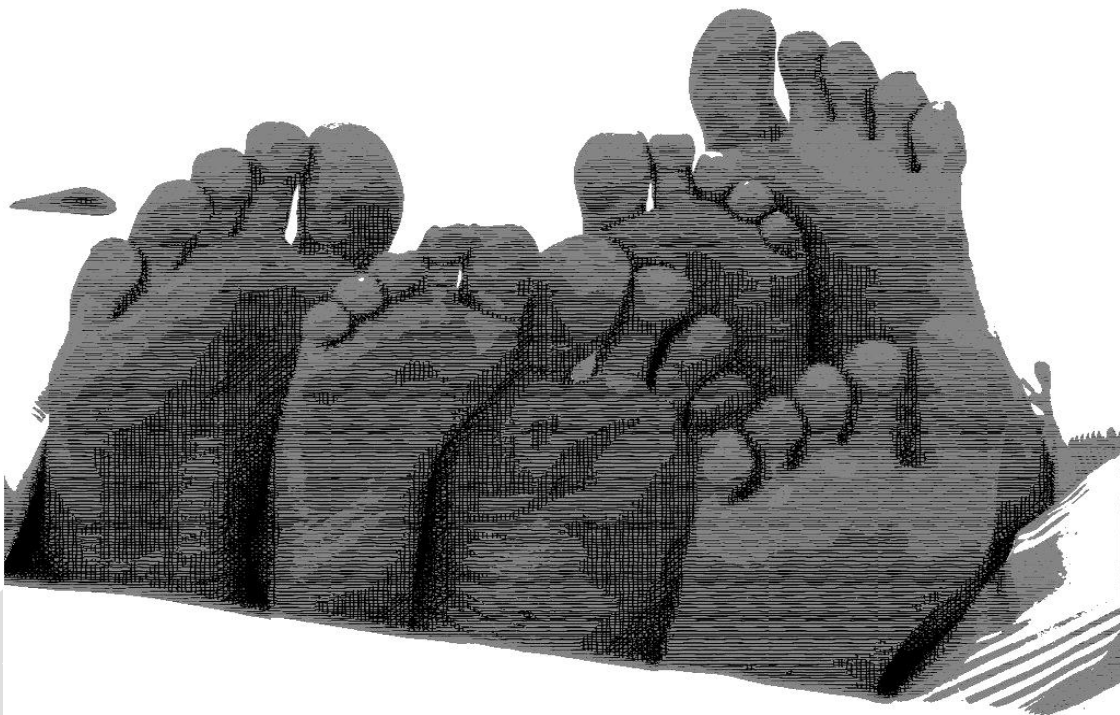


Instructions and Overview
For Your
PARENTING PLAN



12th Judicial Circuit
Manatee, Sarasota, Desoto Counties
Florida

A Planning Guide for Parents Living Apart

One size does not fit all!

INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult challenges facing parents at the time of separation is deciding how they will address issues concerning their children. Each family is different. However, putting the best interest of our children first must come first. Parents often fear that the end of their adult relationship means an end of their child-parent relationship. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.** Parents often do not know that conflict hurts children. **THIS IS ABSOLUTELY TRUE.** Therefore, parents who are concerned about how their separation will effect their children's healthy development are already ahead of the curve.

HONESTLY RECOGNIZING YOUR FAMILY'S SITUATION AND YOUR ABSOLUTE RESPONSIBILITY TO ALWAYS SERVE YOUR CHILDREN'S "BEST INTEREST" IS KEY FOR DEVELOPING A PARENTING PLAN WHICH WILL WORK FOR YOU.

It is not the purpose of this guide to establish a single standard or even an "ideal" parenting arrangement. Likewise, it is beyond the ability of this guide to offer "customized" recommendations for every family. This information is intended to make you think, reflect, discuss, plan and to help you develop a parenting plan for your children's healthy future.

Although this booklet is intended primarily as a guide to parents at the original time of separation or filing of court action, it should continue to serve as a reference as your children grow and your situations change. Parents are encouraged to review their parenting plans as their children reach new developmental stages; as well as, when significant events such as remarriage and relocation are planned.

Designing the Plan...

