

## 1 Communication Protocol

### Introduction

At the core of every successful relationship is the ability to communicate effectively. Regrettably, many people have not been exposed to and/or have not acquired the skills that support effective communication; especially in stressful emotional situations. This Parenting Coordinator (PC) has been engaged, in part, to support these coparents (CPPs) as they transition from an intimate/spousal relationship into the respectful and effective business relationship of coparenting their children, in large part, by developing protocols and structures that support effective communication. The purpose of these structures and protocols is to maximize the opportunity for respectful mature conversation and thereby to increase the likelihood that these parents will adopt the skills needed for successful conflict resolution independent of PC support. Both CPPs desire to achieve this goal because they understand the research has confirmed the negative impact on children who are exposed to unhealthy conflict between their parents. It is now a certainty that the unintended consequence of exposing children to such toxic parental conflict has both short and long term detrimental development impacts.... witness "ACES".

Accordingly, these terms are effective immediately.

### Protocol

The CPPs shall exchange all electronic communication regarding their children, and only child related communication, via [www.Ourfamilywizard.com](http://www.Ourfamilywizard.com) (OFW). If no account has been established by the time that the Court Order or Judgment issues then each CPP shall visit the website no later than 2 calendar days after their Initial Individual Session (IIS), enroll with and pay for an account in their name by completing the online sign up process or calling the toll-free number provided on the "contact us" page.

Each CPP shall provide this PC with Professional Access to their account using the "Permission for Professional Access" document. Enrollment shall be co-terminus with the term of this PC appointment.

In addition to the basic plan each CPP shall purchase the "Tone Meter".

Both CPPs shall download OFW "app" to their phone and/or other mobile device and elect to receive *all alerts and notifications* offered including but not limited to new activity using the Daily Digest or On Action option of OFW.

Within 5-days of activating the account each CPP shall upload into the Calendar section of the platform all of the primary parenting time the children share with them as specified in their Separation Agreement and/or Parenting Plan. Additionally, to the extent that there are any standing appointments and/or extracurricular activities relative to the children, the CPP who is primarily responsible for the activity or event shall input that data to the calendar within the same 5-day period.

Going forward and barring emergencies, all requests and/or offers to “trade”, “swap”, or “exchange” parenting time shall be made using the TRADE function in the Calendar section of OFW according to the time parameters specified therein – minimum of 48 hours’ notice.

One of the most prevalent areas of disagreement between CPPs is the division of costs for things like out of pocket medical expenses, athletic equipment, extracurricular activities and the like for their children. OFW has built in a feature called “Expense Log”. This feature permits each CPP to upload copies of receipts for review and request reimbursement from their CPP. With an eye towards eliminating unnecessary conflict and efficiently reconciling these types of expenses every CPP who seeks reimbursement from their other CPP shall make all requests via the Expense Log. This action will immediately post the request in their CPP’s Expense Log where the request can be approved or rejected.

Accordingly, the CPPs shall utilize the Expense features of the website to record all potentially reimbursable expenses. An electronic copy of the receipt for payment must be attached to each request. If a CPP is not capable of posting a photograph or a scan of the receipt, they shall mail a photocopy to their CPP by regular first class mail no later than the day following the date the expense is posted in the Expense section. Each CPP shall preserve the original of any scanned or photographed receipt that is posted. Each CPP shall have up to 10 days to respond to requests for reimbursements posted therein. **It is the obligation of each CPP to visit the Expense Log no less frequently than each week and promptly upon receiving notification that a request has posted, so that they can review all posted reimbursement requests, and either approve or reject each posted expense. Failure to approve or reject a posted expense request within 10 days of it being posted shall be deemed an automatic approval of the expense, an acknowledgment that the requested amount is due to ones CPP, and acceptance of the responsibility to adjust for said payment, in the amount requested and/or approved, within 30 days or when the next payment of money is exchanged.**

The CPPs shall post all child related electronic communication between them exclusively via this platform. *This means no more texting except for emergencies and time sensitive matters such as last minute schedule changes and delays in drop off or pick up.* CPPs are free to communicate by telephone so long as they can do so respectfully and employ the B.I.F.F. and Nonviolent Communication (NVC) protocols. Should either or both of the CPPs at any point become unwilling or unable to have respectful mature telephone conversations either or both of them shall inform the PC as soon as practicable. If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved then thereafter telephone conversations may be limited to matters of emergency regarding the child that must be acted upon in less than 24 hours.

