

CONSIDERED MEDIATION HANDBOOK

Family, Divorce & Parenting Coordination
Mediation and Arbitration

www.ConsideredMediation.com
contact@consideredmediation.com

© 2026 Considered Mediation

www.consideredmediation.com

(403) 718-9866

Quick start

Which process could help?

Begin with the task you need help with. This comparison is an orientation, not a suitability assessment. Read the relevant chapters and ask about the actual terms before committing.

Process	Typical purpose	Who decides	Main limitation
Facilitative mediation	Explore options and try to agree on family or separation issues.	Participants choose whether to agree.	The mediator does not impose a settlement. Suitability and informed participation matter.
Parenting coordination	Address recurring problems implementing an existing parenting arrangement.	Parents may agree; a coordinator decides only where lawfully authorized.	The law and mandate limit the role. It is not a general power to rewrite parenting arrangements.
Family arbitration	Obtain a decision on specified issues submitted for determination.	An arbitrator decides under the applicable law and agreement.	Legal requirements, cost and review limits matter. Obtain advice before committing.

Mediation may end without agreement. Parenting coordination depends on its mandate. Arbitration can produce a decision you oppose. Read the terms and obtain advice before committing.

Quick start

Before your first appointment

1 Describe the issue briefly

Write two or three sentences identifying the practical issue, the province or territory involved and any important date. You do not need to send your entire history.

2 Ask about a safe intake route

Confirm how to discuss safety concerns privately, how you can be contacted and whether separate intake is offered. Raise access, language or support needs early.

3 Gather the starting documents

Locate current orders or agreements and list relevant records you have or still need. Ask what the provider wants and how to send it securely.

4 Plan for independent advice

Identify questions for your own lawyer before, during and after the process. Limited-scope assistance may help with a particular question or document.

5 Confirm the service and next step

Ask about suitability, fees, availability, required preparation and who contacts whom. Do not assume an enquiry pauses a court deadline.

Your first action: complete Worksheet 1 with only the information needed for an initial enquiry. Keep sensitive documents for the agreed intake route.

Before you begin

A family dispute can make an ordinary decision feel enormous. You may be working out where the children will spend Christmas, how to exchange financial information, or whether to agree to a process that allows someone else to make a binding decision. You may be doing this while working, caring for children and adjusting to a separation.

This handbook helps you understand the process before making commitments within it. It explains facilitative mediation, parenting coordination and family arbitration, including their benefits, drawbacks and possible uses. It then takes you through preparation, participation and follow-through. You do not need legal training or confidence in public speaking to begin asking useful questions.

The main audience is adults in Canada dealing with separation, divorce or parenting disagreements. Alberta receives particular attention, with selected Ontario and British Columbia examples. Provincial examples do not establish the rules elsewhere. This is a participant guide, not a professional training manual or a complete statement of Canadian family law.

Success does not always mean a signed agreement. It can mean reaching a workable arrangement, identifying a missing document, resolving one issue, or recognizing that a different process is needed. A rushed agreement that you do not understand is not the aim.

Read the parts you need now

Start with the two quick-start pages. Use the contents to go directly to a chapter. Each chapter ends with three key points

and one practical next step. You can return to the fuller explanation when you need it.

For a first mediation, read Chapters 4 to 9. For parenting and financial questions, continue with Chapters 10 and 11.

Chapter 12 addresses Christmas, holidays and time-sensitive schedules. Chapter 13 explains the different kinds of written outcomes.

For recurring problems with an existing parenting arrangement, read Chapters 14 to 16. If arbitration or mediation-arbitration has been proposed, read Chapters 17 to 20 before committing. Chapter 23 helps you find reliable information, and Chapter 24 offers optional AI exercises.

All named family scenarios are fictional teaching examples. Their details and outcomes are not predictions. The worksheets are original preparation tools, not prescribed forms, professional screening instruments or documents ready for signature.

You may print or photocopy the workbook pages for your own preparation. Leave a question blank if answering it would expose sensitive information or if you need professional help to understand it. You do not have to finish this handbook before seeking help with a safety concern or urgent deadline.

Important information for readers

This handbook provides general educational information. It is not legal advice or a substitute for advice from a qualified lawyer licensed to practise in the relevant jurisdiction. It does not provide medical, psychological, psychiatric, therapeutic, financial or tax advice. Consult an appropriately qualified professional for those needs.

Reading, downloading or using the handbook, worksheets, examples or AI prompts does not itself create a solicitor-client, lawyer-client, mediator-client, therapist-client or other professional relationship. It does not create solicitor-client privilege. Confirm the professional relationship and an appropriate confidential intake process before sending sensitive material.

Errors and omissions are possible. No assurance is given that the material is complete, current or suitable for a particular situation. Laws, court rules, guidance and research change. Decisions may be reversed, overruled, distinguished or not followed, and statutory amendments may affect their relevance. Verify important information against current primary sources.

The discussion of behaviour and relationships does not provide a diagnosis, treatment, parenting-capacity assessment or individualized safety assessment. Examples cannot establish another person's motives, determine a child's best interests or predict a court decision. No legal, health, financial or personal outcome is guaranteed.

Worksheets and sample wording are preparation aids. They require judgment, adaptation and appropriate professional review. Obtain independent legal advice before making important legal decisions, signing an agreement or preparing

a court filing. Ask about limited-scope assistance if you need help with one task. Advice may be useful before, during and after mediation.

Do not let reading or preparation delay urgent assistance or a legal deadline. If someone is in immediate danger, contact local emergency services. Nothing in this notice excludes rights or responsibilities that applicable law does not allow to be excluded.

Optional AI exercises

The AI prompts are suggestions, not instructions you must follow. Adapt or skip them. They offer starting points for organizing information and preparing questions, not personalized legal or professional advice. AI can invent facts and authorities. Check every useful response against reliable sources and protect confidential and identifying information. Chapter 24 explains how to use the exercises and provides alternatives without AI.

Using the sources

The source register identifies official material used for the legal signposts, with source dates and access limitations. No reported court decision is relied on as authority in this handbook. Chapter 23 explains how to research and check cases; it is not a completed case-law audit. A link to an official source is a place to begin checking, not an endorsement of a result in your circumstances.

© 2026 Considered Mediation. You may download this handbook and print its worksheets for personal preparation.

Contents

Select a chapter title to move directly to it. Page numbers refer to this edition.

1 What a useful resolution can look like.....	10
2 Mediation arbitration parenting coordination or another route.....	14
3 Choosing the professional and understanding the fees....	18
4 The first enquiry and separate initial intakes.....	22
5 Safety and suitability screening.....	26
6 Information documents and financial disclosure.....	31
7 Preparing for remote participation.....	35
8 What happens in facilitative mediation.....	39
9 Working with a lawyer or participating without one.....	44
10 Parenting discussions that focus on everyday life.....	48
11 Financial and separation issues.....	53
12 Christmas holidays and urgent scheduling questions.....	58
13 From discussion to a clear written outcome.....	62
14 What parenting coordination may help with.....	66

<u>15 Understand the mandate before you begin</u>	70
<u>16 Making ongoing parenting work manageable</u>	74
<u>17 Before you agree to arbitration</u>	77
<u>18 Preparing information and evidence</u>	81
<u>19 The hearing and remote participation</u>	85
<u>20 After the award</u>	89
<u>21 When the process stalls or becomes difficult</u>	92
<u>22 Carrying out the next steps</u>	95
<u>23 Finding reliable information and independent help</u>	98
<u>24 Put this into practice with guided AI prompts</u>	102
<u>Preparation workbook</u>	110
<u>Glossary</u>	124
<u>Sources and resource register</u>	130
<u>About Considered Mediation</u>	135

Part I Understand your choices

Chapter 1

What a useful resolution can look like

You may arrive at a first conversation with one large wish: to have this over with. That is understandable. It is also difficult to turn into an agenda. A mediator can help you discuss a parenting schedule, but cannot promise that grief, anger or distrust will disappear when the schedule is written down.

Begin by separating the different things you want. Practical arrangements concern what happens next week: school pickups, housing payments or the exchange of documents. Legal questions concern rights, responsibilities and the effect of an agreement or decision. Emotional concerns may include disappointment, fear or a wish for acknowledgment. These concerns can overlap without being interchangeable.

Suppose your main complaint is that the other parent never listens. The practical issue might be that messages about school events go unanswered. The legal issue might concern who has authority to make a particular decision. The emotional issue might be feeling dismissed. A useful discussion can recognize all three while giving each an appropriate place. It need not pretend that a communication rule repairs the entire relationship.

Define progress in observable terms

A goal such as better communication becomes more useful when you describe what would change. Perhaps school notices would reach both parents, a reply would arrive before registration closes, and a child would no longer be asked to

carry messages. Those are matters you can examine together.

Write down the concern, its practical effect and the question you need answered. For example: “We have not decided how to handle the school break. I cannot confirm childcare. What information and decisions do we need by the booking date?” This gives the professional something concrete to help organize.

You can also identify questions that are not ready for a decision. If neither of you has current pension information, final financial terms may be premature. If there is uncertainty about an order, a lawyer may need to explain it before you negotiate a change. Preparation includes recognizing these limits.

Two broad routes

An agreement-seeking process asks whether the participants can reach terms they are prepared to accept. Facilitative mediation belongs here. The mediator structures the conversation, clarifies questions and helps examine options. The mediator acting in that role does not impose a settlement. [S1]

An adjudicative process asks someone with lawful authority to decide disputed issues. A court hearing and binding arbitration fall into this broad category. You can present your position and evidence, but the decision is no longer yours alone. The scope of that authority and the available review rights matter.

The routes can overlap. A court case may settle. An arbitration may narrow to a single issue after other matters are agreed. A mediation-arbitration process may move from

discussion to a decision, depending on its governing law and agreement. Choosing a decision-making process is not evidence that you have failed at cooperation.

A fictional example of partial progress

Leah and Daniel disagree about property and support. Their immediate difficulty is the coming school break. Neither wants the holiday discussion used as pressure to settle finances. They tell the mediator that the proposed agenda is limited to the children's schedule, subject to the screening and legal advice that their situation requires.

The discussion identifies a previously overlooked problem: a proposed exchange falls during Daniel's work shift. They explore different times and arrange to obtain advice on a short written proposal. The financial questions remain unresolved.

This is partial progress. It has a clear boundary and a practical purpose. It does not mean either person accepted the other's position on money. The status of the proposal and its relationship to any existing order still need to be understood before it is used.

Agreement is not the only useful outcome

A session may reveal that the relevant information is missing, that one participant needs legal advice or that the process is unsuitable. Ending or pausing in those circumstances can prevent an uninformed commitment. A professional should not treat a settlement statistic as more important than the quality of participation.

You may disagree with an offer after understanding it fully. You may also change your view when you receive reliable information. Neither response needs to be dramatized. The purpose is to make a considered decision within a process you understand.

For your own preparation, choose one matter you hope to improve, one question that requires advice and one limit that needs to be discussed privately. Worksheet 3 gives you space to do that. Keep the goals realistic enough that you would recognize progress if it occurred.

Three things to remember

- Define progress as something you could recognize in everyday life.
- Separate practical questions from legal and emotional concerns.
- A partial agreement, useful pause or appropriate referral may be progress.

Your next step: Use Worksheet 3 to identify one issue, one question for advice and one realistic improvement.

Chapter 2

Mediation arbitration parenting coordination or another route

The name of a service tells you less than its actual terms. Before booking, ask who makes decisions, what you are committing to and what happens if the process does not resolve the problem. A pleasant introductory call does not answer those questions by itself.

Facilitative mediation

In facilitative mediation, the professional helps the participants have a structured discussion. The work may involve creating an agenda, clarifying concerns, examining information and developing possible arrangements. The participants decide whether to agree. The mediator's impartial role differs from the role of a lawyer advising one participant.

This approach may suit people who can participate meaningfully, have or can obtain the necessary information and want help discussing options. It can be useful even when communication is strained. Suitability still requires an individual assessment. Courtesy during an introductory call does not establish freedom from pressure, and disagreement alone does not establish unsuitability.

Potential benefits include a choice of professional, a focused agenda, scheduling flexibility and less public discussion than a court proceeding. Private mediation may allow a specific issue to be addressed promptly. Availability, preparation, disclosure and legal advice affect timing. Privacy has legal and practical limits. No honest provider can guarantee a

quick settlement, complete secrecy or lower total cost in every case.

Its limitations follow from its purpose. A mediator cannot compel agreement merely because a proposal appears sensible. If essential information is withheld or a binding ruling is needed, another route may be necessary. Repeated sessions without a clear purpose can add cost.

Lawyer-assisted negotiation and collaborative law

Negotiation can occur directly, through lawyers or with other agreed assistance. Lawyers may exchange proposals while advising their own clients. This can be useful when participants prefer not to negotiate directly or need advice closely integrated with the discussion.

Collaborative family law usually involves a defined participation agreement and a team approach. Ask particularly what happens to the lawyers' involvement if the collaborative process ends without agreement. Do not assume that a provider's use of the word collaborative means you have entered that formal process. Justice Canada's introductory guide describes these options. [S1]

Parenting coordination

Parenting coordination commonly addresses recurring difficulties in implementing an existing parenting arrangement. It may combine education, problem-solving and, where legally authorized, determinations within a restricted mandate. It can involve an ongoing professional relationship and ongoing fees.

It is not a general power to redesign a child's life. Before using it, establish the existing agreement or order, the

precise mandate, how a determination can be made and how it may be reviewed. Chapters 14 to 16 explain those questions. The law and professional requirements differ across jurisdictions. [S8, S9]

Arbitration and mediation-arbitration

An arbitrator hears and decides the issues properly submitted to arbitration. A family arbitration award can have serious legal consequences. The process may offer more choice over scheduling and procedure than court, but it can also require extensive preparation, legal representation, expert evidence and payment of the decision-maker's fees.

Mediation-arbitration combines agreement-seeking and decision-making in a defined way. Sometimes the same person performs both roles. That arrangement raises questions about private information, impartiality and the transition between roles. Do not assume you can simply walk away from the arbitration stage because mediation has become uncomfortable. Get advice before committing. [S10-S12]

Court and other assistance

A court may be needed for urgent protection, enforceable orders, a divorce or an issue outside a private professional's authority. Court involvement does not rule out settlement efforts when they are appropriate. Other needs may call for counselling, child-focused support, financial expertise or an interpreter. Mediation does not replace those services.

Some court steps require attendance at an information program or participation in dispute resolution. That is different from requiring agreement. Under section 7.3 of the

Divorce Act, parties to a proceeding must try family dispute resolution to the extent appropriate. The wording includes that qualification. Local requirements and exemptions still need to be checked. [S2]

Compare the commitment

For each option, write down the decision-maker, the issues covered, the expected work, the cost structure and the exit or review route. Then ask what would happen if there were no agreement next month. This question often reveals a practical difference that a general description misses.

You do not need to choose a process because it sounds more cooperative or sophisticated. Choose with qualified advice about your situation, including safety, urgency, information and legal authority. The most useful process is the one suited to the actual task.

