

# Divorce and Custody Matters

Divorce can be a very troubling and stressful experience for families. Bloom Child Therapists, PLLC has a number of counseling services provided to help children going through the divorce process.

Divorce is a legal process AND an emotional process.

The legal process is for attorneys, judges, guardians ad litem and custody evaluators to handle. The emotional process is where we, as licensed counselors, are here to help.

Unfortunately, it can be confusing as to the many roles different professionals play in the divorce process. We have specific policies in place to address this.

Below are descriptions of the various professionals that may be involved in your divorce and custody case.

The following roles will require you going to other professionals who provide those services:

## Attorneys:

These professionals are there to represent the respective parties' legal rights and navigate the legal process of all aspects of the legal divorce. Often, in order to do their job and represent you in court, attorneys seek witness testimony that will support the case they arguing in court and often will recommend you have your child go into therapy for this purpose, thus the need for this document.

## Guardian ad Litem (GAL):

This is a professional, most often an attorney, with specific training in representing the child's best interest, advocating for the child and providing formal recommendation to the court regarding the child's best interest. The GAL is appointed officially by the court.

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## Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA):

Similar to a GAL, they are appointed by the court to advocate for a child's best interest.

## Child Legal Representative (CLR):

A legal attorney, appointed by the court who represents the best interests of the child with respect to the child's custody, the allocation of parental responsibilities, support for the child, the child's property, parenting time, or any other issue related to the child that is identified by the legal representative of the child or the appointing court.

## Custody Evaluator:

This professional is a licensed psychologist who administers psychological testing of the parents and assesses the children to provide recommendation to the court about custody and what is in the best interest of the children based on psychological expert opinion.

## Parent Coordinator (PC):

The overall objective of parenting coordination is to assist high conflict parents to implement their parenting plan, to monitor compliance with the details of the plan, to resolve conflicts regarding their children and the parenting plan in a timely manner, and to protect and sustain safe, healthy, and meaningful parent-child relationships.

Parenting coordination is a quasi-legal, mental health, alternative dispute resolution process that combines assessment, education, case management, conflict management and sometimes decision-making functions. Usually a trained, licensed mental health professional.

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## Forensic Investigator:

This is a specifically trained individual within law enforcement, child advocacy centers, or DFCS who is assigned to interview and investigate concerns of child abuse and neglect. The information gathered by this professional is available to the court for inspection and sometimes testimony.

## Co-Parenting Counselor:

Co-parenting counseling allows parents an opportunity to talk about the best interests of their children in a neutral environment and, when appropriate, to get input and advice from a professional who is experienced in working with children and families of divorce.

Issues ranging from custody schedules to day-to-day parenting can be discussed and parents can be kept 'on track' when their discussion begins to drift from parenting issues to personal/marital issues that need to be kept distinct from the best needs of their child(ren).

This is ONLY appropriate for divorcing/divorced couples who do NOT have high levels of conflict. Co-Parenting Counselors do NOT provide custody recommendations or testify in court.

## Individual Therapist or Coach for Adults:

Adults often benefit from receiving counseling support when going through or recovering from divorce. This professional provides a confidential relationship and space to help adults deal with emotions, decision-making, managing stress and the healing process. This professional will NOT testify in court as this can only be damaging to the client and the client's privacy is protected by law.

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## Divorcing Couples Counselor:

In some cases couples truly desire to end their marriage amicably. In these cases counseling with the couple helps the couple to have closure, heal hurt places in the relationship, and learn how to communicate as co-parents. This counselor would never testify in court because these clients don't go to court to divorce.

The following roles in which we are able to serve at Bloom Child Therapists:

## Child Therapist/Play Therapist:

Children benefit from having a place and a space to work through their emotions about their parents' divorce. Often, young children do not have the words to express what they are feeling but the feelings can be played out and worked through in play therapy. Older children benefit from talking about the divorce and gaining support and insight from the counseling relationship.

This professional provides a safe and confidential space for children to express and work through their emotions and feelings. Parents are provided parenting recommendations as part of the therapy.

The child therapist can provide an interview and/or a summary of treatment with the GAL or the Custody Evaluator but it is NOT in the child's best interest for a therapist to testify in court as it can destroy the therapeutic relationship and hurt the child causing the child to feel betrayed.

Child therapists do NOT provide any opinion regarding custody. Child therapists report suspected or disclosed abuse to proper authorities which may lead to a forensic investigation/interview but child therapists do not issue opinions on whether or not abuse has occurred.

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## Parent-Child Therapist:

This professional focuses on assisting parents and children in strengthening and healing their relationship. The parent is the identified client but the relationship between the parent and child is the focus and sessions take place with parent and child together.

**Note:** we do not provide Reintegration Therapy. You will want to seek services from a therapist who is specifically trained in this type of therapy.

Again, Bloom Child Therapists ONLY provides the latter two services listed above and we will refer you outside of our offices to other professionals if the other listed services are needed.

We are very careful to make clear what our role is in supporting your family through the divorce process. Our role is to help with the emotional aspects of the divorce.

## More About Our Child Therapy Policies

When we are serving as child therapists, we are dedicated to being neutral and non-biased. When working with child clients we communicate with both parents equally, providing identical reports and communications.

We require both divorcing parents to provide consent for therapy to be provided with a child before a child can be seen. Both divorcing parents of the minor child(ren) are the legal client of record.

If an attorney contacts us, we are required to have both parents sign a written waiver and release before we can speak with anyone other than the client(s) of record. Please note that if your legal representative subpoenas us to court requiring us to prepare for court related activity, all time spent preparing for court, travel time, time in court will be billed at rate of \$500 per hour.