

PARENTING AND DIVORCE CLASS.COM

Parenting Plan Checklist

Parenting plans may be developed by parents, their attorneys, with the help of a mediator or when parents have a Parenting Coordinators appointed. Many of the components contained in a parenting plan are listed in this checklist. Although most parenting plans share similar components, some may not be as detailed as others.

Custody Arrangement:

In a situation with no Domestic Violence and parents live within 50 miles or each other there are three Parental Responsibilities to choose: Shared Parental Responsibility, Shared Parental Responsibility with Decision Making Authority or Sole Parental Responsibility. Questions include parental responsibilities of each parent.

Shared Parental Responsibility:

It is in the best interests of the child(ren) that the parents confer and **jointly** make all major decisions affecting the welfare of the child(ren). Major decisions include, but are not limited to, decisions about the child(ren)'s education, healthcare, and other responsibilities unique to this family.

Shared Parental Responsibility with Decision Making Authority:

It is in the best interests of the children that the parents confer and attempt to agree on the major decisions involving the children. If the parents are unable to agree, the authority for making major decisions regarding the children shall be as follows:

Education/Academic decisions	_____	Mother	_____	Father
Non-emergency health care	_____	Mother	_____	Father
Other: {Specify} _____	_____	Mother	_____	Father

Sole Parental Responsibility:

It is in the best interests of the children that the _____ Mother _____ Father shall have sole authority to make major decisions for the children. It is detrimental to the children to have shared parental responsibility.

Time-Sharing Arrangement/Living Arrangement

_____ Include the parenting time schedule for the school year.

_____ Establish a protocol in the event a parent is unable to provide care for their child during their scheduled parenting time. Determine if the parents will first offer the other parent the opportunity to care for the child/ren. Determine the number of hours. This is commonly known as "first right of refusal." Some high-conflict parents may not be able to successfully implement "first right of refusal". "First right of refusal" requiring several exchanges within a small time frame, may cause undue stress for the family and is not recommended. However, some parents may be able to exercise "first right of refusal" when it results in an overnight which limits the exchanges.

_____ Determine provisions for trade-offs if changes to the schedule are needed.

_____ If adjustments lead to one parent losing scheduled parenting time, determine the method of and time frame for make-up of missed time (within one month of missed time).

_____ Establish the procedure that will be used when there are school delays/cancellations and absences from school due to illness.

Summer Schedule and Summer Vacations:

Some parents may not want to determine a separate summer schedule. Length and timing of vacation is usually determined by the child's age, developmental stage, temperament and school schedule. Clarify that the vacation period includes their regular time-share and is not added to the regular time-share arrangement, and may not occur over the other parent's holiday. For instance, if the parent's regular time-share is Saturday and Sunday and they are taking their vacation beginning on Saturday, the Saturday and Sunday are the first two days of their vacation period. Whenever possible, use number of "overnights" versus "days" such as "seven overnights from Friday at 6:00 pm until the following Friday at 6:00 pm." Also encourage vacation periods to overlap with their normal weekend rotation whenever possible.

- _____ Discuss limitations regarding location of vacations such as in/out of state/country.
- _____ Establish when vacations will occur – summer months and/or during the school year. If vacation occurs during the school year, designate the vacationing parent as the person responsible to contact the school, complete the necessary paperwork for the school, collect homework as well as ensure the child/ren completes the homework prior to the child/ren's return to school.
- _____ Determine the number of vacation periods each parent will enjoy.
- _____ Define the vacation period by days and nights rather than one-week.
- _____ Decide if vacation periods will be non-consecutive.
- _____ Clarify whether or not the vacation period will occur over the parents' regular weekend.
- _____ Identify a deadline for a written notification of the vacation period to the other parent.
- _____ Determine the time in which the vacationing parent provides the other parent with a written itinerary of travel dates/times, location, method of transportation, hotel and flight information, emergency telephone contact.
- _____ In the event that parents will share an equal amount of weeks during the summer, determine how the week will be designated if the child/ren go to summer camp.

Transfers:

If parents are unable to control their behavior at transfers, design exchanges at the beginning and end of daycare/school or at other neutral locations. Do not plan transfers at police stations unless there is a documented risk to either parent/child.

- _____ Determine how parents will share transportation.
- _____ Establish the location of the transfers.
- _____ If parents are meeting at a neutral location, determine the length of time each parent shall wait for the children, and identify the procedure for getting the children if the parent leaves after having waited the designated period of time.
- _____ If high conflict parents, consider outlining the details regarding the transfer such as, remaining in the car, and saying good bye to the children prior to the transfer.

Holiday Schedule:

Holiday schedules generally take priority over the regularly scheduled living arrangement.

It is recommended that days not be used in the definitions of holidays since each school system varies on when they get out of school on a particular holiday. For instance, Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving can become "the day the children are released from school for the Thanksgiving holiday until ..." Mother's and Father's Day do not alternate. Holidays can be split, alternate in odd and even years as well as be split and alternate morning and afternoon.

- _____ Determine which holidays the parents want to include in their holiday schedule.
- _____ Define each holiday with beginning and ending dates and times.
- _____ Establish if Mother's and Father's Day will include the whole weekend or just Sunday.

