

Patricia Lane • Lawyer/Chartered Mediator, Parenting Coordinator
And Convener, Shared Care Coparenting Support*

Shared Care Co-Parenting Support
Some important principles

A. Description

The research is now clear that children whose parents work together in a functioning alliance do much better than children whose parents are unable to build this bridge between them. You have chosen to aim higher than merely containing your conflict. If you can build this bridge, you have no need for the SCCPS process or even for a Parenting Coordinator! That is our shared goal.

This will involve change as you seek to improve your relationship. Changing your behaviour is hard. Since your children's wellbeing is at stake, your timeline is short. You choose to speed up the change by getting skilled coaching. SCCPS coaches support you to change the beliefs and attitudes which underlie your present behaviour which may threaten the parental alliance – so you work as quickly as possible to build the bridge between you that your children need to develop to their potential. Changing your behaviour is not easy. It is much easier to focus on the negative contribution the other parent makes! SCCPS encourages you to work on the changes *you* need to make, confident that your coparent is also being supported to make the changes they need.

B. Use of coaches is optional

Even if you contract to use SCCPS, your use of coaches continues to be optional. If at any time you wish to stop using a coach and work with me directly to merely contain your conflict or help you both organize your children's lives, I am willing to assume that role. Whether this needs to be a joint decision depends on your particular contract. If it is not a joint decision your invoices will be disproportionate to reflect the increased use you will make of my time. Working with me directly is appropriate if all you wish to do is have assistance containing your conflict and organizing the life of your family. It may even be less expensive. For those parents who do not any longer wish to try for the goal of the parental alliance, it may be the more appropriate choice.

C. Coaches' role and mandate

SCCPS coaches have a very specific and limited mandate: To support the building and maintenance of a parental alliance. As long as you are using coaches it is my expectation that you will use the issues about which you disagree as "learning laboratories" for discovering how to improve and change your relationship as coparents.



1774 Armstrong St., Victoria BC V8R 5S6

Tel: 250-598-3992 • Fax: 250-598-2001

Email: plane@patricialane.bc.ca ❖ <http://www.patricialane.bc.ca>

Member of the B.C. Mediator Roster (Civil & Family), the ICBC Mediation Roster and the B.C. Parenting Coordination Roster

* denotes Law Corporation

D. Coach recommendations in decision making

If an issue comes to me for decision making or mediation, I am very likely to ask your coaches and child specialist for a recommendation for process, and often content, of decisions. However, if both of you agree that you do not want your coaches to have input, I will not refer back to them. You are very much in control of this relationship. The coaches are there to support you. But as long as you are in a coaching relationship you agree to meet with them when they ask you to do so until a functional parental alliance has formed. If you stop working with your coaches but do not formally opt out of the coaching process, I may take that as a sign that you are not truly interested in doing the sometimes very hard work involved in changing the way you relate to your coparent. Everything in the SCCPS process is on the record unless specifically stated otherwise and we will all be watching with interest to see how you and your coparent express your commitment beyond mere words. I am very pleased to report that I am working with several families where a parental alliance is forming after quite a short time.

E. The role of the SCCPS Convener

As the SCCPS Convenor, I am included in all the communication so I know what is going on in case I do have to intervene. While some parents worry that this adds to the cost, it is actually pretty marginal. I am a very fast reader and am looking for certain things when I read such as benchmarking to mark progress, regularity of meetings issue resolution, etc. It is important if I am to know enough about the file to stay abreast of the process. I have to know when you agree about things and make sure I have a record of those agreements.

If parents want to short-circuit the coaching process and just ask me for decision they are free to do so unless I have made an Order to use coaches for a period of time or until a particular outcome occurs. While occasionally I may direct that you see a coach for extra support if you have neglected to follow a previous Order for example, I generally only make coaching Orders if both of you agree.

If using coaches is too slow to produce a decision, please let me know and ask me to intervene. I will usually ask your coaches for a recommendation but I am the decision maker. I take the coaches ideas very seriously but I have from time to time made decisions that they did not recommend. Either of you is free at any time to ask me for any decision. I do not have to make it but I do have to take your request seriously.

Unless there is some extra-ordinary circumstance such as the children being unsafe, I will not make a decision if both of you ask me not to do so. We can then talk about what process you would like to use to increase the chances that you will resolve it yourselves which I will usually wholeheartedly support.

Finally, I will not make a decision unless I have talked with or heard from you both in some meaningful way. If you perceive this is not the case please let me know. I am obliged to, and will willingly revisit the decision in that case. Listening to your views can be as a result of a telephone call or email or a letter or submission or a formal meeting or an informal chat. But it is important to me that you feel that I have paid attention to your concerns, even if I do not agree that they should form the basis of the decision.

F. Costs

It is impossible to say how much this will cost. Each family is different. Some families incur costs only at the beginning while they get to know their coaches, hear the first Voice for the Child(ren) report and work out some outstanding issues. Then they have the costs of whatever ongoing support they need from their coaches but gradually learn how to alter their own behaviours to accommodate each other better secure in the understanding that if they do have an impasse they have a support team to help the family. Others have one parent who takes a long time to learn the skills. In those cases I often apportion more of the costs to the parent who is slowing up the bridge building. But even the very high conflict parents spend far less than they would have in their lawyers offices which is where they would be if the did not SCCPS. Plus they feel better knowing they spent that money at least attempting to help their children rather than on a court process we know hurts them. In every family that has worked in the SCCPS process after a very short period of time the children are less stressed. I do monitor all the invoices to attempt to develop strategies to contain costs.

G. Parent's rights

It is important to me that you know you have rights as well as obligations in the SCCPS process. They include the right to:

- talk to me, meet with me and to otherwise communicate directly with me;
- have input into decisions;
- use coaches and to choose not do so;
- consult with the child specialist about anything you wish;
- seek to redesign the terms of our contract, and if your coparent and I agree, to do so;
- ask me to make a decision or otherwise intervene;
- ask me not to make a decision or otherwise intervene;
- ask for written reasons for any decision I do make;
- appeal my decisions to the courts; and
- receive detailed timely invoices.

H. Grievances

If you are troubled by some aspect of the relationship between us, I encourage you to raise it directly with me. It is very much in my interests to ensure the process works well for you and your coparent. I enjoy a very good relationship with most lawyers, so please don't hesitate to ask them to call me or to ask your coach to do so if you wish, but direct communication is infinitely preferable and we can usually sort things out quite quickly. My fees for this work will take into account the nature of the problem.

General caution: This note is a general notice sent to answer some questions that have been raised by parents or coaches. If anything in it conflicts with your contract, the contract prevails.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to call me or email me.