YOU NEED TO **HONESTLY** ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW TO SERVE THE "BEST INTEREST" OF YOUR CHILDREN.

REMEMBER YOU MAY NEED TO PROVE YOUR ANSWERS IN COURT.

STEP ONE: FAMILY ASSESSMENT

Has the other parent:

1. acted as though violent behavior against you or your child(ren) is all right?
2. damaged or destroyed property during an argument?
3. hurt a pet out of anger?
4. been so sad or upset they could not care for themselves or others?
5. threatened to commit suicide?
6. pushed, slapped, kicked, punched or hit you or the child(ren)?
7. abuses alcohol or drugs?
8. requires medication to safely be around others?
9. used weapons to threaten or hurt people?
10. threatened to never return the child(ren)?
11. threatened to kill you or the child(ren)?
12. sexually abused anyone by force, threat of force or intimidation?
13. been served with a protection or no contact order?
14. been arrested for harming or threatening to harm you or anyone else?

If you answered "YES" to one or more of the above questions, you may need a Safety Focused Plan. Please go to Pink Section.

If you answered "NO" to all the above questions, please continue.

YOU NEED TO **HONESTLY** ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

STEP TWO: DISTANCE ASSESSMENT

Do you and the other parent:

1. Live more or plan to live more than 150 miles apart?
(contact during the week and weekends unlikely)
2. Live or plan to live between 50 and 150 miles apart?
(contact during the week unlikely)

If you answered “YES” to one or more of the above questions, you may need a Long Distance Plan. Please go to Blue Section.

If you answered “NO” to all the above questions, please continue.

THESE QUESTIONS WILL HELP RECOGNIZE YOUR ABILITIES AND NEEDS.

STEP THREE: SELF-ASSESSMENT:

DAILY SCHEDULE

If you are employed outside the home: What time do you leave? _____ return? _____

If employed in the home, do you need to be home certain hours? Yes No

Can your schedule be changed? Yes No

Are there any demands on your time after normal work hours? Yes No

Is out-of-town travel required? Yes No If yes, how often? _____ How long are you gone? _____

OUTSIDE COMMITMENTS

Do you have any additional commitments from extended family or friends? Yes No If so, describe: _____

Are you a caregiver for anyone other than your children? Yes No _____

TRANSPORTATION

Do you have reliable transportation? Yes No

A valid license? Yes No

Do you have any health issues which might affect your driving ability? Yes No

PARENTING

In what events or situations does the child:

Ask you for help? _____

Respond to your direction? _____

Does Not respond to your direction? _____

What do you well as a parent? _____

What do you have trouble with as a parent? _____

COMMUNICATION

Do you have problems communicating with the other parent? Yes No Do you have E-mail access? Yes No

Internet access? Yes No Cell phone? Yes No Text Message? Yes No

FAMILY EVENTS

What events or holidays are the most important to you? _____

DISCIPLINE

What kinds do you use? _____

What kinds work for your child(ren)? _____

STEP FOUR: CO-PARENT ASSESSMENT:

DAILY SCHEDULE

If the other parent is employed outside the home: What time do they leave? _____ Return? _____
If the other parent is employed in the home, do they need to be home certain hours? Yes No
Can their schedule be changed? Yes No
Are there any demands on the other parent's time after normal work hours? Yes No
Is out-of-town travel required? Yes No If yes, how often? _____ How long are they gone? _____

OUTSIDE COMMITMENTS

Does the other parent have any additional commitments from extended family or friends? Yes No If so, describe: _____
Are they a caregiver for anyone other than your child? Yes No

TRANSPORTATION

Does the other parent have reliable transportation? Yes No A valid license? Yes No
Do they have any health issues that effect their ability to drive? Yes No

PARENTING

In what events or situations does the child:
Ask for the other parent's help? _____
Respond to the other parent's direction? _____
Does not respond to their direction? _____
What does the other parent do well as a parent? _____
What does the other parent have trouble with as a parent? _____

COMMUNICATION

Does the other parent have problems communicating with you? Yes No Does the other parent
Have e-mail? Yes No Internet? Yes No Cell phone? Yes No Text Msg? Yes No

FAMILY EVENTS

What events or holidays are important to the other parent? _____

DISCIPLINE

What kind does the other parent use? _____
What kinds are effective for your child(ren)? _____

THESE QUESTIONS ARE WRITTEN TO HELP YOU MAKE CHOICES THAT FIT THE NEEDS OF YOUR CHILD(REN), AND BOTH PARENTS.

