

## PARENTING PLAN CHECKLIST

Adapted from *The Psychotherapist as Parent Coordinator in High Conflict Divorce*  
by Boyan & Termini 2005

Many of the components contained in a parenting plan are enumerated in this checklist. Although most parenting plans share similar components, some may not be as detailed as others. This checklist can be used by parents attempting to begin the process of developing their own parenting plan, by family law attorneys and collaborative professionals. Parents should check their local jurisdiction for parenting plan guidelines, typical language and/or requirements.

It is important to remember that the higher the conflict the more detail that should be included into the final document. Using similar transfer times and simplifying parenting plans is also recommended with the higher conflict families. Looking ahead into the future is also important so that the parenting plan will grow with the child and will take into consideration things that may not seem important at the time of the divorce such as the involvement of step parents. Do not use the word “reasonable” or leave points open to interpretation; spell everything out no matter how cooperative parents may seem. Unfortunately, things can change and even cooperative co-parents can hit some rough spots in which their relationship may deteriorate. Minimize the number, if any, of parent-to-parent transfers when the parents are conflicted. Also, it is generally not recommended that high conflict parents include a right of first refusal because this can become very problematic.

### **1. Custody Arrangement**

- Have the parents determined who will have physical custody?
- Has the primary home been designated for the purposes of public school enrollment?

### **2. Joint Legal Custody: Access to Records and Parental Decision Making**

- Have they determined if they will share joint legal custody?
- Will all major parenting decisions be discussed and agreed upon?
- How will they resolve parenting disputes/impasses?

### **Optional:**

- Determine if there will be a tie breaker, and if so on which disputes?
- Indicate within the document that both parents shall have access to school and all medical records

### **3. Time-Sharing Arrangement/Living Arrangement/Parenting Time**

- Indicate the access schedule for each parent for the school year.
- Do they want to have a right of first refusal and if so, over how many hours?
- Determine provisions for trade-offs equal in time and/or agreement to ensure make-up of missed time.

### **4. Summer Schedule**

*The summer schedule takes precedence over the regular schedule and the holiday schedule takes precedence over the regular and the summer schedule. IE Father's Day. Length and timing of vacation is usually determined by the child's age, developmental stage, and school schedule.*

- Do they desire any limitations regarding vacation cites such as in/out of state?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Outline a deadline for each parent to select their vacation dates in writing?
- \_\_\_\_\_ What will their schedule be during the parts of the summer that are not selected as “vacation periods”?
- \_\_\_\_\_ If normally they have a mid-week visit, what will happen when the other parent is out of town?
- \_\_\_\_\_ When they travel out of town, will they share travel information and phone numbers prior to leaving with the child?
- \_\_\_\_\_ If they equally share the summer weeks, how will they do so? And what happens if one child wants to go away to a summer camp? Whose week will the overnight camp be?

#### **4. Transfers**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Which parent will pick up the children? The parent beginning their custodial time or the parent ending their custodial period?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine where the transfers shall take place.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stipulate how long each parent shall wait and what will the procedure be for getting the children if the pick-up parent must leave?
- \_\_\_\_\_ If they are high conflict, consider outlining the details regarding the transfer such as, the pick-up parent shall remain in the car, saying good bye to the children prior to the meeting, etc.

#### **Optional:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Stipulate if the parent can wait in the living room at times of transition and if the child may take the parent briefly to show his or her room (Mild conflict only)

#### **5. Holiday Schedule:**

*Holiday schedules generally take priority over the regularly scheduled living arrangement. We recommend that days not be used in the definitions since each school system may vary on when they get out of school for a particular holiday. IE Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving can become the day the children are released from school for the Thanksgiving holiday until...*

*Discourage parents from breaking up holidays other than the winter holiday which is usually about two weeks. Mother’s and Father’s Day does not alternate but they must determine if it will be only Sunday or the whole weekend. Gay or lesbian parents will have to get creative in order to both share the same day.*

#### **Optional:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ When the holiday schedule interrupts the normal rotation, do they want to prevent either parent from having more than two weekends in a row? How will this be accomplished?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stipulate when the child’s birthday will be held and which parent will host and pay for the child’s birthday on the date of his birth. (peer party only)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine if they have any special religious observances.