Three things to remember

- In facilitative mediation, the participants decide whether to agree.
- Parenting coordination has a defined implementation role and limited authority.
- Arbitration involves a decision under the applicable law and agreement.

Your next step: Compare who decides, what is covered, the costs and the exit or review route before choosing.

Chapter 3

Choosing the professional and understanding the fees

Choosing a professional is partly a question of fit and partly a question of verification. You are entitled to ask about training, experience, professional status and the proposed work. A responsible answer should help you understand the service without pressuring you to book it.

Read credentials carefully

An educational certificate confirms a particular course of study. A professional designation may involve additional experience, assessment and continuing obligations. Membership in an organization may provide standards and a complaint process, or may simply indicate participation. A court roster has its own entry conditions. These descriptions are not interchangeable.

Ask which qualifications relate to the service you are considering. General dispute-resolution training does not establish family-violence screening expertise. A family mediation certificate does not by itself establish authority to make parenting coordination determinations or family arbitration awards. Ask where a designation can be verified and what current professional rules apply.

There is no single Canada-wide credential label that answers every question about every mediation service. British Columbia, for example, has statutory and regulatory provisions concerning family dispute-resolution professionals and parenting coordinators. Ontario has specific family arbitration requirements. These examples are reasons to

check local rules, not a list of provinces where anyone may practise without conditions. [S8-S12]

Ask about the work itself

Find out how the provider handles separate intake, safety and suitability screening, legal advice and financial disclosure. Ask whether joint meetings, separate rooms or shuttle discussions are available when appropriate. For remote work, ask how private contact, interruptions and document sharing are managed.

Discuss experience with the kind of issue you bring. An urgent holiday scheduling matter differs from a complex business valuation. A provider should be able to explain when another specialist is needed. Also ask about conflicts of interest, professional liability coverage, record handling and the process for raising a concern about the service.

A prior connection with a participant does not automatically answer a conflict question. It does need to be disclosed and assessed. Give the provider the identifying information required for a proper conflict check through the method they request. Avoid sending your entire account of the dispute before that check is complete.

Understand the complete price

An hourly rate is only one part of the cost. Ask whether you will be charged for separate intake, preparation, reading documents, correspondence, meetings, drafting summaries and administrative work. Ask about deposits, taxes, minimum booking periods, cancellation charges and unused funds.

For a fixed fee, identify the included work and what triggers additional fees. A single session package may not include legal review or a formal separation agreement. If each participant pays a portion, understand both the billing arrangement and what happens if one person does not pay. Do not infer that the person paying more acquires greater influence over the professional.

Consider a fictional quote at \$300 per hour, shared equally. Four hours of meetings plus three hours of preparation and written work would total \$2,100 before tax and other agreed charges. Each half would be \$1,050. These are illustrative numbers, not market rates or a quote from Considered Mediation. The lesson is to budget for the complete task, including each person's independent advice.

Ask for an estimate and a point at which the provider will check back before incurring more expense. An estimate may change when new issues arise. A useful budget discussion identifies what would cause that change.

Private and publicly supported options

Private mediation does not have a universal minimum income requirement. Ability to pay and a provider's agreed fees are practical considerations, not a national eligibility threshold. Publicly funded, court-connected or subsidized programs can have different financial and subject-matter conditions.

Check the current Alberta family mediation page or the relevant provincial service directory for eligibility and availability. Ontario also provides information about court-connected mediation and family justice services. Do not assume an advertised public program will cover every issue or that private service will necessarily be faster. Ask about

actual appointment dates and the work required before a session. [S13-S16]

Make a short comparison

After each enquiry, record the provider's answers in the same categories: role, relevant qualifications, intake and screening, fees, anticipated steps and legal-advice arrangements. This is more useful than choosing from a polished biography alone.

You may need time to compare. Before paying or signing, read the engagement terms and ask about anything you do not understand. Keep a copy of the terms and fee information. A clear beginning makes later questions about the process easier to address.

Three things to remember

- Check qualifications for the specific role and jurisdiction.
- Ask about all charges, including preparation and correspondence.
- Compare actual availability and intake requirements, not promises of speed.

Your next step: Obtain the proposed engagement and fee terms in writing, then list anything you need explained.

Part II Prepare safely and thoughtfully

Chapter 4

The first enquiry and separate initial intakes

Your first message does not need to prove your case. Its purpose is to find out whether the service may fit, how intake works and what to do next. Keeping that message short can also reduce the amount of sensitive information sent before appropriate arrangements are in place.

Give the broad issue, the province or territory involved, any important timing concern and a safe way to respond. For example: “I am looking for information about family mediation concerning parenting arrangements in Alberta. There is a school-break issue to discuss. Please reply by email with your intake process, availability and fees.” Adapt this wording if the account is shared or it would be unsafe to receive a reply there.

Enquiry is not engagement

An enquiry, a screening appointment and an agreement to provide services are different stages. A provider may need a conflict check, separate conversations and documents before deciding whether to proceed. Ask when fees begin and whether any appointment is an information call, a paid intake or a mediation session.

Do not assume that sending a detailed account creates confidentiality, privilege or a professional relationship. Ask what information is needed now, what should wait and how it should be transferred. Names needed for a conflict check should be supplied through the requested route. Financial records, children's identifying information and allegations do

not belong in a casual public contact form unless the provider has specifically established an appropriate process for receiving them.

What a separate intake can cover

The intake gives the professional a chance to understand the proposed issues and whether the process can work appropriately. Topics may include existing orders and agreements, pending proceedings, important dates, the history of attempts to resolve matters, access to advice and any participation barriers.

You may be asked what you hope to achieve, what concerns you about taking part and what information is still missing. The professional may also discuss how the other person will be contacted. If contact itself creates a concern, explain that privately before assuming an invitation will be sent.

Separate intake is not a competition to persuade the mediator that your account is correct. Nor should you assume that everything said privately will remain undisclosed in every circumstance. Ask about confidentiality and its limits, what the professional may need to report, and how information from separate meetings will be handled. The answers depend on the role, agreement and applicable law.

Prepare enough to be useful

Create a brief chronology of major events and a list of current documents. Identify the latest order or agreement rather than bringing several versions without labels. Note upcoming hearings, filing dates, school deadlines and travel plans. Tell the professional which dates are confirmed and which you merely expect.

If a lawyer is involved, provide the relevant contact details with appropriate permission and explain the scope of the lawyer's work. If you do not have a lawyer, say so. Ask about opportunities to obtain independent advice before substantive commitments are made.

You can prepare a one-page issue list. “Parenting” is broad; “exchange time on school closure days” is more concrete. “Money” can become “documents needed before discussing support.” Keep the list open to correction. The other participant may identify an issue that you had not considered.

When you do not know the answer

It is acceptable to say that you cannot recall a date, do not understand an order or need to locate a document. Distinguish memory from certainty. If you later discover an error, correct it promptly and explain what changed.

You can also say that a topic is difficult to discuss or that you need a break, an interpreter or a different way to provide information. Intake should identify participation needs early enough to consider them. A disability, language difference or need for support does not automatically make someone unable to participate.

Before the intake ends, confirm the next step. Is another document required? Will there be a suitability decision? Who contacts whom? What should you avoid sending until a secure route is arranged? Worksheet 1 helps you plan the enquiry; Worksheet 2 is for your own private intake preparation. Neither replaces the professional's questions.

Three things to remember

- A brief enquiry establishes the issue and asks about the service.
- Separate intake allows private discussion of participation needs.
- An enquiry is not the same as retaining a professional.

Your next step: Complete Worksheet 1. Keep detailed records and sensitive concerns for the appropriate intake channel.

Chapter 5

Safety and suitability screening

A person may sound calm and still be afraid to disagree. Someone may participate from a separate home and still be monitored. A professional cannot assess suitability simply by asking whether both people want to mediate.

Safety and suitability screening examines whether the proposed process can support meaningful participation. It may consider family violence, coercive behaviour, significant power differences, communication barriers and other circumstances affecting a person's ability to understand, speak and decide. It is not a criminal-background check or a questionnaire that awards a passing score.

Justice Canada's HELP Toolkit emphasizes identifying and responding to family violence in family law practice. It is directed to legal advisers and is not a substitute for professional training. It supports the need for careful enquiry rather than assumptions based on how a person presents. [S4]

What concerns may be relevant

Threats and physical violence matter, but they are not the only concerns worth raising. Monitoring of messages, control of money, threats involving children or immigration status, stalking, destruction of property and fear of what will happen after a session can affect participation. Under the Divorce Act, family violence includes conduct beyond physical assault. [S3]

You do not need to choose a diagnostic label for another person. Describe conduct, its context and its effect on your

ability to participate. “I cannot use that email account privately” tells the professional something immediately useful. “I am worried about what happens if I reject an offer” is a concern that deserves attention even if you have no police report.

Also identify existing protection orders, criminal conditions, child-protection involvement or restrictions on contact. Do not assume that an invitation to mediate changes those restrictions. A lawyer should advise on their effect, and the professional needs accurate information before arranging contact.

Separate conversations and safe contact

Screening usually requires an opportunity to speak without the other participant listening or influencing the answers. Before a call, ask how privacy will be checked and what to do if it is not safe to continue. Agree on a way to request another time or end the conversation without being required to explain in front of someone else.

If you believe a device, account or location is monitored, obtain appropriate assistance about safe communication. Deleting messages or changing account settings can have consequences in some circumstances. This book cannot tell you which step is safe for you. A qualified local support service can help assess the situation.

Tell the professional how and when they may contact you, whether voicemail is appropriate and whether routine reminders could create a problem. These details should be revisited if circumstances change. A safe contact method at intake may not remain safe throughout the process.

Participation needs deserve attention

Fatigue, pain, medication effects, language barriers, hearing or vision differences, unfamiliar technology and acute distress can make a meeting harder to manage. They do not all have the same implications. Discuss the specific difficulty and the support that may help.

An interpreter may be needed for meaningful participation. A family member may not be an appropriate substitute, particularly when confidentiality, influence or accuracy is a concern. Ask who selects and pays for an interpreter and how the interpreter's role is explained.

A support person may help someone remain oriented, but the role should be agreed in advance. Clarify whether that person may speak, take notes, receive documents or be present during private discussions. Do not quietly add someone off camera to a remote meeting.

Process changes have limits

Possible responses include shorter meetings, breaks, separate rooms, shuttle discussions, lawyer participation, different communication arrangements, postponement or referral. Sometimes the appropriate response is not to proceed. The availability of a technical adjustment does not establish that the process is suitable.

For example, shuttle mediation may reduce direct contact during the session. It does not necessarily address pressure after the session, surveillance, financial dependence or fear about refusing an offer. Remote participation removes travel and shared waiting rooms but may introduce privacy problems at home.

Screening should continue as relevant information emerges. Tell the professional if an arrangement stops working, a new threat occurs or you no longer feel able to make decisions freely. You should not have to pretend that an earlier suitability decision settles the question permanently.

Confidentiality needs a specific explanation

Ask what is confidential, who may receive information and what exceptions apply. Mandatory reporting, serious safety concerns, legal compulsion and the nature of the professional role may affect the answer. There is no single sentence about confidentiality that accurately covers every province and every process.

Do not assume a professional can promise never to act on information about a child at risk. Equally, do not assume every difficult disclosure must automatically be relayed to the other participant. Ask the professional to explain the applicable obligations and, where possible, the steps they would take before sharing information.

A fictional example of stopping appropriately

Amira asks about mediation because she wants a faster parenting arrangement. During a private intake, she says she fears retaliation if she rejects a proposal. The professional does not treat her wish for speed as sufficient consent to proceed. Further assessment is needed, and the planned joint meeting does not go ahead.

Amira is directed toward appropriate local legal and support services. This example does not prescribe the exact referral or safety plan for another reader. It illustrates a sound boundary: enthusiasm for settlement should not replace assessment of whether participation is safe and meaningful.

Worksheet 2 offers topics you may wish to raise privately. It contains no risk score and does not decide whether you should mediate. If there is immediate danger, use local emergency assistance. If an urgent legal response may be needed, seek legal advice rather than waiting for the next routine appointment.

Three things to remember

- Willingness to mediate does not establish safe, meaningful participation.
- Raise concerns about fear, monitoring or pressure privately.
- Suitability may change; process adjustments cannot solve every risk.

Your next step: Ask the professional how to communicate privately and how concerns will be reassessed. Seek urgent help when needed.

Chapter 6

Information documents and financial disclosure

An agreement can look clear while resting on uncertain information. Before discussing what is fair, establish what is known, what is disputed and what is missing. Financial disclosure is especially important, but the same discipline helps with parenting schedules and other practical matters.

Disclosure means providing relevant information through the required or agreed process. It is more than exchanging whichever documents support your preferred outcome. Legal obligations depend on the issue, proceeding and jurisdiction. A mediator's document request does not replace a statutory obligation or court direction.

Start with an inventory

Separate your material into current orders and agreements, procedural documents, parenting information, financial records and relevant communications. Use clear file names and dates. Keep the original files, including complete messages and attachments. Work from copies when making notes.

For each item, record who issued it, the period it covers and whether it is complete. A bank balance without a date can mislead. A tax assessment is different from a tax return. A spreadsheet you created is different from the records used to create it.

Your inventory should also list gaps. Write “requested” or “not yet located” rather than inserting a guessed number. If an estimate is useful for a preliminary discussion, label it as an estimate and identify how it will be checked.

Financial information depends on the issue

Income discussions may involve tax returns, assessments, employment earnings, benefits and business records.

Property discussions may require account statements, debts, title information, pensions, valuations and evidence relevant to the dates that matter legally. The correct dates and treatment require advice.

Section 21 of the Federal Child Support Guidelines provides an example of detailed income disclosure requirements in proceedings where it applies. It addresses tax records and different income sources, including employment, self-employment and controlled corporations. It is not a universal checklist for every mediation or every family-law question. [S5]

If income has changed, do not assume last year's return answers the current question. Explain the change and gather supporting records. If a company pays some personal expenses, simply naming your salary may not explain the financial picture. A qualified adviser can identify what additional information is needed.

Make requests understandable

A useful request identifies the document, the relevant period and why it is connected to an issue. "Please provide the current statement for the pension identified in your financial summary" is easier to act on than "Send everything you have ever received." The legal scope of required disclosure may be broader than your initial request, so obtain advice where necessary.

Proportionate organization does not justify hiding inconvenient information. Nor does a dispute give you

permission to access another person's accounts unlawfully. Ask your lawyer about obtaining records properly, protecting third-party information and handling material you are uncertain you should possess.

When information conflicts

Suppose one person lists a loan at \$18,000 and the latest statement shows \$21,400. Identify the difference without deciding immediately that someone lied. The figures may come from different dates, include different charges or contain an error. Ask what explains the discrepancy and what evidence resolves it.

If the explanation remains disputed, record that. Do not erase uncertainty by averaging two figures. A mediator can help organize the question; an accountant, valuator, lawyer or decision-maker may be needed to resolve it.