In each and every case of oral communication concerning the children the initiating CPP shall memorialize the subject and general content of the communication by means of a Journal entry (either public or private) in the Calendar section of OFW.

All communication between CPPs shall be modeled after the B.I.F.F and NVC protocols that accompany this recommendation. There shall be no ALL CAP (the functional equivalent of shouting) permitted in any written communication.

*Since all CPP entries in OFW are viewable to the PC it is not necessary to “cc:” the PC on each communication.*

*If the PC is “cc’d” charges will be assessed for the time spent reviewing and/or responding to the communication.*

Not all do, and if a communication requires a response, the receiving CPP shall respond in not less than one hour (so as to be responsive and not reactive) and not longer than 24 hours *unless* the communication itself indicates that a longer or shorter time frame is appropriate under the circumstances. It is advisable that CPPs allow themselves sufficient time to process all communication before responding. Another best practice is to type the response in a word documents, step away for a few minutes, and then return to read the message as if it was being received by them. Then, to copy and paste the content into an OFW reply. If additional time is desired before providing a more complete response, then a useful structure one should employ is the “expectation-setter” that goes something like this:

“Got it. Lot on the plate today, I’ll get back to you tomorrow afternoon.”

Or

“I’m in the middle of something right now, I’ll get back you to this evening.”

This provides a timely acknowledgment and resets the expectation of the CPPs.

When either CPP makes a change to the Calendar, OFW generates a “system message” that summarizes the details of the change. *It is incumbent upon each CPP to promptly open and read each communication from their CPP including but not limited to each system message generated by OFW.*

In the event that a parent fails to provide a timely response to a communication from their CPP that parent may, in the discretion of the PC, forfeit the right to alter or provide further input on the matter at hand. Further, if a matter is presented to the PC for action because of nonresponse of a CPP, then the nonresponding CPP may be assessed all or a disproportionate share of the costs related to the matter as a consequence of their inaction.

*In order to create a clear and all inclusive thread for each topic of discussion all instances of electronic communication shall be limited to **one subject**, the title of which shall be included in the subject line. The “reply” or “reply all” function shall be used in all communication on each thread, until the matter is resolved. In order to prevent a “split thread” it is necessary for each CPP to respond **ONLY** to the most recent communication in the thread. If a split thread develops, it shall be the responsibility of the CPP whose*

*response initiate the split thread to either recreate one chronological thread or to solely bear the cost of this PC's time in doing so if it becomes necessary. Each new topic shall be given a unique subject title.*

The PCSA and PCPAG call for no more than two rounds of communication between CPPs before a matter is submitted to the PC. It is expected that the CPPs will use the "So, What's Your Proposal?" format when exchanging communications. If no agreement is achieved in these two rounds and it becomes necessary to present a matter to the PC the initiating CPP shall add the PC to the thread with a "cc:" to the responding CPP *along with a clear request for action by the PC*. Since the matter has already been the subject of electronic exchange between the CPPs the same subject line shall be used in the communication with the PC. A CPP may also choose to seek the support of this PC on matters that their CPP has not responded to within the time parameters set forth above.

Each communication with ones CPP – either to present or to respond to comments of the other shall, at the outset, be limited to no more than 150 words. If more words are needed, either the CPP or the PC may ask for more information or clarification. Once the initiating CPP presents a matter to the PC both CPPs will be notified if any additional information needs to be conveyed.

