

Co-Parenting Plan / Essential Elements High-Conflict

Create a Parenting Plan

The Parenting Plan is a document that details the agreements the parents reached on how they will care for their child/ren.

Before entering negotiations with the other parent, each parent must determine what parenting arrangements will be in their child/ren's best interest

When parents communicate without hostility, a parenting plan may include general guidelines that leave room for accommodations to the changing needs of the child/ren and the households.

When parents have difficulty communicating with each other and experience repetitive conflicts, a parenting plan must clearly define (with specific details) each parent's responsibility to the child/ren and to the other parent during their parenting time and during transition of the child/ren from one parent to the other.

When parenting by one or both parents is affected by issues such as alcohol/chemical dependency, power imbalance, domestic abuse, jail time, a parenting plan will include specific measures to insure a safe access for the child to each parent.

Elements of a parenting plan are listed below by categories.

Communication between parents

1. **Refer to Tip Sheet titled:** [“Communication Guide High Conflict Co-Parenting”](#)
2. **Method:** email, texting, telephone, Skype/Face-time, In-person meeting. No discussions in front of children, In-Person communication, no phone call if one or both parent raise voice, shame, criticize or coerce the other parent
3. **Frequency:** Texting only about emergencies pertaining to the care of the children and last minute changes to drop off and pickup related issues
4. **Response time:** emails within 48 or 72 hours respond to texts within 2 hours
5. **Summary of child experience during parenting time for continuity of care:** frequency and content depends on child's needs and capacity to self-advocate: No In-Person communication. Consistently use same method, email message or notebook that travels with child. In high-conflict, use My Family Wizard™
6. **Medical Emergencies:** Inform other parent within 1 hour
7. **How to refer to each other:** “My child's parent”(father/mother) -NOT “My Ex”

Transitions

1. Pick-up and drop-off: Specify day and hour, for school days, vacations, holidays, school days off during school year, summer vacation, winter vacation, spring break
2. Location: other parent walk in house, escort to porch, escort to curb, children walk from car to home, children walk between homes. If need to transition in public space away from home, use public spaces such as coffee shops, libraries, playground, etc. Do not use police station
3. Rules for parents' behavior and verbal communication during transition: must be cordial, friendly, business like, no verbal interaction other than a short polite greeting, and the immediate care of the child(ren), no discussions about finances, pending issues, changes to schedule or any decisions, no raising the voice, shouting, slamming doors, throwing objects, making faces, rolling eyes, etc.
4. Who does the transportation: Parent picks up. For toddlers, it is recommended that the parent caring for child always drops off child to prevent triggering separation anxiety. It is easier for the toddler to arrive to a new location and parent then to leave a home and parent
5. Time elapse before returning to a parent depends on:
 - a. Child's age. Diverging attachment theories on this issue
 - b. Parenting capacity of each parent
 - c. Child's relationship with each parent and household members
 - d. The presence and impact on child of arguments between parents
 - e. The stress caused to the child of interrupting routine, transferring belongings and materials used for daily living activity, extracurricular activities, school, and social life
 - f. The distance traveled between the homes
 - g. Etc.

Parenting time

1. Days of the week, start and end time (indicate specific hour and minute). Specify where child is and who is in charge of child at every moment of the day. Specify who has parenting time when the school is out during school year and during spring, holiday and summer breaks

Reasons and Procedures to make temporary changes to parenting schedule

1. Illness at transition: can the child transfer to other parent when sick? What are criteria?

2. Rules for rescheduling or swapping when parenting time was missed due to work or leisure
3. Right of first refusal during the day, evening, night for sleepover, grandparents, baby sitters, and step parents/siblings, new families. Rules differ for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school age, preteens, and teens

Holidays, special days, vacations

1. Fill a form for all Holidays, special days
2. Time and place of transition. Specify start and end time. Who picks up or drops off
3. Monday holidays: attached to weekend or alternate which parent has parenting time on that Holiday (alternate even and odd years)
4. Religious holidays: how to transition? Alternate years? Religious holiday has precedent over regular parenting schedule?
5. School vacation: when do they begin and end, day and time. When school lets out until school starts? Specify start and end time.
6. Summer vacation: number of weeks, consecutive or not, first and second choice assignments date of notice, 90 days prior to taking a vacation? Exception for special opportunities?
7. When Holiday schedule ends, what happens to regular schedule?
8. Determine if need rule where no parent has children 3 consecutive weekends in a row, rules for continuation or change in usual rotation of weekends

Child/ren's birthday / Parent's birthdays

- 1) Child birthdays: alternate where child spends BD each year, each parent has a block of time on day of BD, how do parents host the BD party, together, or alternate each year? Can parent attend if other parent hosts party with child's friends? Who pays for BD party? Where are received gifts at BD party kept?
- 2) Parent birthday: does child attend the parent's BD celebration even if falls on a non-parenting day? Or must parent organize celebration for when child is with that parent?