A fictional example of slowing down

Owen proposes keeping a business while paying Priya a fixed amount for her interest in other property. Priya has seen a short balance sheet but not the records underlying it. They had hoped to finish in one session.

The mediator helps identify the unanswered questions. Priya obtains advice about disclosure and valuation. The parties agree on information-gathering steps rather than a final payment figure. The extra work is not automatically wasted time. It addresses a gap that could materially affect an informed decision.

Exchange documents thoughtfully

Ask how files should be transferred, who will receive them, how corrections are marked and how long they are retained. Avoid sending large collections to everyone on an email thread without checking recipients and purpose. Keep an index so that participants can refer to the same document and page.

Worksheet 4 records documents held, missing or requiring clarification. It is a preparation aid, not a declaration that disclosure is legally complete. Before final terms, ask your own lawyer whether the information is sufficient for the decision you are being asked to make.

Three things to remember

- Identify what is known, disputed and missing before discussing terms.
- Organize documents around the questions they help answer.
- An orderly file does not establish that legal disclosure is complete.

Your next step: Use Worksheet 4 to list the missing information and ask your lawyer what is needed for an informed decision.

Chapter 7

Preparing for remote participation

Remote participation can remove travel and make scheduling easier. It still requires a workable place to speak, access to documents and a plan for problems. Treat those arrangements as part of preparation, not as something to improvise when the meeting begins.

Test the ordinary things

Check the meeting link, software requirements, camera, microphone and connection before the scheduled time. Use a device on which you can read documents comfortably. A phone may be adequate for a short intake but difficult for comparing several pages while watching a discussion.

Charge the device and have power available. Keep the professional's agreed backup contact method where you can find it if the screen freezes. Confirm the time zone. A calendar invitation can display a different local time for someone in another province.

Ask for accessible documents or other accommodations early. You may need larger text, captions, an interpreter, a telephone option or more time to review written material. Automated captions can make errors, particularly with names and numbers, so clarify anything important that seems wrong.

Privacy is a practical arrangement

Choose a location where you can participate without being overheard or interrupted, if that is safely available. Headphones may help you hear privately, but they do not

prevent someone nearby from hearing your answers. A blurred background does not establish that no one else is present.

Discuss who may be in the room or available nearby. Support people, interpreters and lawyers should have defined roles. Children should not be expected to sit within hearing of adult negotiations. Plan childcare and breaks in a way that fits your circumstances.

If a private location is not available, tell the professional before the session. There may be another appropriate arrangement, or the session may need to be changed. Do not feel obliged to disclose sensitive information from a location you have already identified as unsuitable.

Agree on records and tools

Ask about recording, screenshots, chat messages, automated transcripts and AI meeting assistants. A device can record even when the meeting platform displays no recording symbol. The rules should be explained, and all participants should understand what is authorized.

Do not assume a transcript is accurate or that an AI summary is an agreed record. If any authorized record is created, clarify who receives it, how errors are corrected and how it is stored. The same questions apply to a summary written by a person.

When sharing a screen, close unrelated files and notifications. Share the intended document or window rather than an entire desktop where possible. This is a practical privacy measure, not a guarantee of platform security. Follow the provider's actual procedures and raise concerns about them before sending sensitive information.

Plan for a lost connection

Agree on what happens if someone disconnects. Will the discussion pause? Who calls whom? How will you know whether any substantive conversation occurred while you were absent? In an arbitration, these questions can also affect procedural fairness and should be addressed in the directions.

If you cannot hear or read something important, say so immediately. Reconstructing an unclear decision after the meeting is harder than stopping briefly to repeat it. You can say, “I missed the last part. Please pause so I can understand the proposal.”

Make space to think

Keep your issue list and a few blank pages within reach. Take notes about questions and next steps rather than trying to transcribe every sentence. Confirm whether note-taking has any agreed restrictions. Ask for breaks before fatigue makes it difficult to follow the discussion.

If your lawyer is assisting remotely, agree on how you will communicate privately and whether you need a separate consultation before responding to a proposal. Do not assume a group chat is private. Check the recipient and channel every time.

After the session, put away sensitive papers and close the meeting and document-sharing tools. Record the next appointment and any advice or documents required. Worksheet 7 provides a practical checklist, but the professional's specific arrangements remain the ones to confirm.

Three things to remember

- Test access to the meeting and documents before the session.
- Confirm privacy, permitted attendees and rules about recording.
- Agree on breaks, private lawyer contact and lost-connection arrangements.

Your next step: Complete the remote-session checklist in Worksheet 7 and resolve access problems before the appointment.

Part III Family and divorce mediation

Chapter 8

What happens in facilitative mediation

You do not need an opening speech that sounds like a courtroom argument. In facilitative mediation, the first task is usually to establish a workable discussion. You should understand the roles, the issues to be addressed and the arrangements for participation before the conversation moves into proposals.

Processes vary, and a professional may adapt the sequence to the participants. The description here is a practical orientation, not a promise that every session follows the same script.

Establish the working arrangements

At the beginning, confirm who is attending and in what role. The mediator may review the agreement to mediate, confidentiality limits, fees, document arrangements and how private meetings will work. This is a time to ask questions, even if some of the material was discussed during intake.

If lawyers are attending, clarify how they and their clients will participate. If one participant has a lawyer and the other does not, make the distinction explicit. The represented person's lawyer advises that client; the mediator does not become the unrepresented person's lawyer.

Also identify the proposed endpoint for the session. You might aim to explore options, prepare a provisional summary or identify terms for independent legal review. Do not

assume that attending means you will sign final documents before leaving.

Describe the concern and its effect

A helpful explanation tells the mediator what has happened, why it matters and what needs attention. “Three exchanges this month started later than expected, and I missed work” is more useful than a general accusation about character. If the dates or reasons are disputed, say so.

This does not mean stripping the situation of emotion. You can explain that uncertainty is exhausting or that a topic is upsetting. The aim is to connect the concern to a question that can be worked on, while preserving the option to discuss safety concerns privately.

The mediator may summarize what each person has said. Correct an inaccurate summary. Acknowledging that you heard the other person's concern does not require you to accept every fact or agree with their proposed solution.

Build an agenda

An agenda breaks a large dispute into questions. A parenting discussion may include school-day exchanges, activity registration, communication about illness and the holiday schedule. A financial discussion may begin with the documents needed to assess support rather than the amount itself.

The order matters. Some questions depend on information that is not yet available. Other questions may be urgent but narrow enough to discuss separately. Ask whether a proposed interim discussion could affect the broader matter and obtain legal advice where necessary.

Move from positions to workable options

A position is the answer someone initially wants. A concern explains what that answer is intended to address. If one parent wants every exchange at school, the concern may be avoiding direct contact or fitting work hours. Understanding that concern can reveal other options, although safety concerns should not be treated merely as bargaining preferences.

The mediator may ask the participants to consider several possibilities before evaluating them. Exploring an option is not the same as accepting it. Say when a suggestion is tentative or dependent on advice. Ask how proposals will be recorded so that a draft idea is not mistaken for a commitment.

An option needs practical checking. Who performs the task? Is the necessary transport available? Does the school actually open at the proposed time? Can the payment be made from the account identified? A plan that sounds balanced can still fail on a simple detail.

Separate meetings and shuttle discussions

The mediator may meet with participants separately or carry proposals between them. Before a separate discussion, understand what information may be shared. Some processes treat private information differently from others. Ask rather than relying on the word caucus as a complete explanation.

If a summary carried between rooms seems inaccurate, correct it before responding. You can ask for a proposal in writing or for time to consult your lawyer. Separate meetings do not remove the need for ongoing suitability assessment.

A fictional session in practice

Rosa and Michael begin with a dispute about a child's music lessons. Rosa wants the activity to continue; Michael says the schedule is unmanageable. The mediator helps identify three distinct questions: the child's existing commitment, transportation and the information needed before discussing costs.

They discover that neither has checked whether a different lesson time is available. They agree to obtain that information and exchange the current invoice. They explore a short-term transport arrangement for legal review where needed. They do not decide every future activity during that meeting.

The value lies in identifying the actual obstacle and assigning useful next steps. It would be misleading to describe the session as a complete financial or parenting settlement.

Close with a clear record

Before finishing, confirm what is agreed, what is only proposed, what awaits advice and what remains unresolved. Identify the person responsible for each next step and any relevant date. Ask who prepares the written summary and how corrections should be raised.

You may leave with no agreement. You should still understand whether the process continues, pauses or ends, and whether other legal steps require attention. Chapter 13 explains the status of written outcomes. The decision whether to accept terms remains a serious decision, not a test of whether you participated politely enough.

Three things to remember

- A workable agenda begins with concrete issues and their practical effects.
- Exploring an option does not mean agreeing to it.
- Finish by separating agreed steps, proposals and unresolved matters.

Your next step: Prepare a short description of one concern and the information needed to discuss it. Confirm the next step before leaving.

Chapter 9

Working with a lawyer or participating without one

Legal advice and mediation serve different purposes. A mediator helps manage the discussion impartially. Your own lawyer advises you about your position, options and the consequences of a proposed commitment. Using both can help you participate with a clearer understanding of what is at stake.

You may have a lawyer for the whole matter, for a defined task or for advice between sessions. One or both participants may have their own lawyer assist. The arrangement should be discussed with the mediator in advance rather than left to surprise on the day.

Before the process

Ask your lawyer to explain the existing legal position, any deadlines and the proposed dispute-resolution agreement. Discuss what information you need before evaluating offers, what issues can appropriately be addressed and whether any urgent action is required.

Bring the actual documents. A lawyer cannot reliably assess an order from your recollection of it. Provide the proposed engagement or arbitration agreement as well as the family documents. A process commitment can matter as much as the settlement terms discussed later.

You can prepare a focused question list: What do I need to understand before agreeing to this process? What information is missing? Which decisions would be difficult to reverse? What should happen if the process does not resolve

the issue? Ask for explanations in language you can use during the discussion.

During the process

A lawyer may attend, be available for consultation or advise between sessions. Confirm what is realistic. Do not assume a lawyer who reviewed one document will be on call during a full day of mediation unless that has been arranged.

When a new proposal raises a legal question, you can ask for time to obtain advice. For example: “I understand the practical suggestion, but I need advice about how it affects the existing order before responding.” That is a participation step, not a refusal to engage.

If your lawyer attends, discuss how you want to work together. You may wish to explain the practical concern yourself while the lawyer addresses legal implications. The mediator should understand the arrangement, including how a private consultation will occur remotely.

When only one person has a lawyer

The other participant's lawyer does not become your adviser by explaining a proposal or supplying a draft. A professional manner does not remove that lawyer's responsibility to their own client. You need your own advice to understand how the proposal affects you.

The mediator's impartiality also does not fill that gap. The mediator may provide general process information within their role, but should not be treated as your personal advocate. Ask how the process will allow you to understand proposals and obtain independent assistance.

After the discussion

Independent legal review is particularly important before signing or relying on proposed terms. A document may contain consequences that are not obvious from the meeting, including releases, future review provisions, enforcement steps, tax implications or effects on existing orders.

Explain to your lawyer what information was exchanged and what remains uncertain. Give them the actual current draft and identify changes from earlier versions. Do not ask for a signature certificate while withholding the background needed for meaningful advice.

Justice Canada's parenting guidance encourages legal advice before finalizing a parenting arrangement. The broader practical lesson applies throughout preparation: advice is most useful when there is still time to act on it. [S17]

Limited scope legal assistance

If full representation is not available or affordable, ask about a defined task. Examples include reviewing a proposed agreement, advising on disclosure, preparing questions for a hearing or assessing an arbitration clause. Availability and professional requirements vary.

Agree on the scope in writing. Identify what the lawyer will do, what they will not do, the fee arrangement and who is responsible for filing, service, attendance and deadlines. A document review does not necessarily include negotiating with the other party or appearing in court.

The Law Society of Alberta's lawyer directory includes search options relevant to limited-scope services. Other jurisdictions have their own directories and referral routes. A listing helps

you locate a professional; it does not guarantee availability or suitability. [S18]

Make the advice usable

At the end of a consultation, summarize your understanding and ask the lawyer to correct it. Write down what requires action, what remains uncertain and the next date that matters. If you cannot afford the proposed scope, ask whether a narrower task or another service is available.

Worksheet 5 organizes questions before, during and after the process. It is especially useful when appointments are short. Being self-represented does not mean you must remain uninformed or make every important decision without assistance.

Three things to remember

- The mediator is impartial; your own lawyer advises you.
- One participant's lawyer does not advise the other participant.
- Limited-scope help can focus on a particular question or document.

Your next step: Use Worksheet 5 to identify your most important questions and confirm who is responsible for deadlines.

Chapter 10

Parenting discussions that focus on everyday life

A parenting arrangement has to work on ordinary Tuesdays as well as on special occasions. Begin with the child's actual routines, needs and relationships. A broad statement that both parents matter does not tell anyone who collects a child when school closes early.

Under the Divorce Act, the child's best interests govern parenting and contact orders, with primary consideration given to physical, emotional and psychological safety, security and well-being. The Act identifies relevant factors, including the child's needs, history of care, relationships, views where appropriate and family violence. It does not establish a universal rule that every child must spend equal time in each home. [S3]

Map the ordinary week

Describe school or childcare times, travel, work commitments, activities, medical needs and existing care arrangements. Include the less visible work: preparing equipment, responding to school notices, arranging appointments and ensuring medication is available where needed.

Separate current facts from preferences. “My shift ends at six” is information to verify. “I would prefer Friday exchanges” is a proposal. A practical plan needs both the information and the reasons for the proposal, without treating every preference as a fixed constraint.

Do not assume that a schedule successful for one family will work for another. Distance between homes, a child's

particular needs, transport, siblings and the ability to manage transitions can change the practical picture. Obtain qualified advice for developmental, health or safety questions rather than selecting a schedule from a slogan about age or fairness.

Clarify decision-making topics

Parenting time and decision-making responsibility are related but different questions. Discuss the decisions that actually arise: education, health, activities, cultural or religious participation and access to information. The governing law and existing documents determine the legal position.

For a recurring decision, ask how information will be provided, how much time a response requires and what happens if there is no agreement. A general promise to consult may be too vague to help when a school form is due. Conversely, an inflexible rule may be difficult to apply when circumstances change. A lawyer can help translate workable intentions into appropriate terms.

Exchanges and practical responsibilities

An exchange plan should identify the relevant time and place, transport responsibilities and how delays are communicated. Discuss school closure days, illness and circumstances in which the usual location is unavailable. Where safety is an issue, arrangements need individual assessment rather than a generic recommendation for direct contact.

Consider possessions the child needs in each home: school materials, glasses, medication, clothing and activity equipment. The point is to reduce avoidable disruption, not

to create another system of accusations. If a shared checklist helps, keep it focused on the child's needs.

Communication that serves a purpose

Decide which channel is used for routine information and which for genuinely urgent matters. Discuss reasonable response expectations and what counts as urgent. A communication application can organize messages, but it cannot make a relationship safe or cooperative by itself.

