



If you have become involved in the court process, you are likely at a crossroads moment. What is a crossroads moment? A moment where the decisions you make may have an impact for weeks, months or years ahead. Many people don't know that there are several ways to handle your dispute other than going to court. Take a moment and ask yourself these questions:

- ⇒ Most parents find it hard to think about their children as adults, but take a second to think about this: When your children are 30 years old, what do you want your children to remember about how you handled the disagreement between you and the other parent? What would you want them to say about how you handled the conflict?
- ⇒ Parents are the experts on their children. Given what you know about your child or children, what is the best way to resolve your dispute?

How you answer these questions can support you in making the right decision for your family in a crossroads moment. There are 4 crossroads: Withdraw, Agree, Mediate, and Court. **Which way will you choose?**

WITHDRAW

Sometimes, after a petition is filed, parents talk and decide further court involvement is not needed to resolve the dispute. Parents can withdraw the petition. In this option, parents work out the conflict without the court being involved with their family. To withdraw a petition, the person(s) filing the petition(s), must go to the Clerks office.

AGREE

After a petition is filed, some parents talk and reach an agreement between themselves. They also want to put these agreements in writing . Parents can go to the Clerks office and complete a "Consent to Enter Custody/Parenting Time/Visitation Order". To learn more about this option, please call the Clerk's office, 804-748-1379.

MEDIATE

Many people use mediation as an option to resolve their dispute. A mediator is there to manage a future focused problem solving conversation to create a plan. Mediation has many benefits:

- ⇒ No cost.
- ⇒ Faster resolution.
- ⇒ Parents construct an agreement together; having maximum control over decisions about their children's future.
- ⇒ Once a Judge reviews the mediated agreement, it can be signed and is considered an enforceable order of the court.

COURT

In this option, parents are asking an outsider to the family (a Judge) to make decisions about the future. Judges will do the best they can in making these decisions for you but it is important to consider the following:

- ⇒ Court can unintentionally increase conflict between family members.
- ⇒ Judges make decisions based on the law; not on how people feel about the other parent.
- ⇒ You are the expert about your child. Judges often believe parents should make the decisions about their children's future.
- ⇒ The court process can be stressful for the whole family. The long term impacts of this stress can be felt by children for months and years to come.