

EPPM Information for Attorneys

Early Parenting Plan Mediation (EPPM) is a confidential process that provides attorneys and their clients information that can aid in the settlement of child-related issues early in the divorce process and potentially obviate the need for the appointment of a Child and Family Investigator (CFI) or an Allocation of Parental Responsibilities (APR) evaluator.

The process involves meetings with parents and sometimes children, and is likely to take eight to twelve hours to complete, although the amount of time will vary depending on the circumstances of each family. I have attached the documents that I use in the process to give you a (hopefully) clear understanding of what EPPM actually entails.

Attorneys play an important and sometimes critical role in the success of the process. For that reason, and to help me understand who the clients are and the issues in dispute, the process begins with a 15 to 30 minute telephone conference with the lawyers.

During the conference call, I speak with the attorneys about 1) whether or not the EPPM process would be likely to help, 2) how we might work as a team to facilitate an agreement regarding a parenting plan for their children, and 3) the potential role(s) of the attorneys during the process.

In brief, the EPPM process consists of 1) my meeting with parents together for an hour or so to discuss conflict, successful conflict resolution, the elements of the process, and, of course, the nature of the dispute(s), looking at what parents need to reach an agreement (such as information, a different perspective, or an apology for the hurt they have been caused), and the obstacles that stand in the way of resolution.

Before the initial meeting, I provide parents documents including a description of the process, an outline of a parenting plan proposal, and a questionnaire that contains what I consider the most important questions asked during a parental responsibility evaluation.

During the initial meeting, I speak with parents regarding whether or not it would be helpful for me to meet with the children. I explain that I will not share what the children tell me unless the kids want me to and I believe that they are making a safe decision, i.e. one that does not place them in a tough spot should the information be revealed.

Individual meetings with each parent are scheduled at the time of the initial meeting to ensure that the process moves forward in an expedient manner. Parents are expected to complete the questionnaire and parenting plan proposal several days in advance of his or her individual meeting, if not before the initial conjoint meeting, so that I have an opportunity to review their responses in advance.

During the individual meetings, I give each parent the opportunity to talk about what is important to them and what they believe to be in the best interest of their children. I also

ask questions that help me more fully understand their perspectives and the reasons for them.

It is also during that meeting that I initiate a discussion of parenting plan options that would appear to best meet the needs of the children based on the information they have provided.

If I meet with the children, I do so in advance of the next step in the process, i.e. a second conjoint meeting with the parents designed to result in an MOU.

During the second conjoint meeting with the parents (which is often the final meeting), I continue the discussion regarding parenting plans that would be likely to fit with their children's emotional and developmental needs based on the children's developmental histories, family dynamics as they have described them, each family member's personality, the parents' relationship, and the relationships between the parents and the children.

Following the final meeting, I draft an MOU that is provided to the parents and their attorneys for completion. I remain available to help the parents and the professionals overcome remaining obstacles that might interfere with each person's signing off on the agreement. To prevent the interference of buyer's remorse, I will sometimes prepare the MOU and ask the parents to sign it in my office when I have the attorneys' agreement.

There it is. If you have any questions based on your review of this email or the attached documents, or to see if a case you are working on would be likely to benefit from the EPPM process, please let me know. In the meantime, please feel free to share the attached information with clients, colleagues, and members of your office staff.