A useful message identifies an event, the practical question and a response date where one is needed. For example: “The school has moved the appointment to Thursday at 3 p.m. Can you attend, or should we ask for another time? Please let me know before I reply tomorrow.” This wording does not determine legal authority; it illustrates a clear request.

Avoid asking children to carry negotiations, obtain evidence or report on the other home. Adult disagreements should be handled through appropriate adult channels. If a child raises a concern, listen without coaching an account or promising an outcome you cannot control.

Children have views without carrying the decision

The way a child's views are obtained should fit the circumstances and the applicable process. It may require a qualified professional. Do not repeatedly ask a child to choose a parent, write a persuasive statement or confirm an adult's interpretation.

You can distinguish an observation from an inference. “She said she was tired after the drive” is different from “She wants to change homes.” Bring the actual concern to an appropriate professional without deciding in advance what it

proves. The child's best interests cannot be assessed from a single preference or an adult's account alone.

Fixed arrangements and agreed flexibility

A clear default can reduce repeated negotiation, while a method for agreed changes can accommodate life. Discuss how a proposed change is made, how agreement is recorded and what happens if there is no agreement. Do not assume a casual variation permanently changes an order or creates a new legal entitlement.

A review date can identify when to reconsider practical arrangements. It should not leave everyone unsure whether existing responsibilities continue in the meantime. Ask for advice about the legal effect of review provisions and any proposed changes.

Justice Canada's Parenting Plan Checklist and Parenting Plan Tool provide useful topic prompts. They are starting points for thinking and advice, not a determination that particular terms fit your family. [S19, S20]

Worksheet 6 begins with routine and holiday questions. Complete the factual details first. The most useful parenting agenda often starts with what a child needs to happen reliably, then asks what arrangements could accomplish that.

Three things to remember

- Begin with the child's actual routines and needs.
- Clarify exchanges, decisions and communication in practical terms.
- A reliable baseline can coexist with properly agreed flexibility.

Your next step: Map an ordinary school week in Worksheet 6, including transport, care arrangements and unresolved questions.

Chapter 11

Financial and separation issues

Financial discussions become more manageable when you separate three questions: what the records show, what the law may require and what an arrangement would mean in practice. A number on a worksheet can help with the first or third question without answering the second.

Begin with disclosure. Then identify the advice needed to understand support, property, debt and tax consequences. A proposal that appears affordable today may carry a future cost or depend on an assumption that has not been checked.

Build a usable financial picture

List sources of income, regular expenses, assets and debts. Record the date and source for each figure. Distinguish gross income from take-home pay, recurring expenses from occasional ones and an account balance from an estimate of value.

Household budgets serve a practical purpose. They show when money arrives and which obligations fall due. They do not determine legal entitlement by themselves. Likewise, a person having paid a bill does not necessarily resolve how it should ultimately be treated between the parties.

Keep shared obligations visible. A separation agreement between two people may not release either from a lender's contract. Before proposing that one person "takes over" a debt or mortgage, obtain advice and confirmation from the relevant institution about what is actually required.

Child support questions

Child support may involve the applicable guidelines, income determination, the parenting arrangement, the number and circumstances of children, and special or extraordinary expenses. Identify which rules apply before relying on a calculator. A table lookup is not a complete legal assessment.

The federal tables were updated effective October 1, 2025. Justice Canada's 2025 lookup and earlier tables should be selected according to the period being considered. A current figure should not simply be applied to every historical period. Income and other legal questions may still need advice. [S6]

For an expense such as childcare or an activity, gather the actual cost, relevant receipts, available subsidies or benefits and the information needed to discuss its treatment. Do not assume every expense a parent considers valuable automatically has the same legal status.

Where a child's circumstances or the parents' income have changed, ask what disclosure and formal steps are needed. Do not treat a private spreadsheet as permission to change an existing obligation unilaterally.

Spousal support questions

Spousal support involves legal entitlement as well as amount and duration. The Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines assist with calculations but are advisory, not legislation. They do not independently decide whether a person is entitled to support. Their use requires attention to the correct formula, inputs, exceptions and circumstances. [S7]

A gross-income illustration can be particularly misleading if the situation requires tax and benefit calculations. Ask what

the calculation includes, what it leaves out and which assumptions need verification. If someone supplies a range, ask what supports a proposed point within that range and how the duration question has been assessed.

Also consider the form and timing of a proposal. Monthly payments, lump sums and arrangements involving property can have different consequences. Obtain legal and tax advice before treating two nominally similar amounts as equivalent.

Property pensions and businesses

Property rules differ between jurisdictions and can differ according to relationship status and other circumstances. Do not import a friend's result from another province. Establish the relevant dates, ownership records, debts and any claimed exclusions or special treatment with your lawyer.

A home has more than an estimated sale price. Consider secured debt, transaction costs, the feasibility of refinancing and the timing of any sale or transfer. A pension statement may not provide the family-law value needed. A business balance sheet may not establish market value or available income.

When expert help is needed, clarify the expert's question, assumptions, access to records and fee. Ask whether the parties will obtain separate advice or agree on a joint expert process. Do not assume a joint appointment removes the need for each person to understand and question the result appropriately.

Test the cash flow without confusing it with the law

In a fictional example, Morgan estimates monthly take-home income at \$4,900 and current household outgoings at

\$4,200. A proposal adds a \$950 monthly obligation. The resulting arithmetic shows a \$250 gap before unexpected expenses. It does not establish whether the obligation is legally appropriate or how the gap should be addressed.

The useful next questions concern accuracy and options. Are the income and expense figures current? Is an annual expense missing? Does the proposal assume refinancing that has not been approved? Is qualified advice needed about tax treatment or support? A budget makes those questions visible without pretending to answer them all.

Interim arrangements need boundaries

Sometimes immediate payments or housing arrangements must be addressed before final settlement. Identify the purpose, duration, information assumptions and proposed review point. Ask a lawyer how the interim arrangement would relate to existing orders, later adjustments and unresolved claims.

Avoid language that unintentionally makes a temporary step appear final. Conversely, calling something temporary does not necessarily determine its legal effect. Have the actual wording reviewed.

Use calculators as preparation tools

The DivorceNexus support calculators are a connected educational resource. Begin at divorcenexus.com/calculators and read the coverage notes. The current collection includes child support tools and selected spousal-support illustrations. It does not provide a completed with-child spousal-support tax-and-benefit engine. The combined tool is not a substitute for obtaining the appropriate spousal calculation. [R1]

Record the tool, version or date, input assumptions and output. Check the applicable official tables and obtain advice before relying on a result. Do not enter unnecessary identifying information merely to explore a hypothetical calculation.

Before considering final financial terms, use Worksheet 4 to identify missing records and Worksheet 5 to organize advice questions. The aim is to understand both the proposal and the information on which it rests.

Three things to remember

- Separate financial records, legal rights and practical cash flow.
- Support, property, pensions and business interests may require different advice.
- Calculator results depend on coverage and assumptions.

Your next step: List the financial questions, missing records and specialist advice needed before discussing final figures.

Chapter 12

Christmas holidays and urgent scheduling questions

Holiday disagreements often become urgent because several decisions depend on one another. A parent cannot book travel without dates, a relative needs an answer, childcare closes and work schedules change. A focused mediation may help organize those questions, but urgency does not remove the need for screening, information and advice.

Begin with the current order or agreement. Identify what it already says about holidays, ordinary parenting time, travel and changes. If the wording is unclear or circumstances have changed, obtain advice. Do not assume that a holiday preference overrides an existing obligation.

Put the real dates on one calendar

Use the school's actual last day and return date, not a general description such as the Christmas week. Add work shifts, childcare closures, meaningful family or cultural events and proposed travel. Include the year and time zone when relevant.

Christmas Eve, Christmas morning, Christmas dinner and the remaining school break can be separate questions. Other families may prioritize different religious, cultural or family observances. Ask what the event means in practical terms before assuming the same arrangement suits everyone.

For a proposed division, identify the start and end time, exchange location, transport responsibility and which ordinary schedule resumes afterward. Avoid leaving “after lunch” or “early evening” undefined when those phrases are already a source of disagreement.

Explore options without assigning a universal best one

Possible discussion options include alternating a particular celebration by year, dividing the school break into blocks, keeping an established event with one side of the family, or planning a separate celebration on another day. These are options to examine, not recommendations for every child.

Consider the actual experience of the proposed schedule. How many transitions does it create? What travel is involved? Where will medication, clothing or equipment be? Is a late-night exchange realistic? A numerical division of hours may overlook a difficult sequence of journeys.

In a fictional example, Elise and Noah both begin by asking for Christmas Day. They identify that Elise's extended family gathering is on the afternoon of December 24, while Noah's is on December 25. That information creates an option to explore. It does not require either parent to accept it or establish that a same-day exchange is suitable for their child.

Travel needs its own questions

Discuss destinations, dates, transport, accommodation, contact information, travel documents and any required consent. Check existing restrictions and obtain legal advice about the proposed trip. Do not book non-refundable travel on the assumption that agreement will follow.

The Government of Canada recommends a consent letter when a child travels abroad without every parent or guardian who should provide consent. Its guidance distinguishes that recommendation from a general Canadian legal requirement, while noting that officials or carriers may ask for a letter. Destination rules and the family's orders can add requirements. [S21]

An informal holiday agreement does not resolve a relocation question or an abduction concern. Those issues require prompt, specific legal assistance. If someone fears that a child will not be returned, that concern should not be reduced to an ordinary dispute over itinerary details.

Plan for disruption

Ask what happens if weather closes a road, a flight is cancelled or a child becomes ill. Identify how the information is shared and what immediate practical decisions need to be made. Avoid attempting to pre-write a solution to every imaginable event.

A contingency can describe a process: notify the other person through the agreed channel, provide the relevant factual information, seek any required advice and confirm the revised practical arrangements. Its legal wording should be reviewed where it changes responsibilities under existing documents.

Work backwards from the real deadline

Identify the latest date by which a decision is actually needed, then allow time for separate intake, screening, disclosure, a session and legal review. Ask the provider about available appointments rather than relying on general claims about speed.

If the schedule cannot be resolved in time, ask your lawyer about the available court or other steps. A mediation enquiry does not reserve a court date, suspend a filing deadline or guarantee emergency service. Explain genuine timing concerns promptly.

Worksheet 6 has space for the calendar, responsibilities and unresolved questions. Keep the year's final arrangement somewhere you can find it. When appropriate, review next year's plan well before the same pressure returns.

Three things to remember

- Check the existing arrangement before proposing holiday changes.
- Use exact dates, times, exchange locations and transport responsibilities.
- Leave time for screening, advice and a plan for disruption.

Your next step: Complete the holiday calendar companion in Worksheet 6 using the actual school calendar and proposed travel dates.

Chapter 13

From discussion to a clear written outcome

The end of a productive discussion can feel like the end of the matter. Often it is the beginning of the documentation stage. Before relying on a written record, understand what the document is and what still has to happen.

A mediator's summary, a memorandum of understanding, proposed minutes, a separation agreement and a court order can have different purposes and legal effects. The title alone does not determine enforceability. The wording, intention, circumstances and applicable law matter.

Identify the status of every point

Separate agreed procedural steps from proposed substantive terms. “Each person will obtain pension information” differs from “The pension will be divided in this way.” Mark points awaiting documents, advice or further discussion. Do not let a clean layout remove those qualifications.

If the document is intended only as a proposal for review, that intention should be clear. Ask a lawyer about appropriate wording and the legal effect of any signatures or communications. Do not assume that avoiding a formal signature always means nothing can be binding.

Review practical completeness

For each proposed obligation, ask who must do what, by when and through which method. Check names, dates, amounts and the document version. Identify what happens before a dependent step can occur. A transfer may depend

on lender approval; a schedule may depend on a confirmed school date.

Review the terms as if you were trying to use them six months later. Would someone unfamiliar with the discussion understand the ordinary arrangement? Are exceptions clear? Does a review clause explain what continues while a review is taking place?

This practical review complements legal advice. It does not replace advice about fairness, rights, disclosure, formalities, enforceability or the effect on existing proceedings and orders.

Allow meaningful legal review

Give each person reasonable opportunity to obtain independent advice before signing or relying on terms. Send the complete current draft and relevant background to the lawyer, including unresolved questions. If the document changes after advice is given, ask whether the change needs further review.

Avoid treating legal review as an administrative stamp. The lawyer may identify a problem that requires further discussion. That does not mean the mediation was pointless. It may mean the parties found a practical direction that now needs legally workable wording.

Justice Canada's parenting guidance specifically directs readers toward legal advice before finalizing their arrangement. Local requirements still determine how a particular agreement or order should be prepared. [S17]

Partial agreements and unresolved matters

If only part of the dispute is resolved, identify the boundary carefully. Record which issues remain open and obtain advice about whether settling one issue affects another. A financial package can involve connected terms that should not be separated casually.

If nothing is agreed, confirm any useful procedural next steps without presenting them as a settlement. These might include a document exchange, an advice appointment or a decision about whether further mediation is appropriate.

Keep a reliable final version

Use clear version dates. Preserve earlier drafts where appropriate, but identify the document intended for signature and the one ultimately signed or issued. Ask how formal changes will be handled later and who retains the records.

Worksheet 10 provides a proposed-terms review and implementation planner. It deliberately contains no signature blocks or ready-made legal clauses. Its purpose is to help you ask better questions before a document begins to govern important parts of your life.

Three things to remember

- Identify whether each point is a proposal, agreed step or final obligation.
- Check who does what, when and subject to which conditions.
- Give legal review enough time to address the complete current draft.

Your next step: Use Worksheet 10 to mark unresolved terms and questions for your lawyer before signing or relying on the document.

Part IV Parenting coordination

Chapter 14

What parenting coordination may help with

Some parents have an agreement or order but continue to encounter the same practical disputes. Exchanges run late, activity requests become arguments and the document does not seem to answer each new situation. Parenting coordination may be one option to discuss with a lawyer and a qualified provider.

The starting point is usually an existing parenting arrangement and a defined role for the coordinator. The work may include education, clarification, problem-solving and, where lawfully authorized, decisions on specified implementation questions. It is important to know which of those functions is being proposed.

Understand the practical purpose

A coordinator may help establish a workable method for raising routine issues, exchanging information and addressing recurring disagreements. The goal is not to require emotional reconciliation. Parents may remain dissatisfied with one another while improving how a particular arrangement is implemented.

Possible topics include practical exchanges, activity logistics or the interpretation of a scheduling detail. Whether a particular issue falls within the coordinator's authority depends on the law and the actual mandate. The fact that a disagreement concerns a child does not automatically place it within that authority.

British Columbia provides a clear statutory example. Its Family Law Act permits parenting coordination for implementing specified parenting agreements or orders, with a parenting coordination agreement or order in place. The Act and regulation also address qualifications and the scope of determinations. These are BC rules, not a national template. [S8, S9]

Potential benefits

An ongoing professional may become familiar with the governing arrangement and recurring practical difficulties. A defined route for bringing issues forward may reduce repetitive argument about how to begin each discussion. Where valid decision-making authority exists, a narrow unresolved question may be determined without starting the process from the beginning each time.