Mother's Day / Father's Day

- 1) Mother's day: does child attends if falls on father's weekend? Does child visit for a few hours? From what time to what time? Who drops off and pick up?
- 2) Father's day: does child attends if falls on mother's weekend? Does child visit for a few hours? From what time to what time? Who drops off and pick up?

Extra-curricular activities

1. Must both parents agree before enrolling? Or does one parent defers decision to other parent?
2. Must parent schedule activity only when child is with that parent?
3. For invitation sent to one parent for activities that will occur during the other parent's parenting time: does parent consult with other parent before committing child to an activity such as a friend's birthday party. Or forward request to the parent who will be parenting that day for that parent to respond directly to the person inviting child.
4. Who pays, how is cost divided between parents? PICS?
5. Rules for attending sport games, recitals, concerts, special events related to activity (e.g. ice cream social). Must parent attend only on their parenting time? May parent attend if not on parenting day? Will both parents sit together? May extended family and Significant Other attend?
6. How will you instruct child about selected rules and expected behavior from both parents and child?
7. Will child be encouraged, allowed to acknowledge the other parent while with one parent?
8. How will you prevent child to face conflict of allegiance to one parent over the other? (see Child's Greatest Dilemma form)

Parent-teacher conferences

1. Will both parents attend parent-teacher conferences together or will they schedule different conference times? Will school accommodate?
2. Will child attend parent-teacher conference? How?
3. Which will be considered primary residence where all school material will be sent?
4. How will the parent receiving school updates on child's behavior and performance inform other parent? PDF copy via e-mail within 72 hours? Copy mailed to other parent's address?

Clothing and equipment

1. Who buys clothing? Is parent receiving child support buying all clothing including those kept at other parent's home?
2. Does each parent maintain a full set of clothing?
3. When child transitions from school, how is clothing taken to the other home?

4. Rules, who washes, how is clothing returned, washed? Dirty? Dropped off or picked up?
5. How is sport equipment transferred from one house to the other? (e.g. hockey equipment, musical instrument such as violin, bicycles, scooter, skis?)
6. How are toys transferred from one house to the other? Table games, stuffed animals, electronic toys, hand held devices, laptops? When child transfers from school? When child picked up and dropped off at each home?
7. Who is responsible to replace lost, missing or broken items, clothing, electronic devices?
8. Can child take personal belonging to other parent's home if bought by other parent? E.g. stuffed animals, X-Box games, I-Pad, chargers, and markers?

Day to Day decisions

Routine Medical and Dental Care

1. Who schedule? Who attends? Who drives the child?
2. How is information from the visit communicated to other parent who does not attend visit? Time frame 24 hours? 72 hours?

Emergencies

When is other parent notified? How? Can other parent go to location?

Sick at school around transition time

Priority is picking child up. If within an hour of transition to the other parent's home, the parent who will care for the child will pick up child. Communicate by text.

Travel

1. When travel out of town, how much notice must be given, how much detail about the travel, itinerary and where child is staying? How will parent communicate with child? Schedule, method?
2. When is notarized letter provided?
3. Who holds the passports? Pay for passports?

Major decisions Health, Education, and Religion

1. How are they made?
2. How is information exchanged?

Discipline

1. Will expectations about behavior, performing chores, and disciplines measures be coordinated between the two households?
2. If so how will discussion occur and how is agreement reached?
3. If no cooperative discussion is possible about discipline, will parent inform each other about their practice without expectations that the decisions will be implemented in the other household?
4. How will disagreements about discipline be resolved?

Diet

1. How will parents discuss child's diet?
2. Will parents discuss what should be served at the other parent's house?

TV, Screens, Social Media, video hand held and computer gaming, etc.

How will parent discuss, set and enforce rules about child's use of?

Homework

1. Who is responsible to assist child with homework?
2. What is expectation in each household? How will expectations be discussed between parents?
3. On long term project how will assistance for homework be coordinated?
4. How will homework be completed on weekend?
5. How will information regarding homework be communicated between parents?

Protecting child from exposure to conflict between parents

1. Cordial behavior between parents in front of child.
2. No discussion about any issue for which you are in disagreement
3. No negative verbal or body language toward other parent
4. Parent does not allow negative talk about other parent by anyone in front of child
5. Parent does not belittle the other parent in order to gain credibility or affection of child
6. Parent supports and facilitates the child's relationship with the other parent

Child's safety

Any concern about child's safety and wellbeing must be addressed. Refer to Resource Handout to access services.

Other issues regarding child rearing, involving values, customs, preferences

How will parent discuss, set and implement parenting on the following child care issues?

Inflexible position on how to raise children, how to handle temper tantrums, defiance, commitments to homework and grades in school, when to start potty training, transfer from bottle to sippy cups, how to implement nap schedule, bed time, letting an infant cry to sleep, when to comfort, letting children express anger, explaining reason for decisions to children, how to dress, how much cuddling, promoting distinction versus conformity to group, preventing negative experiences versus letting child experience and find solutions, allowance, purchases, driving, use of public transportation, sleep overs, etc.