

TIPS FOR CHOOSING A FAMILY COURT ORDERED SERVICE PROVIDER (THERAPIST) & BEGINNING THERAPY

- 1. Court referral lists:** Family Court Services offers referrals lists for therapists and other service providers. These lists are organized by type of service (child, family, co-parenting, etc), along with a separate list for agency counseling centers. The lists are provided as a public courtesy; you are not required to use someone on the referral lists and the Court makes no guarantee as to their qualifications or the quality of services.

- 2. Insurance:** If you have private insurance, you may want to inquire directly with your insurance company about using these benefits to cover therapy services. Oftentimes, this will make therapy more affordable. However, if you are using your insurance, you may want to inquire about the frequency of sessions that is allowed. Therapy works best if sessions are regular, which typically means weekly or at minimum twice per month.

- 3. Experience:** Make sure that the therapist you are working with has experience addressing your concerns and issues. Some therapists specialize in working with families that are involved with post separation conflicts and family court. Other therapists may have less knowledge of these areas. Some general questions you may want to ask on the phone include the following:
 - Have you worked with these issues before (e.g. a child who is resisting contact with one parent or is caught between parents in a high conflict separation, court-ordered co-parenting counseling, etc)? Please tell me about your experience.
 - Have you worked with parents who are involved with Family Court?
 - Are you willing to provide feedback to a family court custody counselor (mediator), provided I sign an authorization allowing you to do so, in the event that we return to court?
 - Are you interested in hearing from both parents? Will you attempt to engage both parents?
 - How do you share information with parents? Do you ensure both parents receive the same information? Under what circumstances would you not provide information to a parent?

- 4. Co-parenting counseling:** This is a specialized type of therapy; many therapists do not have training in this area. You will likely benefit more if you can find a therapist with experience. You may want to ask the therapist as to their philosophy or approach to co-parenting counseling. Co-parenting counseling should feel more like mediation than therapy, with the therapist helping the parents discuss specific issues, problem-solve concerns, and help parents use new tools to improve communication and decrease conflict. The therapist should be focused on here-and-now solutions and less on the past relationship challenges. Some therapists will monitor the parents' outside email or text communication, although there may be an additional fee for this service.
- 5. Child therapy:** Check your court order carefully. If you share joint legal custody, you will likely need the other parent's permission to initiate therapy for a child, and often this is listed clearly in your court orders under "legal custody". Even if this is NOT included in your court orders, most child therapists will seek to involve both parents in a child's therapy. If a child is spending time in both households, it is usually common practice for the therapist to meet with each parent prior to meeting the child. This ensures that both parents have the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns with the therapist, and that the therapist better understands both parents' perspectives. Many child therapists will try to schedule appointments so that the parents alternate bringing the child to sessions. This gives the therapist more information about the child's relationship with each parent, and it ensures that the therapist is able to involve parents in sessions or give feedback to a parent as needed.
- 6. Recommendations from your therapist:** Therapists should not be making recommendations on child custody and visitation. The only exception to this would be if a court has specifically appointed a therapist under Evidence Code 730, authorizing the therapist to provide direct feedback (often in the form of a written report) to the court. If you return to custody counseling, you may be asked to sign an authorization to allow the custody counselor to speak with the therapist. Some therapists will provide simple letters listing dates of service and the focus of therapy.
- 7. Working with the other parent to choose the therapist:** A simple suggestion is to have each parent make inquiry phone calls, and then submit three names/phone numbers to the other parent. A less complicated approach is for parents to agree that one parent will take the lead in selecting the therapist.