



Co-Parenting Options™

A communication and decision-making reference for parents, attorneys, and mediators

How to use this handout. Ten options ordered from lower to higher safeguards. Your SA CoParents™ assessment report may recommend one primary pathway and reference several others as your situation changes. Options 1–5 focus on how parents **communicate**; options 6–10 focus on how decisions get **made** when parents disagree.

1 BIFF Communication

BEST FOR *low-to-moderate conflict where direct communication is still appropriate.*

Keep messages **Brief · Informative · Friendly · Firm**. Share only necessary information, focus on the child, avoid emotional language and accusations, respond only to relevant issues, prefer written communication. Ideal for school updates, exchange times, medical appointments, activity schedules.

2 Structured Co-Parenting App

BEST FOR *parents who need documentation and reduced direct interaction.*

Apps: **OurFamilyWizard · TalkingParents · AppClose · SA CoParents™**. Provides a written record, shared calendar, expense ledger, school and medical updates, and reduced conflict through structured messaging.

3 Communication Through Professionals

BEST FOR *high-conflict or coercive relationships where direct communication may not be safe or productive.*

Route through: **attorneys · child's therapist · Parenting Facilitator · Guardian ad Litem · social worker · case manager · school counselor** (educational issues). Use for schedule changes, significant decisions, dispute resolution, and safety concerns.

4 Child-Focused Mediation

BEST FOR *parents who can safely participate with appropriate safeguards.*

Safeguards: **separate arrival/departure, shuttle mediation, separate waiting rooms, virtual mediation, attorney participation, trauma-informed mediator, support person**. Topics: parenting schedules, education, medical, holidays, activities, communication expectations.

5 Parallel Parenting

BEST FOR *ongoing conflict or significant difficulty communicating.*

Characteristics: **limited communication, detailed parenting plan, independent parenting decisions during each parent's time, clearly defined exchanges, structured schedules**. Designed to reduce opportunities for conflict while keeping the child at the center.

6 Medical Decision-Making Plan

BEST FOR *disagreements about healthcare.*

Primary decision maker (one parent has authority per court order) · **Joint decision-making** (consult before major decisions) · follow **pediatrician** recommendation · follow **specialist** recommendation (developmental pediatrician, neurologist, psychiatrist, OT, SLP, PT) · **Independent Medical Evaluation** for significant disagreement.

7 Mental Health Decision-Making

BEST FOR *disagreements about counseling or behavioral treatment.*

Follow recommendations from the child's **treating therapist**. Consult a **child psychologist** or **child psychiatrist** when appropriate. Request a parenting consultation with the therapist (subject to confidentiality). Seek an **independent mental health evaluation** if needed.

8 Educational Decision-Making

BEST FOR *disagreements about school, IEP, or 504 matters.*

Follow **IEP or ARD team** recommendations · consult teachers and school counselors · obtain educational testing · request an **Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)** where appropriate · work with a **special education advocate**.

9 Tie-Breaker Decision Process

BEST FOR *when parents cannot agree despite reasonable efforts.*

10 Safety Planning

BEST FOR *assessments that identify elevated safety concerns.*

Neutral tie-breakers: **child's pediatrician** (medical) · **treating specialist** (condition-specific) · **licensed child psychologist or therapist** (mental health) · **IEP/ARD team** (educational) · **Parenting Facilitator** · **mediator** for unresolved disputes. Any tie-breaker must be consistent with court orders and legal decision-making authority.

Recommendations may include **exchange at a neutral location**, **third-party transportation**, **supervised exchanges**, **virtual communication only**, no in-person discussions during exchanges, emergency contact procedures, safety planning with a **DV advocate**, and consultation with a family law attorney about parenting arrangements.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

This reference is an educational tool. It is not legal advice, therapy, mediation, or a psychological evaluation. Any decision-making process must be consistent with applicable court orders and each parent's legal decision-making authority. If you are experiencing family violence or coercive control, contact 911 in an emergency or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-7233**.