

Consultation

Consultation is a process involving the coming together of one or more people and an expert who can provide information, perspective, and ideas about how to address and/or solve a problem. It is a process that is often used when people are trying to obtain information regarding treatment options for psychiatric problems, struggling with what needs to be done to address psychological and behavioral problems that a family member is experiencing, or need to know how to help their children and themselves as they navigate the legal system when they divorce.

The process of consultation begins with an initial meeting that generally lasts a couple of hours. The purpose of the meeting is for the client to provide information that will help the consultant develop an understanding of 1) the nature of the problem, 2) the likely sources of the problem, 3) how the problem has manifested itself, 4) the impact of the problem on the client and others, 5) attempted solutions to date, including what has worked and what hasn't, 6) what the client needs to solve the problem, and 7) the likely obstacles to resolving the problem successfully.

A decision is made at the end of the meeting regarding whether or not additional information is needed before developing a strategy to address the problem with which the client needs help. If it is determined that more information would be helpful, a decision is made regarding which information is to be collected and who will be responsible for collecting it.

If no additional information is needed, a second meeting is scheduled to develop a plan of action based on available information and further discussion between the client and the consultant. An outline of the initial steps that are likely to lead to a successful resolution of the problem is created and decisions are made regarding the steps that need to be taken first to solve the problem.

An action plan evolves over time, which means that the initial plan of action is just that. As the client takes steps in an effort to address the problem, he or she will encounter additional information that will allow him or her to improve upon the approach that is used to solve the problem.

The client's taking steps may also provide a different perspective regarding the problem, the sources of the problem, what is needed to resolve the problem, and how to get past the obstacles that interfere with a successful outcome.

Sometimes the "problem" is primarily a need for information regarding how to look at and address situations that arise in a person's life or the life of a family. For example, it is often the case that divorcing parents encounter a number of issues pertaining to their children with which they have had no experience. In the case of a divorce, this might involve the development of a parenting plan that is based on a

child's developmental age. Or it might involve how one goes about telling a child about the divorce, or how to help him or her grieve the inevitable losses, or how to work effectively as a co-parent with a divorcing spouse.

Additionally, consultation in the context of divorce can be used to address:

- Parenting issues
- Conflict resolution
- Child development
- The psychological impact of divorce
- Involvement in the legal process
- The process of grieving
- The need for mental health intervention
- Participation in court-ordered evaluations
- Exchanges of the children
- Other issues specific to individual families

Consultation can involve both parents simultaneously as long as they are not in a state of high conflict, or separately if the level of conflict between the parents is too great.

Consultation that involves only one parent is kept confidential unless the parent elects to provide a written release allowing the dissemination of information, or the consultant is required to testify in court. As a means of protecting a client's confidentiality, the consultant may be asked to serve as the attorney's consultant instead of the client's.

Consultation may also be provided to lawyers at their request without the involvement of a client. Such consultation might include a review of the report of an expert witness, advice regarding how to better manage his or her relationship with a client, a private psychiatric evaluation of the client, and/or a discussion of psychological issues pertinent to a given case.

I consult with attorneys who have cases in the areas of criminal, domestic relations, personal injury, employment, and medical (psychiatric) malpractice.

Finally, I consult with mental health professionals who are involved as evaluators in very difficult legal cases or who are treating people with problems that intersect with the legal system.