Those potential benefits depend on the mandate, professional competence, participation and cost. Familiarity does not eliminate the need to listen fairly or check new information. Speed does not justify deciding an issue outside the authorized role.

Drawbacks and burdens

Parenting coordination can create an ongoing expense. Small disputes may generate correspondence, document review and decisions that each carry a charge. A poorly understood mandate can itself become another source of conflict.

The process may also be more intrusive than someone expected. Ask what information can be requested, who may be contacted and what records are created. If the coordinator

can make determinations, understand their effect before agreeing to that authority.

It may be unsuitable where the central problem is an unresolved major parenting question, the existing arrangement needs legal change, or safety and participation concerns cannot appropriately be addressed. A coordinator is not a substitute for emergency protection, therapy, a parenting-capacity assessment or comprehensive legal representation.

Who might find it useful

It may be worth exploring when there is an established parenting framework, recurring implementation difficulties, a legally appropriate mandate and a realistic ability to participate and fund the process. That is a starting point for assessment, not a self-qualification checklist.

Parents do not need to become friends for an implementation process to help. They do need a process that addresses the circumstances, including power and safety concerns. A wish to stop receiving hostile messages does not by itself show that ongoing parenting coordination is the right remedy.

A fictional example

Gavin and Mira have a parenting order with defined school-week time. They repeatedly disagree about the location for exchanges when school is closed. Before retaining a coordinator, they seek advice about whether the proposed issue is an implementation detail within a lawful mandate or a change requiring another route.

If the matter properly fits, the coordinator can address it using the agreed process. If it does not fit, the title parenting coordinator cannot create the missing authority. That boundary protects the purpose of the service as well as the participants.

Read the next chapter before signing any parenting coordination agreement. Worksheet 8 asks you to identify the document being implemented, the proposed powers and the review route.

Three things to remember

- Parenting coordination commonly addresses recurring implementation problems.
- Its usefulness depends on a lawful mandate, suitability and manageable cost.
- Major parenting changes or unresolved safety concerns may require another route.

Your next step: Identify the existing arrangement and two recurring problems, then ask whether each fits the proposed service.

Chapter 15

Understand the mandate before you begin

The mandate defines the work a parenting coordinator may do. It may come from an agreement, an order and applicable legislation. Read those sources together with your lawyer. A brochure describing helpful parenting support is not a substitute for the actual terms.

Identify the source of authority

Find the current parenting agreement or order and the document appointing or retaining the coordinator. Confirm that you have the complete versions, including schedules and later changes. Ask how an inconsistency between documents will be handled.

Establish whether participation is voluntary under the proposed agreement, required by an order or governed by another arrangement. Ask what ending the engagement involves. Do not assume that every participant can terminate every type of parenting coordination unilaterally.

Separate assistance from determination

A coordinator may first try to help the parents reach agreement. A determination is a decision made under an authorized power. Ask when the process moves from one function to the other and how you will know that a decision is being considered.

Before a determination, understand how the issue is stated, what information may be supplied, whether each person sees and can respond to relevant material, and whether reasons will be given. The exact procedural requirements come from

the governing law and mandate. You should not have to guess whether an informal email is a proposal or an operative decision.

Define the boundaries

Ask for a plain explanation of included and excluded issues. If the mandate lists routine scheduling, does the question you want answered actually fit? What happens if one parent requests a significant change to parenting time or a move to another city?

In BC, the regulation permits specified determinations but excludes matters such as changes to guardianship, substantial changes to parenting time and relocation. That example illustrates why implementation authority must not be confused with a general power to rewrite arrangements. [S9]

Other jurisdictions require their own analysis. Ontario's rules on secondary family arbitration can be relevant to arrangements involving future implementation disputes. The label parenting coordination alone does not determine which legal requirements apply. Obtain advice on the proposed structure. [S12]

Check qualifications and accountability

Ask which current qualifications authorize this person to perform the proposed role where your matter belongs. Verify professional standing and any applicable designation. Training, relevant practice experience, screening competence and insurance deserve separate questions.

Find out how service complaints are handled and distinguish that route from challenging a determination. A complaint to

an organization may not change a decision or preserve a legal deadline. Your lawyer should identify the proper route for each concern.

Understand communication and cost

Confirm who may initiate an issue, whether the other parent must receive the request, the expected response period and what counts as urgent. Ask about contact with teachers, health professionals or children. Do not assume those contacts are automatically authorized.

Review charges for reading messages, telephone calls, meetings and written decisions. Ask how deposits are handled and whether the coordinator checks in when costs reach an agreed point. A low meeting frequency does not necessarily mean low total fees if extensive correspondence is being reviewed.

Know the review route

Ask what legal effect a determination has, when it must be followed and what review or challenge is available. BC's Act, for example, provides a route to change or set aside a determination on specified grounds. It does not follow that every province has the same route. [S8]

Get advice before signing and promptly when a disputed determination arrives. Write down the relevant time limits with your lawyer rather than relying on a general book. Worksheet 8 helps organize the questions; it is not a parenting coordination agreement.

Three things to remember

- Read the appointment document, underlying arrangement and applicable law together.
- Distinguish help reaching agreement from an authorized determination.
- Confirm scope, fees, communication rules and review rights before beginning.

Your next step: Use Worksheet 8 to record what the coordinator may decide, what is excluded and the questions for your lawyer.

Chapter 16

Making ongoing parenting work manageable

Once a parenting coordination process begins, the way issues are presented can affect how much work is required to understand them. A focused request helps the professional identify the question within the mandate. It does not guarantee agreement or a favourable decision.

Present one identifiable issue

Start with the relevant provision of the existing arrangement. Describe the event, the practical difficulty and the question you are asking the coordinator to address. Identify supporting documents without attaching an entire archive unless it is requested or required.

For example: “The order identifies the school as the Friday exchange point. School is closed on November 6. We have not agreed on the alternative location. I am asking for help addressing the location for that date within the mandate.” This is a fictional preparation example, not wording to use without checking the actual order and process.

Avoid embedding several unrelated disputes in the same request. A disagreement about one exchange can become harder to resolve when the message also asks the professional to revisit support, holidays and the history of the relationship.

Record facts without building a grievance diary

A brief issue log can record the date, relevant provision, what occurred, any attempted resolution and the response required. Distinguish observation from interpretation. “Pickup

occurred at 5:35” is different from “The delay was intended to punish me.”

Keep necessary records, including information your lawyer advises you to preserve. The purpose of a preparation log is to help locate relevant events, not to encourage monitoring every action in the other household. Do not involve children in collecting evidence or verifying your interpretation.

Use the communication procedure

Follow the agreed route for requests and responses. If the procedure requires copying the other participant, do not privately send substantive material to influence a decision. Safety disclosures may need a different confidential channel, which should be discussed with the professional.

If a reply requires information you do not yet have, identify that fact and ask about the appropriate next step. Do not assume silence is an agreed extension. If a request appears outside the mandate, raise that concern through the process and obtain advice rather than simply ignoring it.

A fictional late-exchange problem

Sonia and Eric have repeatedly argued about delays at a weekend exchange. Sonia records three dates and actual arrival times. Eric supplies information about a road closure on one of those dates. The coordinator first identifies what is agreed and what is disputed, then considers the question within the authorized role.

The useful discussion may concern notice of delay, realistic travel time or clarification of a location. It should not leap from three incidents to a clinical label or a sweeping

conclusion about parenting capacity. Those are different questions requiring different authority and expertise.

Review whether the process is helping

Periodically examine the practical results and cost. Have recurring questions become clearer? Are requests staying within scope? Is the communication procedure being followed? Are safety or participation concerns emerging? Bring specific concerns to the professional and seek independent advice where needed.

An ongoing process should not continue merely because it has already consumed money. Equally, dissatisfaction with one result does not establish a right to disregard the process. Understand the terms for review, change or termination before acting.

Keep determinations and agreed changes organized with the governing documents. Make sure you understand which document controls the next practical step. If the underlying arrangement may need a major legal change, obtain advice about the appropriate route instead of trying to stretch the coordinator's mandate to cover it.

Three things to remember

- Present one issue with the relevant provision and factual record.
- Use the agreed communication procedure and separate private safety channels.
- Review practical results and costs without disregarding existing obligations.

Your next step: Complete the issue companion in Worksheet 8 for one current question, including the outcome or clarification you seek.

Part V Family arbitration

Chapter 17

Before you agree to arbitration

Arbitration changes the nature of the task. You are asking a decision-maker to determine specified issues, rather than asking a mediator to help you decide whether to agree. That commitment deserves independent legal advice before you make it.

An arbitrator's authority comes from the applicable law and the agreement or other lawful basis for the appointment. The parties cannot necessarily give an arbitrator power over every issue they wish to resolve. For example, Ontario's official guidance distinguishes family issues an arbitrator may address from matters such as granting a divorce, which require court action. [S10]

Identify exactly what is being submitted

Read the proposed arbitration agreement with your lawyer. List the questions the arbitrator may decide and those excluded. A phrase such as “all family matters” may conceal uncertainty about the actual scope. Clarify any relationship to existing court proceedings and orders.

Ask what law governs the substantive dispute and what procedural law applies. Where participants live in different places, do not assume the location of an online meeting settles jurisdiction. Family relationships, property, orders and proceedings may connect the matter to more than one place.

Weigh the potential benefits

Arbitration may allow selection of a decision-maker with relevant experience, a procedure fitted to the issues and a more predictable hearing schedule. It can provide a decision when agreement cannot be reached. Private arrangements may reduce public exposure, although confidentiality and later court involvement require specific advice.

These benefits are possibilities, not guarantees. Availability, the number of issues, disclosure, expert evidence and procedural disputes affect time and cost. A private hearing is not automatically simple or inexpensive.

Understand the burdens

The participants may pay the arbitrator's fees, administrative costs, legal fees and expert expenses. Preparing evidence can take substantial work. Ask how costs may be allocated, including whether one party can be ordered to pay some of another's costs under the applicable arrangement and law.

The outcome may be one you would not have accepted in mediation. Review and appeal rights are legally defined and may be limited. Do not sign on the assumption that you can always have the entire case heard again by a judge if dissatisfied.

Once there is a valid commitment to arbitration, withdrawing may not be a matter of simply cancelling the next appointment. Discuss termination, challenges to authority and any effect on court proceedings with your lawyer at the outset.

Local safeguards matter

Ontario has specific family arbitration legislation and regulations addressing matters including written agreements, independent legal advice, screening and approved training. The Family Law Act also contains distinct provisions for secondary arbitration concerning future implementation disputes. Those distinctions are a reason to obtain advice on the actual agreement rather than applying a short general description mechanically. [S11, S12]

BC has its own family arbitration provisions and professional requirements. Alberta and other jurisdictions must be considered under their applicable law. This guide does not supply a Canada-wide authorization list or certify any provider's eligibility. [S8, S9]

Ask how safety and suitability will be assessed and revisited. Arbitration's decision-making role does not make family violence or power imbalances irrelevant. The professional should explain the applicable safeguards and how concerns may be raised.

Be particularly careful with mediation-arbitration

If the same professional may mediate and then arbitrate, ask what happens to information received privately during mediation. Can that information influence a later decision? How will the role change be announced? What consent, waiver or procedural arrangements are proposed, and are they valid under the governing law?

Different models handle these issues differently. Do not assume that a familiar, informal mediation discussion will continue on the same basis once adjudication begins. Get advice on the exact model and documents before disclosing

information in reliance on assumptions about the later process.

Questions to resolve before signing

You should understand the scope, professional qualifications, screening arrangements, disclosure duties, procedural framework, fees, confidentiality limits, decision format and review routes. You should also know how urgent issues and existing court deadlines will be managed.

Worksheet 9 helps organize those questions. It is not an arbitration agreement.

Three things to remember

- Arbitration is a commitment to a decision-making process.
- Understand the issues, safeguards, cost and available review routes.
- Mediation-arbitration needs particular clarity about roles and information.

Your next step: Take the proposed arbitration agreement and Worksheet 9 to your own lawyer before committing.

Chapter 18

Preparing information and evidence

An arbitrator needs a usable record on which to decide the submitted issues. Preparation begins by reading the procedural directions and identifying the questions for decision. A large volume of material does not compensate for an unclear issue.

Your lawyer, if retained, should explain which tasks they will handle and which remain yours. Confirm responsibility for document preparation, delivery, witnesses, expert reports and deadlines. Put the dates in a calendar with enough time to complete the work, not merely to remember that it is due.

Separate facts evidence and argument

A fact is something asserted to have occurred or to be true. Evidence is material offered to establish a fact, such as testimony or a document. Argument explains what conclusion or legal result you say should follow. Keeping those categories distinct helps the decision-maker follow your position.

For example, “The payment was received on March 8” is a factual assertion. A bank record may support it. “That payment satisfied the obligation” is a conclusion requiring the relevant terms and legal analysis. A confident statement is not a substitute for the supporting material.

Record uncertainty honestly. If you remember a conversation but not its exact words, do not manufacture a quotation. If a date is approximate, say so and explain the basis. Correct an error promptly through the appropriate process.

Build an issue map

For each question submitted to arbitration, identify the relevant facts, the available documents, possible witnesses, missing information and the legal questions for your lawyer. This helps distinguish essential preparation from material that is interesting but unrelated.

An issue map is for organization. It does not decide admissibility or weight. The applicable law, agreement and directions govern what may be presented and how the arbitrator considers it. Ask before assuming that informal procedure means there are no evidentiary rules.

Organize documents consistently

Use an index with an item number, document date, short description and page reference. Preserve originals and provide readable copies in the required format. Ensure the same numbering appears in the documents and your references.

A fictional index might identify item 1 as the current order, item 2 as a dated earnings statement and item 3 as a complete email exchange about the disputed event. The descriptions should identify the documents without embedding argument in every title.

Do not alter messages, crop away important context or create a misleading compilation. If an excerpt is permitted for convenience, identify it as an excerpt and preserve the full record. Ask your lawyer about privilege, settlement communications, confidential records and material involving third parties before including them.

Work with witnesses properly

Identify what each witness actually knows and how that information relates to an issue. A person who observed an event differs from someone who was told about it later. The process for witness statements, attendance and questions should be confirmed in advance.

Preparation should help a witness understand the process and locate relevant records. It should not supply invented memories or rehearse a misleading account. A witness should be able to say that they do not know or cannot remember.

Do not ask a child to prepare evidence, record the other parent or write a statement without appropriate professional and legal guidance. The way a child's information is obtained raises distinct issues that cannot be resolved by an adult's wish to strengthen a case.

Expert information needs a defined purpose

A business valuation, pension calculation or other expert report can be useful when a specialized question matters. Clarify the expert's qualifications, instructions, assumptions, records and required format. Ask about deadlines and the procedure for responding to or questioning expert evidence.

Do not treat an expert's conclusion as broader than the question they were asked. A financial calculation does not decide a parenting issue. A report based on incomplete records may need qualification or further work.

