

## Child and Family Counseling Group

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### What You Can Expect From Your Child Specialist Five-way Meeting

The Collaborative Divorce Process that you have chosen offers you, as parents, the unique opportunity to hear and appreciate feedback from your children in a professional but conversational manner that keeps your children's views and their needs foremost in the process.

The Child Specialist will have talked with each of you individually, met with your children at least once, and, if possible, contacted significant other adults who know your child and are able to provide important additional information in helping the professionals involved better understand your child. Whether this information is from teachers, pediatricians, childcare professionals, or other close relatives, it adds to the "picture" that the Child Specialist obtains from both of you, your child, and your coaches.

After talking with your coaches and getting any additional information from them that helps in this process, a five-way meeting is scheduled to discuss the child and his or her needs.

At that meeting all involved, especially the parents and Child Specialist, discuss each child with a goal of understanding your child's unique personality, strengths, coping skills, reaction to the divorce and delivers any direct feedback the child has for each parent. Parents are welcomed to share any concerns they may have as well as give additional feedback and knowledge about their child. The goal is to have the child "come alive" in the room as much as possible without actually being physically present. Often parents bring pictures of their child.

Once the feedback is given, the meeting is open for questions about how to best meet the child's needs in the current situation as well as in the future. While the Child Specialist is there as a resource for the parents and will offer suggestions that include information about children's reactions to divorce, the developmental stage of the child, the child's unique characteristics as well as wants or needs the child may have expressed directly, he or she does not give recommendations or create the parenting plan itself.

The coaches, after participating in the meeting, will begin to help the parents structure a co-parenting plan that takes into consideration the information previously provided in the five-way meeting. The document that is created is a unique one that ultimately reflects each child's needs.

That document which specifies the more formal "custodial" arrangements (referred to in Collaborative as the "time share") is then filed along with other agreements you have made (your Marital Settlement Agreement) with the court. The most important part, however, is the joint effort you have made as parents to create a plan that reflects not only your needs and wants but also those of your child as well. Children invariably benefit from this effort and the experience of having their own voice considered as part of the decision-making.

Thanks to both of you for giving them this opportunity.