#### **6. Extracurricular Activities**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Do they want any limitations on the number of activities per child or per year?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Who will schedule and pay for the activities:
- \_\_\_\_\_ Who will be responsible for transportation to the activity?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Will there be any restrictions regarding adult attendance at extracurricular activities?

#### **7. Parental Communication Expectations**

*See chapter nine for additional information on communications. 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, facsimile, meeting in public places or written correspondence
- \_\_\_\_\_ Design a decision-making procedure regarding choice of physicians and assistance outside routine medical care such as therapy and orthodontia and payment arrangements.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do they want any deadlines included: IE “Written requests for change in schedule must be made 72 hours prior to the anticipated change. Receiving parent must respond “within 12 hours”.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Specify exact time and limits to weekly parental communications.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Designate which parent should 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 parent coordinator to assist with issues.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Develop a system with deadlines for sharing parenting information

- Non time sensitive parenting information
- Time sensitive information
- Emergencies
- Written schedules, report cards, etc.
- Child’s school and activity schedule
- Notification of appointments

**1. Inclusion Expectations:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Have they determined who will schedule the routine appointments?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Will both parents be included in well checkups or consultations?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Will both parents be invited to all school and extracurricular activities?

**Optional:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Would they like to alternate school field trips?
- \_\_\_\_\_ If the child is in therapy will they take turns transporting the child?

**2. Parent to Child Communication**

- \_\_\_\_\_ How often can the non-custodial parent call the children and during what periods of time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine when parents will get returned calls when they are unable to reach the child?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Designate if and when the child can call the absent parent.

**Optional:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine if privacy for the child’s calls will be expected.

**3. Parental Behaviors**

*We encourage spelling out the “Divorce Rules” in this section. Any expectation they want included should be placed in this section. Keep in mind that some of their expectations cannot be monitored without an involved parent coordinator. Be sure to inquire if these expectations will also apply to future step parents or significant others.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Will they commit to mature behavior in front of their child? If so, be specific.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do they want a moral clause regarding overnight guests? Note: high conflict families will need this to be very specific such as spare bedroom, travel, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do they want a travel expectation regarding significant others?

#### **4. Safety Issues**

*Ask parents to consider safety issues. IE Drinking and driving with the children in the car, wearing helmets for certain activities, riding in the back seat, or a provision for guns in the home.*

#### **5. Financial Responsibilities**

*Generally, financial responsibilities of both parents will be determined separately, particularly child support, child care fees and medical costs. Encourage parents to keep these payments separate from other payments. In many jurisdictions, there are written guidelines that help determine financial matters. In situations of joint physical custody it is not unusual for the parents to share all expenses related to child-rearing. Child support may or may not be designated. Therefore, the checklist may or may not be necessary.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine parental responsibility to purchase standard clothing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine parental responsibility to purchase special attire, teacher gifts, yearbooks, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine parental responsibility for fees for service beyond insurance premiums. Consider deductibles and non-covered expenses.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clarify how and when the parents will exchange receipts and reimburse each other.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine type of education: preschool opportunities, public or private education and tutoring and how the costs will be paid.
- \_\_\_\_\_ What exactly will be considered separate from child support? Such as daycare, private school, day camps, after school care, clothing, and overnight camps.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Include the provision of a minimum life insurance policy held by one or both parents in which the children will be named as beneficiaries.

#### **6. Optional Concerns**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are the parents willing to include college expenses? (Some states require this while other states do not.) If so, what expenses will they share and what percent will they be responsible for? Will there be a cap with their local state school as a baseline?
- \_\_\_\_\_ How will clothes be handled and returned to the primary home? Or will they be duplicated in both homes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine if the child will be permitted to move items between homes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Determine commitment to religious education.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If the parents attend the same worship service, designate whether or not both parents will worship at the same time as the child and if so, clarify the arrangements.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are there rules and responsibilities they will support in both homes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Will corporal punishment be used by the parents? Will the biological parent be the only parent to implement consequences for the child or will a future step-parent be allowed to do so?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do they want a provision for maximum distance between homes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ If this is a step family separation, do they want a provision for continued contact with step-siblings and/or step-parents?

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