Session Minutes: An Essential Tool to Achieving Your Best Outcome Possible

By Andrea M. Eichorn, JD

Session Minutes:

1) **Prevent misunderstanding between all participants**
2) **Efficiently keep non-attending professionals informed of progress**
3) **Provide all participants with a record of what was discussed over time**
4) **Can be an easier way to digest complex or voluminous information**
5) **Memorialize agreements in written form**
6) **Identify homework to be completed and resources to be gathered by each client and professionals, ensuring information is properly and efficiently gathered**
7) **Separate out the information that is being exchanged from the emotional overtones of the clients' communication styles**

A common practice for non-adversarial professionals is to draft minutes of what was discussed during each meeting. The minutes usually contain a brief synopsis of each issue covered, what both people expressed about the issue, legal information if given, and what the agreed upon next step is to resolve the issue. Minutes also contain homework, or what could be called a To Do List, for both clients and professionals, and finally a confirmation of all future scheduled sessions, and the agenda for the upcoming session.

1) Prevent misunderstanding between all participants

It is a collaborative professional's job to try and make sure that assumptions are swept aside and people are all talking about the same things—understanding things similarly—but it is impossible to do this all the time.

If each person approves the minutes, it ensures that all participants in the process agree with their perception of what transpired during the session.

2) Efficiently keep non-attending professionals informed of progress

In the Collaborative Practice process, minutes are the most efficient way for professionals to communicate the content of their work with the clients to the other professionals. Since they are creating minutes for both the clients and the professionals, the clients participate in creating the content being communicated to the other professionals.

3) Provide all participants with a record of what was discussed over time

Since the Collaborative Practice process, is usually much faster than the adversarial process, but takes the merging of three or more people's schedules, there can be breaks in the rhythm of the sessions.

Minutes are a useful tool to review: they provide details about where we have been, were we are now, and what needs to be done to finish the process after a break in the process has occurred.

4) Can be an easier way to digest complex or voluminous information

During a Collaborative meeting, topics often have emotional aspects coupled with complicated legal or factual content. This combination can lead clients to leave from a two-hour session with the feeling of, "What just happened?" All that was discussed can seem a bit like a blur. Having minutes ensures that all the factual content is captured and can be reviewed

5) Memorialize agreements in written form

Agreements are the foundation of a functional collaborative process. For clients to have faith in the process Agreements need to be understood and adhered to. Therefore, it is important to make sure that both people made the same agreement. Putting agreements in writing often clears up misunderstandings or highlights the need for more clarity.

6) Identify homework to be completed and resources to be gathered by each client and professionals, ensuring information is properly and efficiently gathered

Nothing is more irritating for a Collaborative client than hearing that the time they spent collecting documents or creating an asset list was wasted, because the other client did the same work. Or another irritant is collecting the wrong information, or out of date information, or information from the wrong source. To prevent duplication of efforts, or wasted effort, a homework and resource list is part of concise minutes.

7) Separate out the information being exchanged from the emotional overtones of the clients' communication styles

Since professionals are not emotionally involved in the issues being discussed, it is easier for them to compile the factual events of the meeting, and filter out the emotional overtones. For clients this can be very challenging to do during the meeting, and they may take away with them a lot of emotional content that is not productive to reflect on. The filtering process used to create factual minutes from a session can make them a valuable resource for digesting the information that needs to be heard and understood ,