*Each CPP will have opportunity to respond to the comments of the other before this PC will accept jurisdiction of the matter.* (Therefore, an exchange might look like this: Parent 1 presenting comment, Parent 2 response, Parent 1 reply, Parent 2 reply, Parent 1 cc: PC with request for support).

Somewhere in these exchanges or at the request of the PC, *each parent shall include a proposal for resolution with supporting rationale*. Subject to the discretion of the PC, each CPP is permitted up to 24 hours to respond to the other CPP's posting.

Once a matter is fully presented to and accepted the PC will contact the CPPs to arrange for individual and/or conference call(s), request further information, or perhaps issue a recommendation based upon the information provided. In a time-sensitive situation, the PC may choose to issue an oral recommendation that is effective immediately and which will be documented in writing within a reasonable period of time.

The PC retains the discretion to disregard any oral or electronic communication exchanged between the CPPs that is not documented in a contemporaneous Journal Entry and/or takes place outside of the OFW platform. After giving the question due consideration a written binding decision will be issued by the PC and posted in MyFiles.

*If either parent wishes to communicate individually with the PC on any matter that is not the subject of an ongoing exchange with their CPP that parent shall ask the PC in writing via OFW for the opportunity to communicate individually, stating the subject and providing their CPP with a cc: of the request (i.e. notice and the opportunity to be*

heard). Upon request, each CPP shall be afforded the opportunity to contribute their input individually to the PC on the matter at hand.

Finally, one of the most difficult times in many coparenting relationships is the time when the children transition from sharing parenting time with one parent to sharing parenting time with the other. Parents often see this as a “good time” to raise questions, make comments, and/or “to discuss or resolve” open matters between them. IT IS NOT. So, at transitions (and any time when both parents are together in the presence of their children) conversations are to be limited to cordial greetings and positive comments about the children and possibly the activity at hand (aka “Dunkin Donuts conversation”). AND, in every instance where your children are transitioning from sharing parenting time with their on duty parent (ODP) to sharing parenting time with the off duty parent (OFP) the ODP shall write a brief email titled “TRANSITION” that must be shared with the OFP some time on the day of the transition. This communication is limited solely and exclusively to predetermined matters of interest and/or concern that occurred during the ODPs parenting time such as ‘John had a 100-degree fever and took Tylenol at 3pm’, ‘All soccer equipment has been packed’, ‘special notice from scouts is in the backpack’, or ‘homework is only partially complete’ etc. Each parent shall address the following topics – at a minimum – every time they send a transition email to the other. (This list of topics will be customized and finalized during our initial joint session):

For infants and toddlers:

- Share *at least* one positive experience (per child) during parenting time
- Feeding
- Nap & sleep schedule (changes)
- New ways to sooth and calm child
- How a bump or bruise occurred
- Potty training techniques and update
- Moods
- Medical appointments/Health update
- Illnesses & medication
- Developmental issues or milestones

For Pre-school and School aged children:

- Share *at least* one positive experience (per child) during parenting time
- Relationships with friends & social activities
- School, extracurricular & religious activities
- Homework & school projects
- Scheduled events & activities
- School progress & meetings
- Behavioral & disciplinary issues
- Health update
- Bed, bath, & meal routines

Most parents find it easier to create a template or to simply cut and paste the appropriate list from this memo into a word.doc and OFW email and then fill in the blanks. Short bulleted updates are entirely appropriate. And if there is no change or comment on a particular topic there is no need to say anything.

No personal or editorial comments are permitted and no other topic is permissible in the "TRANSITION" email. Each transition email shall include a civil greeting, and closing such as Thank you, Thanks, or Enjoy your time with our children. From the outset and until further notice, the PC shall be "cc:d" on each and every transition email. Since I only scan this particular communication there is no cost to the file for the time spent reviewing these transition emails.

Other matters that can be addressed during the IJS and perhaps added to this CP if desired are:

The number of OFW communications to be exchanged per day or week

The time or times of day when OFW messages can be exchanged

Thank you.

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