Prepare a realistic work plan

Work backwards from the hearing. Allow time for obtaining records, reviewing disclosure, arranging witnesses, receiving advice and correcting the document package. If something cannot be completed on time, raise the issue through the prescribed process promptly. Do not assume a private agreement with the other participant changes an arbitrator's directions.

Before the hearing, practise finding each key document quickly. You do not need to memorize a speech. You do need to know the issue, where the relevant information is and what question requires clarification. Worksheet 9 includes an evidence organizer and a place to record procedural dates.

Three things to remember

- Connect each document or witness to a submitted issue.
- Keep facts, evidence and argument distinct.
- Follow the procedural directions and organize realistic preparation dates.

Your next step: Create an issue-and-evidence index, then identify the next missing record or preparation task.

Chapter 19

The hearing and remote participation

A hearing can feel unfamiliar even after careful preparation. Ask in advance how it will proceed and what you will be expected to do. The sequence depends on the agreement, law and directions; this chapter describes common elements as orientation, not a mandatory script.

Clarify the sequence

There may be preliminary matters, opening explanations, evidence, questions, legal submissions and closing directions. Some matters are decided primarily through written material; others require oral testimony. Confirm the chosen procedure and how changes will be communicated.

Know when you may speak, how to raise a procedural issue and how documents are introduced. If you have a lawyer, agree on how you will communicate questions during the hearing. If you are self-represented, ask for a process explanation without assuming the arbitrator can advise you how to win your case.

Participate accurately

Listen to the question before answering. If you do not understand it, ask for clarification. If the answer requires context, explain that rather than guessing at a short answer that would mislead. Avoid exaggerating certainty to appear more persuasive.

Use the document references established for the hearing. Give others time to find the page. If a document appears

incomplete or unfamiliar, identify that concern through the process and ask for an opportunity to address it.

Do not communicate privately with the arbitrator about the merits unless the procedure specifically authorizes the communication and the applicable fairness requirements are met. Routine administrative contact and substantive evidence are different matters. Ask when uncertain.

Remote hearings require additional arrangements

Confirm identity checks, who may be present, permitted materials and how witnesses join. A witness may be required to wait separately or avoid hearing other testimony. The directions should make the applicable arrangements clear.

Do not coach a witness through messages, notes or off-camera signals. If you are giving evidence, ask before consulting a document, messaging someone or taking a break. Follow the directions about recording, transcription and access to exhibits.

Agree on a connection-failure procedure. If you lose sound or cannot see a shared document, raise the problem promptly. The record should not proceed on the false assumption that you heard material you missed. What remedy is appropriate depends on the circumstances and the arbitrator's directions.

Accessibility and breaks

Request accommodations early, including interpretation, accessible documents or a schedule that addresses a relevant limitation. Explain the functional need and ask how it can be managed within a fair process for everyone.

Breaks are also a practical part of sustained participation. If fatigue or distress affects comprehension, say so through the

appropriate channel. Do not quietly agree with something you have not understood because you are embarrassed to ask for repetition.

Settlement discussions during arbitration

The parties may wish to explore settlement while arbitration is underway. Ask how that discussion will be separated from evidence and decision-making, who will conduct it and what confidentiality rules apply. Do not assume that every offer can be sent to the arbitrator without consequence.

If an agreement is reached on some issues, clarify how it is documented and what remains for decision. Obtain advice about its legal effect. A pause for discussion does not necessarily suspend every procedural deadline.

Before the hearing closes

Confirm whether further material is permitted or required, any deadlines for submissions and how the award will be delivered. Ask about outstanding costs issues and the treatment of the hearing record.

Keep your notes organized. Record questions for your lawyer rather than sending an immediate argumentative message to the decision-maker after the hearing. The next stage is understanding and responding appropriately to the award, not continuing the hearing informally by email.

Three things to remember

- Confirm the hearing sequence and how documents will be used.
- Answer accurately and ask for clarification when needed.
- Remote attendance requires privacy, access and an agreed backup plan.

Your next step: Before the hearing closes, record any permitted further material, submission deadlines and award-delivery arrangements.

Chapter 20

After the award

When an award arrives, record when and how you received it. Keep the complete document, attachments and delivery message. Time limits may depend on receipt or another legally significant event. Obtain advice promptly rather than waiting until you have worked through every paragraph yourself.

Read for obligations and dates

Identify what the award requires, who must act and when. Distinguish the reasons explaining the decision from the operative terms. Note costs, interest, document requirements, payments and any further procedural steps.

Make a short list of questions. A typing error, an unclear term, disagreement with factual findings and concern about the arbitrator's authority are different issues. They may require different responses. Do not assume one informal request will address all of them.

Ask about the correct legal route

Depending on the governing law and circumstances, there may be procedures for correction, interpretation, appeal, setting aside or enforcement. The grounds, deadlines and required steps vary. This guide deliberately does not provide a single appeal period for all Canadian family arbitrations.

A challenge is not necessarily a new hearing at which you may simply present a better version of the case. Your lawyer should explain the legally available grounds and the record

needed. Dissatisfaction alone does not establish that the award can be reversed.

Also ask whether an application changes the obligation to comply or whether a separate stay is required. Do not assume that sending a complaint or requesting advice suspends the award. A professional complaint and a court challenge serve different purposes.

Organize implementation

For each required step, record the responsible person, date, supporting document and confirmation of completion. If a third party must act, identify the required form or process. An award concerning a financial transfer may still require administrative or court steps before it can be carried out.

If there is a genuine obstacle, such as a lender declining an anticipated transaction, obtain advice promptly. Do not quietly substitute a different arrangement and assume it has the same legal effect. Keep accurate records of efforts to comply and communications made through the proper route.

Manage the reaction without delaying advice

An unwelcome decision can be difficult to absorb. You can take time to consider your response while also protecting urgent legal steps. Ask a trusted support person to help with practical organization if appropriate, without circulating confidential material indiscriminately.

Avoid public posts or messages written in the first surge of frustration. They may create new problems without changing the award. Discuss legal questions with your lawyer and personal support needs with an appropriate person or professional.

Worksheet 9 includes an award follow-up record. Complete the receipt details first, then arrange advice on obligations and time-sensitive options. The award, governing law and qualified advice must guide the response; this book is a preparation aid.

Three things to remember

- Keep the complete award and a record of when it arrived.
- Obligations, corrections and challenges may involve different steps.
- Dissatisfaction alone does not identify an available legal remedy.

Your next step: Record receipt details in Worksheet 9 and promptly obtain advice on obligations and time-sensitive options.

Part VI Progress and next steps

Chapter 21

When the process stalls or becomes difficult

An unproductive session can leave you wondering whether to try harder, change the approach or stop. Begin by identifying what is preventing progress. Different obstacles need different responses, and persistence is not useful simply because time and money have already been invested.

Identify the obstacle precisely

If the disagreement concerns a fact, ask what information could clarify it. If it concerns the law, independent advice may be needed. If a proposal is impractical, examine the details. If participation is affected by fear or pressure, the professional needs to reassess suitability rather than offer another negotiation technique.

For example, arguing about a business value without the relevant records is an information problem. Disagreeing about the treatment of that value may be a legal question. Being afraid to request the records is a participation concern. These issues can coexist, but they should not be collapsed into a single claim that communication is poor.

Narrow the next task

A smaller agenda may help when too many questions are being addressed at once. Instead of trying to finish the entire separation agreement, the next meeting might identify disclosure gaps or examine one time-sensitive parenting issue. Obtain advice about whether separating issues could affect your position.

A useful pause has a purpose. Name the document, advice or change in arrangements needed before returning. Agree on who will obtain it and when the process will be reviewed. Avoid booking another long session solely in the hope that someone will feel differently by then.

Respond to pressure by slowing the decision

Pressure may appear as a demand for an immediate answer, a claim that advice is unnecessary or a suggestion that refusing an offer proves bad faith. Discuss the situation privately with the professional and your lawyer. The meaning and legal consequences of conduct depend on context, but you should understand a significant commitment before making it.

You can say, “I need time to understand this proposal and obtain advice before responding.” If saying that would itself create danger, tell an appropriate professional through a safe channel. Do not use sample negotiation wording as a personal safety plan.

Changing the format

Shorter sessions, written proposals, scheduled breaks or lawyer assistance may address some barriers. Other circumstances require referral, postponement or ending the process. A different format should respond to the identified problem, not merely create the appearance that something has changed.

If trust in the professional is affected, identify the concern clearly. Is it a misunderstanding, a possible conflict, unequal opportunity to participate or something else? Ask about the complaint or review process and obtain advice where

necessary. Do not assume that a service complaint changes a court or arbitration deadline.

Ending without agreement

Mediation may end without a settlement. Confirm the status of any partial or provisional terms, what records will be provided and whether any follow-up is expected. Ask your lawyer about the next legal steps and any obligations that continue.

Avoid making a final offer merely to justify the money already spent. The relevant question is whether the proposal is one you understand and are prepared to accept, with appropriate advice. Costs already incurred do not make an unsuitable agreement suitable.

The fictional families in this book illustrate several outcomes: a narrow holiday arrangement, a pause for financial information and a process that does not proceed after safety concerns emerge. None supplies a universal measure of success. The next responsible step depends on the obstacle you have actually identified.

Three things to remember

- Identify the obstacle before deciding whether to continue.
- Missing information, pressure and unsuitable process need different responses.
- Money already spent does not make an unsuitable proposal acceptable.

Your next step: Name the main obstacle and ask what specific change, advice or information would address it.

Chapter 22

Carrying out the next steps

A useful outcome can lose its value if nobody is sure what happens next. Whether you leave with an information plan, proposed terms, a signed agreement or an award, translate the next steps into an organized record while preserving the document's legal status.

Separate preparation from legal obligation

A mediation task list may ask someone to obtain an account statement. A signed agreement or award may require a payment or transfer. Keep those categories distinct. Do not mark a proposed term as binding merely because it appears in the same notes as an agreed administrative step.

For each action, record the responsible person, date, dependency and evidence of completion. “Contact the lender” is different from “Obtain written approval.” If the next step depends on approval, identify what happens if approval is unavailable and obtain advice before substituting a different plan.

Use a calendar and a document list

Enter confirmed deadlines and reminders separately. A reminder one week earlier is your organizational choice; the deadline comes from the relevant document or procedure. Record who verified a legal date and when. Ask your lawyer about uncertainty rather than guessing.

Store the current agreement, order or award where you can locate it. Keep supporting documents and subsequent changes clearly dated. A folder full of files named final can

create avoidable confusion. Use version dates and identify the executed or issued document explicitly.

Confirm completion proportionately

Where appropriate, send a short factual confirmation through the agreed channel. Identify the task completed and any attachment needed. Avoid using each administrative message to reopen the wider dispute.

If a required step has not occurred, establish the facts and obtain advice on the appropriate response. A missing payment confirmation, a late payment and a refusal to pay are not necessarily the same situation. Do not respond by withholding an unrelated obligation without legal advice.

Review changes through the correct route

Life changes. A work schedule, health need or housing arrangement may make an existing plan difficult. Identify the problem and ask how a change can be considered lawfully. An implementation difficulty does not automatically authorize a unilateral variation.

A review date can prompt a discussion, but its legal effect depends on the document. Find out whether the current terms continue and whether new disclosure is needed. If there is no agreement about change, ask what decision-making process is available.

Know when the task is finished

Once the required steps are complete, retain the records and any future review dates. You do not need to keep negotiating matters that have already been properly resolved merely to maintain contact with the process. If a new issue arises, identify it as new and consider the appropriate route.

Worksheet 10 provides an implementation planner. Use it to support the governing documents, not to rewrite them. A small, accurate record of responsibilities is usually more useful than a long narrative about everything that happened during the dispute.

Three things to remember

- Keep preparatory tasks separate from final legal obligations.
- Record the responsible person, date and dependencies for each step.
- Use the proper process for later changes to agreements or orders.

Your next step: Complete the implementation planner in Worksheet 10 and enter confirmed deadlines in your calendar.

Chapter 23

Finding reliable information and independent help

You do not need to become a lawyer to prepare well. You do need a way to distinguish an official rule, an educational explanation and advice about your own circumstances. Start with the question you need answered and the jurisdiction to which it belongs.

Begin with the question and the date

Write down the issue, the province or territory, the court or process if known, and the relevant dates. Ask which legislation, regulations, court rules, practice directions and existing orders apply. Check whether a source describes current law, an earlier version or a proposed change.

A recent webpage is not necessarily a complete statement of the law. Conversely, an older judgment may remain relevant, but only after checking its treatment and the governing legislation. Keep a dated research record so that another person can understand what you actually reviewed.

Related tools and books

Start with the support tools at [DivorceNexus calculators](#) if a calculation is part of your preparation. Read the coverage notes first, record your assumptions and compare the result with the applicable official sources and professional advice. These tools are connected to the author and are not government calculators. Their limits are discussed in Chapter 11. [R1]

The [DivorceNexus AI Prompt Library](#) provides optional organizational exercises. This book's complete prompt

collection is included in Chapter 24, so no account or AI service is required to use the book. [R2]

[Considered Press](#) is the connected publishing resource. It is separate from government, courts and professional regulators. A book or private website can help explain a question, but it does not determine the legal answer for your circumstances. [R3]

Official starting points

Justice Canada's family-law pages explain federal topics and link to provincial and territorial services. The provincial and territorial directory is useful when your matter is outside Alberta or has connections to more than one place. Local rules and service eligibility must still be checked. [S15]

In Alberta, consult the government's family mediation and family-law assistance pages, the relevant court's forms and the current Court of King's Bench Family Focused Protocol materials. The protocol began in January 2026 and has been updated. Use the current court materials to identify applicable pre-court requirements, exceptions and waiver processes rather than relying on an older checklist. [S13, S22, S24]

In Ontario, the Mandatory Information Program and court-connected mediation are different services. An obligation to attend an information program should not be described as an obligation to settle in mediation. Check the current Family Law Rules, court directions and official family justice services information for your case. [S16, S23]

This family guide does not summarize civil mandatory mediation rules. A rule affecting a civil lawsuit should not be

imported into a family proceeding simply because both are heard in a courthouse.

Finding and checking cases

CanLII is a useful public starting point for Canadian legislation and decisions. Search a precise issue or a known citation, then narrow by jurisdiction, court and date as appropriate. Open the decision itself and read the relevant paragraphs in context. A search snippet is not the judgment. [S27]

Record the case name, neutral citation, court, date and paragraph numbers supporting the point you are considering. Distinguish the court's conclusion from a party's argument recounted in the reasons. A factually similar case does not guarantee a similar outcome.

Check appeal history and later treatment. Reversed means a higher court changed the result or part of it; overruled concerns the authority of a legal proposition; distinguished means a later court treated differences as significant. A later citation, criticism or decision not to follow a case needs to be read, not reduced to a colour or citation count.

Also check whether legislation changed after the decision and whether the court is binding or persuasive for your question. No search or automated note-up guarantees completeness. A lawyer or law librarian can help with the research task, and a lawyer must assess its legal significance for you.

