

“...PARENTING COORDINATION IS BEING RECOGNISED AS THE MISSING PIECE IN THE FAMILY LAW PROCESS...”

Over the past several years, Parenting Coordination has evolved from a relatively unfamiliar process within the Australian family law system into one of the fastest-growing post-parenting order interventions available to separated families.

As courts, lawyers, and other family law professionals continue to recognise the long-term impact of unresolved parental conflict on children, there has been a noticeable shift towards finding practical interventions that extend beyond the making of parenting agreements or orders. Increasingly, Parenting Coordination is being recognised as the missing piece in the family law process, providing families with ongoing support precisely when they need it – while implementing their parenting agreements.



## Why Conflict Continues After Parenting Orders Are Made

For many parents, there is an expectation that once parenting orders have been made, conflict will come to an end. Unfortunately, this is often not the reality.

Parenting orders provide a legal framework for parenting arrangements, but they cannot anticipate every issue that will arise as children grow and circumstances change. Day-to-day co-parenting inevitably involves decisions about time-swaps, school events, new medical issues not anticipated at the time the orders were made, the involvement of new partners and countless other practical matters that may require ongoing communication between parents.

For high-conflict families, these everyday conversations can quickly become sources of renewed dispute.

Rather than resolving conflict, final orders may simply change the nature of the conflict. Instead of arguing about where children should live, parents begin arguing about how orders should be interpreted or implemented. Small disagreements can escalate rapidly, leading to inflammatory communication, repeated involvement of solicitors and, in some cases, further court proceedings. All of this hurts kids.

Without appropriate support, many families find themselves caught in an ongoing cycle of conflict long after litigation has concluded.

## Why Conflict Continues After Parenting Orders Are Made (...continued...)

This prevents parents from making timely decisions and often delays access to what a child needs or what is in their best interests (such as braces, medical treatment, or enrolling in an activity they are eager to participate in, but Mum and Dad cannot agree).

## The Gap that Parenting Coordination Fills

Traditionally, the Australian family law system has offered extensive support leading up to the making of parenting orders through negotiation, mediation, Family Dispute Resolution and therapeutic or court processes. However, once orders are made, many families are left to navigate implementation on their own.

This post-order period has historically been one of the least serviced stages of the family law process, despite often being the period when parents require the greatest assistance.

Parenting Coordination was developed specifically to address this gap.



The focus is not on renegotiating parenting arrangements or having someone else make decisions when parents can't. Parenting Coordinators do neither. Instead, they assist parents to:

- Implement parenting plans and parenting orders;
- Improve and assist with ongoing communication;
- Resolve disputes arising from day-to-day parenting issues;
- Maintain a child-focused approach to parental decision-making for day-to-day issues;
- Provide an avenue for accountability and respectful engagement; and
- Reduce children's ongoing exposure to parental conflict.

Importantly, Parenting Coordination is an ongoing process rather than a single intervention. Parents have access to a neutral professional over an extended period, allowing issues to be addressed before they escalate into larger disputes.

By helping parents develop and maintain effective communication and conflict management skills, Parenting Coordination aims to reduce reliance on repeated legal intervention while improving long-term co-parenting relationships.

# Why Parenting Coordination is Becoming Essential in Australian Family Law

By Dr Anne Purcell

## The Gap Parenting Coordination Fills (...continued...)

Importantly, Parenting Coordination is an ongoing, multi-faceted process rather than a single intervention. Parents have access to a neutral professional over an extended period, and attend as ordered, or by agreement

By helping parents develop and maintain effective communication and conflict management skills, Parenting Coordination aims to reduce reliance on repeated legal intervention while improving long-term co-parenting relationships.

## Why Professionals are Increasingly Referring to Parenting Coordinators

As awareness of Parenting Coordination grows throughout Australia, referrals are increasingly being made by judges, family lawyers, independent children's lawyers, family report writers, therapists, mediators and family dispute resolution practitioners.

Professionals are recognising that some families require more than parenting orders alone. High-conflict parents often need ongoing guidance in applying those orders consistently and constructively in real-life situations.

“...PC'S ASSIST PARENTS TO IMPLEMENT PARENTING PLANS & COURT ORDERS...”



Dr Anne Purcell, Co-Founder, PCA

Professionals are recognising that some families require more than parenting orders alone. High-conflict parents, or those with complex family issues or dynamics, often need ongoing guidance to implement their parenting orders consistently and constructively in real-life situations.

Many referrals involve families who have experienced:

- Repeated litigation;
- Ongoing communication difficulties;
- Conflict regarding the implementation of parenting orders;
- Frequent disputes over parenting decisions; or
- Significant difficulty co-parenting despite final orders being in place.

Rather than returning repeatedly to lawyers or courts to resolve relatively minor implementation issues, Parenting Coordination provides a structured process where parents can work through these disputes with the assistance of an appropriately trained professional.

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## Who are Parenting Coordinators (PCs)?

Parenting Coordinators come from many family law backgrounds, including:

- Family Lawyers;
- ICLs;
- Mediators or FDRPs;
- Psychologists and Social Workers, or
- Family report writers.

PCs often come to the practice of Parenting Coordination after years of experience working on high-conflict parenting matters. For them, it provides a new opportunity to do important and professionally satisfying work where they can see and monitor the immediate benefits their ongoing assistance provides.

## The Future of Parenting Coordination (PC) in Australia

Parenting Coordination continues to gain momentum across Australia.

Family law practices now recognise Parenting Coordination as an important extension of existing services they provide to separating families. Just as mediation and collaborative practice became established dispute resolution processes, Parenting Coordination is emerging as an essential part of the suite of services available to co-parents.



Importantly, Parenting Coordination is not intended to replace existing dispute resolution processes. Instead, it augments process options by providing practical assistance during the post-orders period, a stage where many families continue to experience significant challenges.

As Australian family law increasingly adopts approaches that prioritise early intervention, child-focussed practice and long-term conflict reduction, Parenting Coordination is well positioned to become a standard component of family law practice.

Ultimately, its success is measured not simply by reducing litigation, but by helping co-parents communicate more effectively, implement parenting arrangements with less conflict, and provide children with greater stability as they transition between two households.

For families navigating the challenges of post-separation co-parenting, Parenting Coordination represents more than another dispute resolution process; it offers a practical pathway towards healthier co-parenting and better outcomes for children.