

Voice of the Child in Parenting Coordination

Why include the Voice of the Child in Parenting Coordination?

The conclusion from the literature is that children want to have a voice but not make the decisions about custody or access. As well, children have the right to be heard as part of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the child, ratified by Canada (Article 12).

Including the voice of the child can increase the Parenting Coordinator's (PC) understanding of the child's needs and wishes with more accuracy. Parents who need a PC often present opposing views about the child's needs and wishes. Using a voice of the child report can help alleviate this problem and help the parents focus on the child's needs and well-being.

There are cases, however, where meeting with the child might be contraindicated. The PC must learn to discern if the child's voice should be considered, and when and how to include the child's voice for the benefit of the child and family, and the goals of the intervention.

Why do PC's need specific training for the Voice of the Child?

PC's need sufficient training for interviewing children because PC work, generally done with moderate to high conflict parties, can be a mine field for the PC. As well, the parents' relationship can be a mine field for the child. It is important to not put the child at risk for further harm, whether that derives from the PC's lack of skill, the parental conflict, or retribution because of what the child said. There are many considerations that when played out, could assist the process and help to decrease conflict, or could exacerbate it.

Potential complaints to the PC's registration or accreditation body or issues around liability can be exaggerated by the nature of the work with high conflict parents. If the PC lacks sufficient training and experience, it can give the parent(s) ammunition. It is not unusual for one, or at times, both parents to try to undermine the PC. Knowing the potential traps and how to do the work without adding to your liability is important.

Further, insufficiently trained PC's interviewing children can lead children to tell you what they think you want to hear, instead of what is really going on for them. The lack of skill may increase the trauma/stress for the child or cause the child to shut down. It is crucial that professional consideration be given to the goals of the work in relation to the process and the child's trauma/stress. Not only are there many process issues to consider, there are many ethical issues that can arise from this work including confusion about who the client is, the child or the parents.

Training Available?

Having spent 32 years working with children and families in various capacities including obtaining the voice of the child for FDR, I developed "Voice of the Child: 12 Step VCR (Voice of the Child Report)" training. This advanced training addresses these factors and much more. This skill based training is delivered by myself, Dr. Dan Ashbourne, Dr. Kim Harris and Carolyn Leach. For registration contact [drodrigues@pccs.ca](mailto:d Rodrigues@pccs.ca)

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