Forms and legal help

Use the current official form for the correct court and proceeding. Read filing, service and supporting-document

requirements separately. A worksheet in this book is not a substitute for an affidavit, financial statement or other prescribed document. Alberta and Ontario form directories are listed in the source register. [S25, S26]

Look for lawyers through the relevant law society or other reliable referral route. Ask about limited-scope assistance, legal aid and community legal services where appropriate. Eligibility and availability vary. A court clerk or information worker may explain procedures but cannot replace your own legal adviser.

For your research record, note the question, source title, URL, version or update date, section or paragraph, date checked and the remaining uncertainty. Bring that record to your consultation. It helps turn a collection of links into a focused request for advice.

Three things to remember

- Start with the issue, jurisdiction and relevant date.
- Read original authorities and check later legal developments.
- A form, search result or calculator does not answer every legal question.

Your next step: Prepare a short source record and take the unresolved questions to a qualified adviser.

Part VII Tools and guided practice

Chapter 24

Put this into practice with guided AI prompts

AI can help organize a short account, create a question list or compare the practical details of hypothetical options. It can also invent facts, remove qualifications and produce confident legal errors. Use it, if at all, for a defined preparation task that you can check.

The AI prompts in this book are suggestions, not instructions you must follow. They are optional starting points for organizing information, exploring questions and preparing for a discussion. Adapt or skip them to suit your circumstances. They are not personalized legal or professional advice, and neither a prompt nor its response guarantees accuracy, suitability or a particular result. Check any response against reliable sources and obtain qualified advice when needed.

Protect the information first

Use invented names and the minimum detail needed. Omit children's identifying information, addresses, account numbers, health records, private correspondence and privileged material. Replacing a name does not necessarily anonymize a distinctive story. Do not upload case files or confidential documents merely because a prompt asks for background.

Check the service's current privacy and retention terms. Do not assume a personal account, a paid subscription or a deleted conversation guarantees confidentiality. If you are unsure whether material may be shared, obtain advice before entering it.

Do not ask AI to assess your safety, diagnose another person, determine a child's best interests, decide what settlement to accept or predict a judge's ruling. A polished answer is not evidence of competence. Keep original records and verify the result of every exercise.

Prompt 1 Organize a neutral chronology

Use this when events are difficult to follow. Supply a short, de-identified list that distinguishes confirmed dates from approximate memories. Omit allegations or personal records you cannot safely share.

Help me organize the following de-identified notes into a chronology for my own preparation. Use only the facts I supply. Do not add motives, legal conclusions or missing events. For each entry, show the date or approximate period, what I say happened, the source I have identified and any uncertainty. Preserve disagreements and mark missing information as unknown. At the end, list factual questions I may need to clarify. Do not decide which person is credible or what the law requires. My notes are: [insert a short anonymized summary].

Check every date and event against your records. Delete any invented detail. Take the corrected chronology to an appropriate adviser if useful; do not present the AI output as independent evidence.

Without AI, draw four columns headed date, event, source and uncertainty. Enter one event per row.

Prompt 2 Turn concerns into an agenda

Use this when a broad dispute is difficult to break into manageable questions. Supply practical concerns and timing

information without personal identifiers. Keep private safety concerns for an appropriate professional channel.

Turn my de-identified concerns into a draft discussion agenda. Separate factual questions, practical arrangements, documents still needed and questions for independent legal advice. Use neutral wording without minimizing any concern. Do not diagnose anyone, decide who is right or propose a settlement. Identify dependencies, such as a discussion that requires a document first. Suggest a short order for discussing the topics, and explain that it is only an organizational option. My concerns are: [insert summary].

Check whether the agenda preserves your meaning and any uncertainty. Remove topics outside the proposed process. Share only the appropriate version through the mediator's agreed route.

Without AI, underline each separate question in your notes and place related questions together.

Prompt 3 Prepare questions for your own lawyer

Use this before a limited-scope consultation. Supply the type of process, jurisdiction and broad issues, without confidential case documents. Do not ask the tool to answer the legal questions.

Help me prepare a concise question list for a lawyer licensed in [jurisdiction]. I am considering [process] about [general issues]. Organize questions under before committing, information and disclosure, participation, proposed terms, and next steps or deadlines. Do not give legal advice, invent deadlines or say what I should agree to. Flag matters that require the lawyer to inspect the actual

documents. Use only this de-identified context: [summary]. End with questions about the lawyer's scope, fees and responsibility for procedural tasks.

Check that the questions match the appointment's purpose. Put the most time-sensitive questions first and confirm actual deadlines directly with the lawyer. Bring the relevant documents by the lawyer's requested method.

Without AI, use Worksheet 5 and select the questions you most need answered.

Prompt 4 Build a document organizer

Use this when you know which records you have but need an index. Supply document descriptions, dates and status, not the documents themselves or identifying numbers.

Create an organizational index from these de-identified document descriptions. Use columns for item number, description, date or period, source, current status and question to clarify. Do not infer contents or calculate legal entitlement. Keep missing, incomplete and estimated information visibly separate. Do not claim this list satisfies legal disclosure obligations. After the index, identify duplicate descriptions or date gaps that I should check manually. The descriptions are: [list].

Compare the index with the actual files and correct the descriptions. Ask your lawyer or the professional about required disclosure and secure exchange. The tool cannot certify completeness.

Without AI, fill Worksheet 4 using the same headings.

Prompt 5 Compare holiday logistics

Use this to examine hypothetical scheduling options after identifying the relevant legal and safety questions with appropriate professionals. Supply invented dates or de-identified practical constraints. Do not upload an order or ask the tool to interpret one.

Compare these hypothetical holiday scheduling options only for practical logistics. For each option, identify transitions, travel, unresolved timing details, responsibilities that need clarification and assumptions that require confirmation. Do not recommend a parenting arrangement, decide a child's best interests or interpret legal rights. Do not assume equal time is required. Preserve every constraint I provide and flag conflicts rather than silently changing them. Options and practical constraints: [insert de-identified examples]. End with questions for human discussion and legal advice.

Check the calendar yourself. Verify school dates, travel time and every stated constraint. Bring useful questions to the professional; do not treat the comparison as approval of a plan.

Without AI, place the options on separate printed calendars and mark each transition.

Prompt 6 Draft a factual request

Use this for a routine communication only where direct communication is appropriate and permitted. Supply the practical question, relevant fact and requested response date. Do not use this exercise to manage threats or a protection-order issue.

Draft a short, factual message about the following routine practical matter. State the relevant information, ask one clear question and include the response date only if I supplied one. Avoid blame, threats, legal conclusions, diagnoses and promises. Do not add facts or imply agreement that has not been reached. Provide two versions, one very brief and one with a little context. Explain any assumption you had to leave unresolved. Matter: [de-identified summary].

Read the message aloud and check its accuracy, recipients and channel. Confirm it is consistent with the applicable communication arrangements before sending. AI should not send it for you.

Without AI, write one sentence of fact, one question and any genuinely necessary response date.

Prompt 7 Check practical gaps in proposed next steps

Use this to organize non-confidential, de-identified task descriptions. Do not upload a privileged settlement draft or ask AI to decide whether wording is legally binding.

Review this de-identified task list for practical gaps. For each task, identify who is named, what is to be done, the stated date, any dependency and how completion could be recorded. Mark absent details as missing. Keep proposed tasks separate from confirmed tasks. Do not create obligations, interpret legal documents or suggest enforceability. End with questions I should raise with the relevant professional. Task list: [summary].

Check the result against the actual record. Ask your lawyer about legal meaning and formal requirements. Add only steps that have actually been agreed or required.

Without AI, use Worksheet 10 and leave unknown fields blank until confirmed.

Prompt 8 Plan a source check

Use this to structure your research, not to obtain a legal conclusion. Supply a general issue, jurisdiction and the titles of sources you have already located. Do not provide private case facts.

Help me plan how to verify information about [general issue] in [jurisdiction]. Organize a checklist covering applicable legislation, regulations, court rules, practice directions, effective dates, transitional rules and any relevant existing orders. For any case I identify, remind me to verify the actual judgment, citation, court, paragraphs, appeal history, later treatment and legislative changes. Do not invent authorities, quotations, URLs or deadlines. Clearly mark anything you cannot verify. Sources already located: [titles or public links]. End with questions for a qualified lawyer or law librarian.

Open every source yourself. A link can be genuine while the tool's description is wrong. Record the date and limits of your check, and obtain advice about the legal significance.

Without AI, use the research method in Chapter 23 and keep a dated list of sources and unanswered questions.

Keep the decision with the appropriate person

Save only the corrected work that is useful for your preparation, through a method appropriate to its sensitivity. An AI conversation is not a legal consultation, a safety assessment or a hearing. The value of these exercises lies in organizing questions so that you can discuss them with the right person.

Three things to remember

- Use AI only for a defined preparation task you can check.
- Protect private records and independently verify useful output.
- The exercises are optional and each has an alternative without AI.

Your next step: Choose one relevant exercise, use minimal de-identified information and keep only the corrected work that helps you prepare.

Preparation workbook

These ten tools are for your own preparation. They are not prescribed court forms, legal agreements, professional screening instruments or a substitute for advice. Use copies as needed. Keep completed pages appropriately secure and ask how to share sensitive information before sending them to anyone.

You may leave a question blank, use a separate page or discuss it verbally with an appropriate professional. Do not complete an exercise if doing so creates a safety concern or delays urgent help. The space provided is a convenience, not a limit on the information that may matter.

Worksheet 1 First enquiry planner

Use this before contacting a provider. Include only the information needed for the initial enquiry. Complete any formal conflict check through the provider's requested process.

General issue and province or territory involved

What I want to learn about the service

Important timing concern and whether the date is confirmed

Safe response method and any contact restrictions to mention privately

Questions about intake costs availability and next steps

Before sending, remove unnecessary financial records, children's identifiers and detailed allegations. Confirm the recipient.

Worksheet 2 Private intake preparation

Use this to remember topics for a private professional conversation. This is not a risk assessment. If writing sensitive details is unsafe, leave them off the page and discuss a suitable contact method.

Current orders agreements proceedings and dates the professional needs to know about

What I hope the process could address

Topics I need an opportunity to discuss privately

Participation needs such as interpretation accessibility breaks or legal advice

Questions about confidentiality information sharing and whether to proceed

Ask how suitability will be reassessed if circumstances change. Do not email this completed page through a public enquiry form without appropriate arrangements.

Worksheet 3 Priorities and issue map

Choose one issue. Separate the concern from a preferred solution. Use another copy for an unrelated issue.

The issue in one or two sentences

Practical effect on everyday life

Known facts disputed facts and information still missing

Possible options to explore without committing to them

Advice needed and a useful next step

Progress I could recognize even if the whole dispute remains unresolved

Worksheet 4 Documents and disclosure tracker

Use one entry for each document or group of records. This tracker does not establish that legal disclosure is complete.

Document description and relevant date or period

Source and location of the original

Status such as held requested incomplete disputed or not yet located

Issue the document may help clarify

Missing information or question requiring advice

Next action responsible person and confirmed date

Preserve originals. Ask about privileged material, third-party information and secure exchange before sharing records.

Worksheet 5 Independent legal advice

Use this to make an appointment more focused. Give your lawyer the actual relevant documents through the requested method.

Before committing to the process I need to understand

During discussions I need advice about

Before signing or relying on terms I need reviewed

After the process I need to confirm

Lawyer scope fees exclusions and responsibility for deadlines

Most time-sensitive question and appointment details

Worksheet 6 Parenting agenda

Start with the current agreement or order and the child's actual routines. This page does not determine a child's best interests or recommend a schedule.

Current document and issue to discuss

School care health activity and transport facts to confirm

Ordinary week problem and its practical effect

Communication or decision process that needs clarification

Child-related questions requiring appropriate professional help

Next step and any legal advice needed before changing arrangements

Worksheet 6 Holiday calendar companion

Use the actual year and exact dates. Record proposals separately from existing obligations. Copy this page for each option.

Holiday or school break and confirmed school closure dates

Proposed periods with start and end dates times and locations

Transport travel documents costs and consent questions

Weather illness or travel disruption questions

What remains unresolved and when advice or a decision is needed

Check the existing order or agreement. A completed calendar is not permission to disregard it or to book unapproved travel.

Worksheet 7 Remote session preparation

Discuss these arrangements with the professional. This is a practical checklist, not a security certification.

- Confirm the date time zone link and backup contact method.
- Test the device connection audio and document access.
- Arrange necessary interpretation accessibility support and breaks.
- Discuss a private location safe contact and anyone who may be present.
- Plan childcare and reduce avoidable interruptions.
- Confirm rules for recording screenshots transcripts and AI assistants.
- Understand how to ask for a private conversation or legal consultation.
- Agree on what happens if someone loses connection.

Questions or arrangements still to confirm

Documents and preparation tasks needed before the session

Next contact and confirmed date

Worksheet 8 Parenting coordination mandate

Complete this with appropriate advice before committing.
The actual law and documents determine authority.

Existing parenting document and proposed appointment document

Issues included in the mandate and issues expressly excluded

Assistance role determination power and procedure for responding

Qualifications fees communication rules and access to records

Term review termination and legal challenge questions for my lawyer

Unresolved question before signing

Worksheet 8 Parenting coordination issue companion

Use one page for one issue. Keep safety disclosures within the appropriate private process.

Relevant provision and document date

Event and practical difficulty with dates where known

What has already been tried and what response was received

Question I am asking the coordinator to address within the mandate

Relevant records and any uncertainty

Process or legal advice needed before proceeding

Worksheet 9 Arbitration preparation

Use this alongside the arbitration agreement and procedural directions. It is not an agreement to arbitrate or a statement of evidence.

Questions submitted for decision and governing documents

Procedural dates and who is responsible for each task

Key facts documents witnesses and missing information

Questions about screening participation expert evidence and procedure

Fees legal assistance and review rights to clarify before committing

Next confirmed preparation step

Worksheet 9 Award follow up

Obtain advice promptly. Do not use this page to calculate an appeal deadline without checking the applicable law and circumstances.

Award date and exact date and method of receipt

Operative obligations responsible persons and stated dates

Possible error ambiguity or challenge question for my lawyer

Advice appointment and deadlines confirmed by the adviser

Questions about compliance enforcement or a stay

Immediate next action

Worksheet 10 Proposed terms and implementation

Keep proposals separate from finalized obligations. This page is not a separation agreement and has no signature block.

Document title date version and present status

Term or task to review and any missing information

Legal advice or formal step needed before reliance

Confirmed action responsible person date and dependency

How completion will be recorded and where records will be kept

Review point or problem requiring further advice

Glossary

These explanations are tailored to this guide. They are not universal statutory definitions. The applicable legislation, agreement, order and procedural directions may use a term more specifically.

Adjudication. A process in which an authorized decision-maker determines disputed issues after considering the material properly presented. Litigation and binding arbitration are examples.

Affidavit. A written statement of evidence sworn or affirmed before a person authorized to administer the oath or affirmation. Local rules govern its form, content and use.

