

COLLABORATIVE Practice Tips

A monthly bulletin from the CP Cal Practice Excellence Committee

The Practice Excellence Committee is pleased to offer tips to help you increase your Collaborative cases and achieve *practice excellence*.



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When should you consider bringing a Child Specialist into a Collaborative team?

Here are some tips to help you make that decision.

Tip #1

When parents don't agree on the child(ren)'s needs. It is not unusual for parents to have different parenting styles. Perhaps one is more lenient and the other is stricter. Parents may express concerns about the other parent's parenting skills. A Child Specialist (CS) can help parents understand the impact of the divorce and their children's developmental needs. While the CS will not make recommendations, he/she can convey the potential risks and protective factors unique to their children, which will help parents make parenting decisions.

Tip #2

When parents have trouble establishing a schedule they can agree on. Parents resolving their divorce collaboratively may have strong disagreements about how to share time with their children. The CS can help these parents by meeting the children and then conveying to the parents an understanding of their children's stress tolerance, developmental needs, as well as their hopes and wishes. The CS can help the parents consider various timeshare factors such as how often the children should transition, whether the children stay together on the same schedule, how flexible the schedule should be, and give examples of schedules that might work well for the children.

Tip #3

When parents are worried about how their kids are faring during the divorce. Often children show signs of distress or aren't expressing themselves to their parents. These children often will open up to a neutral trained Child Specialist. The CS can assess how the children are coping with the divorce, normalizing their reactions when appropriate. If the children need further support, the CS can make referrals to therapists in the community who specialize in divorce-related child therapy. Research shows that children who appear to be doing well may not be and a CS can look at this possibility.

Tip #4

When there are children with special needs. Children with special needs such as autism, chronic illness, or learning disorders may benefit from the input of a Child Specialist. The CS should have expertise in divorce and special needs children. The CS can help the parents understand the unique needs of their child and how to structure a parenting plan that will keep the child stable and safe. This might include slowing the pace of the changes, as these children may not be as resilient or adaptable as other children. The CS can help these parents develop a shared understanding of how to support their special needs child during and after the divorce.

Tip #5

When children have a difficult attachment to one parent, or reject/resist/refuse contact with one parent. Sometimes children are drawn into loyalty conflicts and feel they must choose to align with one parent who is perceived to be the more fragile or safe parent, or against the parent seen as the "bad" parent or perpetrator. These children are caught in the middle of their parents' conflict. The CS can meet with the children, assess the situation, and help the parents understand the dynamics that are harming the child, the emotional needs of the child, and how the parents can co-parent successfully to support their children. The CS can help develop a plan to heal or reconnect the estranged child and his/her parent. The CS can make outside referrals as appropriate.

Tip #6

When there are children in the family, no matter their age. Children inevitably have thoughts and feelings about their parents' impending divorce. They may not have felt open to share those with their parents for fear of hurting them or when they feel the pull to "choose the good parent." The children may be okay or relieved about the divorce and fear sharing that with the ones they love. Knowing that they have a caring adult who will share their perspectives and wishes with their parents without their having to do so can be a great relief. Frequently, older, even grown children are not asked and thus hold their unexpressed opinions. Assure the parents that the Child Specialist will ask the children for their input and will let the children know that while they will have a voice, they will not have decision-making power. That is a relief to all.



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