
8. Collaborate with professionals involved with the family in a coordinated manner.

Time Commitment:

The Co-Parenting process consists of an average of twelve- 90 minute sessions held over a period of six to ten months. Sessions are scheduled to better ensure a positive and cooperative transition over an extended period of time. Joint follow up sessions may also be scheduled at six and twelve months and parents are encouraged to return to the process to address difficulties interfering with their ability to co-parent.