Appeal. A legally authorized request to a higher or reviewing court to examine a decision. The permitted grounds, standard, procedure and deadlines vary. It is not automatically a new hearing of the whole dispute.

Arbitration. A process in which an arbitrator decides issues submitted under a valid legal framework. Authority, procedure and the effect of an award depend on the applicable law and agreement.

Arbitration agreement. The agreement identifying a commitment to arbitrate and ordinarily addressing the issues, decision-maker and procedural arrangements. Family arbitration can have particular legal requirements.

Award. An arbitrator's decision. An award may address some issues or conclude the arbitration. Its form, effect, review and enforcement are governed by the relevant law and arrangements.

Best interests of the child. The governing child-focused standard for parenting decisions under applicable family law. It requires attention to the particular child and circumstances, rather than an automatic division of time.

Caucus. A separate meeting between a mediator and a participant, sometimes with that participant's lawyer. Ask what confidentiality and information-sharing rules apply to it.

Coercive control. A pattern of controlling conduct that can restrict another person's autonomy and affect their ability to act freely. The legal significance depends on the governing law and facts. A book cannot assess an individual situation.

Collaborative family law. An agreement-based process in which participants and their lawyers work toward resolution under a defined framework. The participation agreement may affect whether those lawyers can act in later litigation.

Confidentiality. Duties or arrangements limiting disclosure of information. Their scope and exceptions depend on law, role and agreement. Confidentiality is not identical to legal privilege.

Conflict of interest. A circumstance that may interfere with, or create a legally relevant concern about, a professional's proper performance of the role. It must be assessed under the applicable standards.

Consent order. A court order made on terms agreed by the parties and accepted by the court. Party agreement does not eliminate the court's applicable responsibilities or formal requirements.

Decision-making responsibility. A term used in the Divorce Act for responsibility for significant decisions about a child's well-being. Provincial laws and older documents may use different terminology.

Determination. In this guide, a decision made by a parenting coordinator within a legally authorized mandate. The term's precise meaning and effect depend on the jurisdiction and governing documents.

Disclosure. Providing relevant information through the applicable legal or agreed process. A private inventory of documents does not prove that required disclosure is complete.

Enforcement. Using an available legal process to obtain compliance with an obligation or decision. An agreement, order and arbitration award may require different enforcement steps.

Evidence. Material offered to establish facts, including testimony and documents where permitted. Its admissibility and weight are separate questions governed by the applicable process.

Facilitative mediation. Mediation focused on helping participants discuss concerns, understand information and explore options. The mediator acting in that role does not impose the settlement.

Family violence. Conduct falling within the relevant legal definition, which may extend beyond physical assault to threats, coercive or controlling patterns and other forms of abuse. It can affect safety and process suitability.

Impartiality. Performing a role without favouring one participant. An impartial mediator does not become either person's advocate; an impartial adjudicator must decide within the applicable legal framework.

Independent legal advice. Advice from a lawyer acting for you about your circumstances and legal interests. Another participant's lawyer and an impartial mediator do not provide this advice to you merely by explaining a proposal.

Informed consent. Agreement made with an adequate understanding of the relevant commitment and circumstances. What the law requires depends on the decision and context; a signature alone does not answer every question.

Interim arrangement. An arrangement intended to address matters pending further steps or a final outcome. Its legal effect depends on its wording, context and applicable law, not simply the label temporary.

Jurisdiction. The legal authority of a court or decision-maker, or the place and legal system whose rules apply. An online meeting does not eliminate jurisdictional questions.

Limited-scope retainer. An agreement under which a lawyer performs specified tasks rather than handling the entire matter. Scope, exclusions, fees and responsibility for deadlines should be clear.

Mandate. The authorized scope of a professional's work. In parenting coordination and arbitration, it is especially important to distinguish what may be discussed from what may be decided.

Mediation-arbitration. A process combining mediation and arbitration under defined arrangements. The transition between roles, use of private information and commitment to adjudication require careful advice.

Memorandum of understanding. A document recording an understanding or proposed terms. The title does not by itself establish whether it is binding or what formal steps remain.

Neutrality. A term often used to describe a professional's non-partisan role. Its intended meaning should be explained; it does not require ignoring safety, legal duties or unfair participation conditions.

Parenting coordination. A defined process commonly concerned with implementing an existing parenting arrangement. Assistance and any decision-making powers depend on the law, qualifications and mandate.

Parenting plan. A description of intended parenting arrangements. It may address time, responsibilities and practical processes. Its legal status depends on how it is made and incorporated into other documents.

Parenting time. Time a child spends in the care of a person under the applicable parenting framework. The exact legal definition and associated responsibilities depend on the governing law.

Privilege. A legal protection that can restrict disclosure or use of certain communications or information. Its existence and exceptions require legal analysis; the word confidential does not create it automatically.

Procedural fairness. Requirements for a fair decision-making process, including an appropriate opportunity to know and respond to relevant matters. The required procedure depends on the legal setting.

Provisional terms. Terms identified as awaiting a further condition, information, advice or decision. Their legal effect should be checked from the actual wording and circumstances.

Review. Examination of a decision or arrangement through an available process. The word may refer to a scheduled reconsideration, a statutory remedy or something else; identify the actual route.

Scope. The boundaries of a task, engagement or issue submitted for decision. Clear scope helps distinguish included work from matters requiring separate authority or advice.

Screening. Professional enquiry into factors relevant to safety, suitability and participation. It is not a self-scored test or a guarantee that circumstances will remain unchanged.

Self-represented party. A person participating without a lawyer representing them in the relevant process. That person may still obtain independent advice or limited-scope assistance.

Set aside. To have a decision or document deprived of effect through an authorized legal process. Grounds and consequences differ; it is not synonymous with simply disagreeing.

Shuttle mediation. A format in which the mediator communicates between participants who are not discussing matters together in the same room or virtual room. Suitability and information-sharing rules still matter.

Stay. A legally authorized pause in a proceeding or in enforcement or operation of a decision, depending on context. Requesting advice or filing a challenge does not necessarily create one.

Submission. An argument presented to a decision-maker about the result sought and why the evidence and law support it. Argument should be distinguished from evidence.

Variation. A legally effective change to an existing order or arrangement through the applicable process. Informal practical adjustments do not necessarily amount to a legal variation.

Sources and resource register

Selected sources were checked on October 17, 2026. This is a targeted source record for a practical guide, not a comprehensive audit of all Canadian law. Official consolidations can have a currency date earlier than the day accessed. Check amendments, commencement and local directions before acting.

Source markers in the chapters identify the relevant entries below. The surrounding practical examples, preparation methods and worksheets are original educational material. No case outcome, clinical assessment or success rate is asserted on the strength of those examples.

Connected educational resources

R1 DivorceNexus calculators. [Support calculators and coverage information](#). Connected educational tools. Current route and coverage were checked against the site's source on October 17, 2026. Read the tool-specific limitations. The with-child spousal-support tax-and-benefit engine is not complete in the reviewed version.

R2 DivorceNexus AI Prompt Library. [Prompt library](#). Connected optional preparation tools. The full prompts for this book appear in Chapter 24. Use the complete prompts in Chapter 24 for the exercises in this handbook.

R3 Considered Press. [Publishing resource](#). A connected publishing resource. This is not a court, government or regulatory source.

Federal legislation and guidance

S1 Department of Justice Canada. [Family dispute resolution resolving family law issues out of court](#). Introductory distinctions among processes and the importance of appropriateness. Official page retrieved October 17, 2026.

S2 Divorce Act. [Section 7.3](#), RSC 1985, c 3 (2nd Supp). Duty to try family dispute resolution to the extent appropriate. Retrieved official text displayed currency to September 21, 2026.

S3 Divorce Act. [Definitions in section 2](#) and [best interests in section 16](#). Used for family violence, decision-making responsibility and parenting principles. Official provisions retrieved October 17, 2026; the definitions page displayed currency to September 30, 2026.

S4 Department of Justice Canada. [HELP Toolkit overview](#). Professional background on identifying and responding to family violence. Intended for family law legal advisers. It does not validate this book's worksheets as screening instruments. Retrieved October 17, 2026.

S5 Federal Child Support Guidelines. [Section 21](#), SOR/97-175. Example of prescribed income information in proceedings where the provision applies. Retrieved text displayed currency to September 30, 2026 and amendment on October 1, 2025.

S6 Department of Justice Canada. [2025 child support table lookup](#). Official lookup and date-sensitive table information. Check the applicable period and guidelines. Retrieved October 17, 2026.

S7 Department of Justice Canada. [Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines](#). Official starting point for the advisory guidelines and related materials. Used for the distinction between an advisory calculation framework and legislation. Retrieved October 17, 2026.

Parenting coordination and family arbitration

S8 British Columbia Family Law Act. [Part 2](#), SBC 2011, c 25. Sections 14 to 19 concern parenting coordination; Division 4 concerns arbitration. Official act displayed currency to October 6, 2026. BC-specific examples only.

S9 British Columbia Family Law Act Regulation. [BC Reg 347/2012](#), particularly sections 4 to 6. Professional requirements and parenting coordination determination limits. Consolidation displayed

currency to October 13, 2026. Do not apply these provisions as national rules.

S10 Government of Ontario. [Family arbitration](#). Official indexed content retrieved October 17, 2026; direct full-page access was blocked. Used for introductory Ontario-specific process and scope information, alongside the legislation below.

S11 Ontario Family Arbitration regulation. [O Reg 134/07](#), under the Arbitration Act 1991. Official indexed text retrieved October 17, 2026; direct full-page access was blocked. Relevant to agreement, screening, training and record requirements. Recheck the complete current regulation before an individual engagement.

S12 Ontario Family Law Act. [RSO 1990 c F3](#), sections 59.1 to 59.8, including the distinct secondary arbitration provisions in section 59.7. Current official indexed text retrieved October 17, 2026; direct full-page access was blocked. The book does not reproduce a complete enforceability checklist.

Services parenting and professional help

S13 Government of Alberta. [Family mediation](#). Program information, eligibility and preparation. Retrieved October 17, 2026. No fixed income threshold is reproduced in this book because readers should check current program criteria.

S14 Government of Ontario. [Family mediation](#). Court-connected and other mediation information. Official indexed content retrieved during preparation; full-page access was blocked. Check current fees, eligibility and local availability directly.

S15 Department of Justice Canada. [Provincial and territorial government websites](#). Directory for family justice information across Canada. Retrieved October 17, 2026. A directory is a starting point, not a regulatory opinion about services available everywhere.

S16 Government of Ontario. [Family justice services](#). Official indexed information about the Mandatory Information Program and

other services, retrieved October 17, 2026. Check the applicable rules and exceptions for the actual case.

S17 Department of Justice Canada. [Making plans Section 5](#). Options for developing a parenting arrangement and obtaining legal advice. Retrieved October 17, 2026.

S18 Law Society of Alberta. [Find a lawyer](#). Directory with practice and service filters, including limited-scope assistance. Retrieved October 17, 2026. A listing is not an endorsement or a promise of availability.

S19 Department of Justice Canada. [Parenting Plan Checklist](#). Planning topics for discussion and advice. Retrieved October 17, 2026. Not a determination of suitable terms for a particular family.

S20 Department of Justice Canada. [Parenting Plan Tool](#). Structured topics and sample planning material. Retrieved October 17, 2026. This book uses original explanations and worksheets rather than presenting the tool as a signed agreement.

S21 Government of Canada. [Consent letter for children travelling outside Canada](#). Official travel guidance. Retrieved indexed content October 17, 2026. Check destination requirements and the family's legal documents separately.

Court procedure forms and research

S22 Alberta Court of King's Bench. [Family Focused Protocol](#). Current hub for notices, guides and forms. Retrieved October 17, 2026. Consult the current materials for applicable requirements and waiver procedures; the book does not reproduce the full protocol.

S23 Government of Ontario. [Required steps in family court](#) and [Family Law Rules](#), including rule 8.1. Official indexed material retrieved October 17, 2026. Distinguishes information-program requirements from a duty to settle.

S24 Government of Alberta. [Family law assistance](#). Official starting point for information and support services. Reviewed during

preparation on October 17, 2026. Confirm current scope and availability with the service.

S25 Alberta Court of King's Bench. [Family law forms](#). Retrieved October 17, 2026. Use the correct court's current forms and related instructions; a downloaded form does not establish that the chosen procedure is appropriate.

S26 Ontario Court Services. [Family Law Rules forms](#). Retrieved October 17, 2026. Check current versions, filing requirements and service rules.

S27 Canadian Legal Information Institute. [CanLII](#). Public research starting point. Help-page retrieval was blocked during this preparation, so no current interface feature or comprehensive note-up result is certified. Chapter 23 explains a general research method; this edition relies on no reported case as authority.

Source boundaries

Selected private course materials helped inform the teaching sequence during development. No proprietary course script, form or exercise has been reproduced. York University has not reviewed or endorsed this book. Course participation does not establish professional authorization for every role or jurisdiction.

No Canadian jurisdiction is described here as unrestricted for all mediators, parenting coordinators or arbitrators. A reader must check the actual role, provider, law and program. The book's geographical readership is broader than any particular service offering.

About Considered Mediation

Considered Mediation offers remote facilitative family and divorce mediation. The mediator supports discussion impartially; participants decide whether to agree to proposed terms.

One or both participants may have a lawyer assist by arrangement. Self-represented participants are encouraged to obtain independent legal advice before, during and after mediation, especially before signing or relying on terms.

Services and availability

Intake confirms suitability, jurisdiction, scope, fees and availability. Parenting coordination is in development. Arbitration is coming soon; its discussion in this handbook does not mean appointments are currently available.

Considered Mediation is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice or representation. An enquiry does not itself establish an engagement or make information privileged. Wait for appropriate arrangements before sending confidential records.

Begin with a short enquiry

Website: www.ConsideredMediation.com

Email: contact@consideredmediation.com

Phone: (403) 718-9866

Give the broad issue, province or territory, important timing concerns and a safe reply method. Ask about intake, fees and availability. Worksheet 1 helps you prepare.

© 2026 Considered Mediation. Published by Considered Press.

Copyright and permitted use

© 2026 Considered Mediation. All rights reserved.

Published by Considered Press.

This free handbook is provided for personal information and preparation. You may download and print it for your own use, and complete or copy the worksheets for your own matter. Keep the source, copyright notice and website address visible.

You are welcome to share a link to the official handbook page. Free availability does not grant permission to rebrand this handbook, change its authorship, remove its attribution or present it as another person's or practice's publication.

Except as permitted by applicable law, prior written permission from the copyright holder is required to adapt, translate, sell, republish, host or distribute this handbook or its worksheets as part of another practice's materials. Giving credit alone does not grant that permission.

These terms do not restrict uses permitted by law, including applicable fair dealing exceptions. Rights in third-party materials remain with their respective owners.

Permissions and attribution enquiries

contact@consideredmediation.com

Phone: (403) 718-9866

www.consideredmediation.com

Scan for the official handbook and current resources.