_____ Explore options for holidays that may vary during the year such as the parents' and child's birthday. Determine how the time will be spent for week days and weekends.

_____ When the holiday schedule interrupts the normal rotation, discuss with the parents if they want to prevent either parent from having more than two weekends in a row. Determine how this be accomplished.

_____ Indicate when the child's birthday will be shared. Also determine who will host the birthday party for friends and classmates in order to prevent having friends invited to two parties. If alternating years, this parent would plan, invite and pay for the child's "peer" party that year. Determine if both parents will be invited and if the party will be scheduled for a day that is part of their time-share arrangement.

_____ Determine if they have any special religious observances that they will like to include in their holiday schedule.

Extracurricular Activities:

_____ Discuss any limitations on the number of activities each child will participate in each year.

_____ Decide which parent will schedule and pay for the activities. (Payment of activities may be part of child support. It may not be indicated in the court order).

_____ Discuss transportation to and from the activity. The custodial parent (parent with the child) usually provides transportation.

_____ Determine if there will be any restrictions regarding adult attendance at extracurricular activities.

Parental Communication Expectations:

Encourage parents to notify the co-parent when they are traveling out-of-town without the children in the event of an emergency or in case the child would like to contact the absent parent.

_____ Determine frequency and method of communication, such as phone calls, e-mail, text, facsimile, meeting in public places, written correspondence or "Our Family Wizard" or "talkingparents.com".

_____ Discuss deadlines, such as written requests for change in schedule made 72 hours prior to the anticipated change in schedule with the receiving parent responding within 12 hours."

_____ Specify exact time for weekly parental communication.

_____ Designate a parent that will initiate contact with the other parent.

_____ Clarify any important communication ground rules including topics that are off limits.

_____ Clarify when both parents should return to the parenting coordinator to assist with issues they are unable to resolve on their own.

_____ Develop a system with deadlines for exchange of communication:

_____ non-time sensitive parenting information

_____ time-sensitive information

_____ emergencies

_____ activity schedules, report cards, etc.

_____ school records, information and activity schedule

_____ notification and outcome of appointments

Inclusion Expectations:

- _____ Determine the parent who will schedule routine appointments.
- _____ Decide if one or both parents will attend well check-ups or consultations.
- _____ Consider parental behavior and decide if both parents will attend all school and extra-curricular activities and parent- teacher conferences.
- _____ Discuss both parents' name and information on all emergency cards.
- _____ Establish parental involvement in school field trips and parties.
- _____ Decide how children will be transported to therapy appointments, and if parents would like to alternate taking the child.

Parent-Child Communication:

- _____ Determine the time and frequency of phone calls between the child and absent parent.
- _____ Decide who will initiate the call: absent parent or child.
- _____ Determine how calls will be returned when a parent is unable to reach the child.
- _____ Designate if and when the child can call the absent parent.
- _____ Determine if privacy for the child's calls will be expected.

Parental Behaviors:

Consider outlining the Divorce Rules in this section. Any expectations the parents have of each other should be included in this section. Keep in mind that some of their expectations cannot be monitored without an involved parenting coordinator. Be sure to inquire if these expectations will also apply to future stepparents or significant others.

- _____ Determine if parents will commit to mature behavior in front of their child. If so, be specific.
- _____ Decide if parents want a moral clause regarding overnight guests.
- _____ Determine if parents want a travel expectation regarding significant others.
- _____ Discuss the option of significant others and other family members transporting the child/ren.

Safety Issues:

Ask parents to consider safety issues. For example, wearing helmets for certain activities, riding in the front seat of a car, riding ATVs, smoking around the children, internet safety programs, movie/games/videos/music ratings, and guns in the home.

Financial Responsibilities:

Generally, financial responsibilities of both parents will be determined through the legal system, particularly child support, childcare fees and medical costs. In many jurisdictions, there are written guidelines that help determine financial matters. In situations of shared parental responsibility it is not unusual for the parents to share all expenses related to child-rearing. Child support may or may not be designated. If you are unsure on the legal expectations regarding financial responsibilities, consult with a legal professional.

- _____ Establish parental responsibility to purchase special attire, teacher gifts, yearbooks, and child's car.
- _____ Clarify how and when the parents will exchange receipts and make these payments.
- _____ Explore areas that may be separate from child support. For instance, clothes and overnight camps.

Optional Concerns:

_____ Decide how clothes will be handled and returned to the primary home. Or, decide if clothes will be provided in both homes.

_____ Determine if the child will be permitted to move items between homes and identify these items.

_____ Explore commitment to religious education.

_____ Designate whether or not both parents will worship at the same time as the child and if so, clarify the arrangements.

_____ Determine how items left behind by the child/ren will be transported to the child. Will the parent with the "forgotten" item be responsible to return the item and how?

_____ Discuss the rules and responsibilities the parents want to support in both homes.

_____ Decide if the parents may use corporal punishment.

_____ Determine if parents want to include a provision for maximum distance between homes.

_____ Discuss provisions for continued contact with former step-siblings, stepparents and extended family members on both sides of the child/ren's family.