Complete one for each child

STEP FIVE: CHILD ASSESSMENT:

FULL NAME OF CHLD: _____

1. What is the child's age? _____ School? _____ Grade? _____
2. Is the child closer to one parent than the other? Yes No
If Yes, which parent? _____
3. Has the child experienced any separations or deaths? Yes No
If Yes, when? _____ Describe: _____
4. Has the child ever been diagnosed by a licensed professional with any academic needs, physical problems or emotional disorders? Yes No
Evaluated by: _____
Diagnosis: _____ When Diagnosed? _____
If Yes, Treatment plan: _____
5. Has this child:
 - a. Changed schools other than for normal progression? Yes No
 - b. Been retained a grade in school? Yes No
 - c. Skipped a grade in school? Yes No
 - d. Had difficulty in school? Yes No
 - e. Been provided an Individual Educational Plan (IEP)? Yes No
 - f. Been found to be academically gifted? Yes No
6. How close _____ is your home from: _____ is your work from: _____
 - a. Child's school? _____
 - b. Tutors? _____
 - c. Sporting activities? _____
 - d. Pediatrician? _____
 - e. Extracurricular activities? _____
 - f. Place of Worship? _____
 - g. _____

7. How close is _____ the other parent's home from: _____ the other parent's work?
- a. Child's school? _____
 - b. Tutors? _____
 - c. Sporting activities? _____
 - d. Pediatrician? _____
 - e. Extracurricular activities? _____
 - f. Church? _____
 - g. _____

8. Check the activities in which this child *currently* participates and the days of the week on which these events occur.

_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> Wed	<input type="checkbox"/> Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/> Fri	<input type="checkbox"/> Sat	<input type="checkbox"/> Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> Wed	<input type="checkbox"/> Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/> Fri	<input type="checkbox"/> Sat	<input type="checkbox"/> Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
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_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Mon	<input type="checkbox"/> Tues	<input type="checkbox"/> Wed	<input type="checkbox"/> Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/> Fri	<input type="checkbox"/> Sat	<input type="checkbox"/> Sun	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly

9. List any future activities: _____

10. How do you and this child spend time together? When? _____

BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT IS WORKING NOW. CHILDREN NEED A REGULAR SCHEDULE. **HOWEVER**, THERE ARE OFTEN TIMES WHEN SOMEONE WHO WAS NOT AN ACTIVE PARENT BEFORE THE SEPARATION MAY WISH TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED AFTER SEPARATION. THE INITIAL PLAN SHOULD PROVIDE THAT PARENT ENOUGH TIME TO DEVELOP A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP.

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

The following are developmental norms. **HOWEVER**, each child must be assessed as an individual. Children develop at varying speeds depending on temperament, place in the family, and outside events.

INFANT: Birth to 9 Months Infants learn very quickly. They learn to trust and love familiar caregivers. They form attachments by consistent, loving responses such as holding, playing feeding, soothing, talking and meeting their needs. When both parents have been actively involved, the child forms an attachment to both parents.

Infants should have frequent contact with both parents. Infants have a limited capacity to remember the absent parent. Infants trust regular caregivers to recognize their signals for food, comfort and sleep.

They require a predictable schedule and routine. It is important to maintain the infant's sleep, feeding and waking cycles. Parent's schedules should be adjusted to limit the child's routine. Keep the special needs of breast feeding in mind when crafting a schedule.

Infants have emotional memories and can recognize anger and harsh words. Do not argue or use harsh words in the presence of your infant.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Infant, Remember:

- Frequent, repeated contact for both parents is recommended
- Contact should provide time for feeding, playing, bathing, soothing, napping and overnight sleeping.
- Both parents need to bond with the infant.
- Infants should not be away from either parent for more than a few days.
- Parental communication should include a log that is exchanged between the parents to note the infant's sleeping, diapering, feeding and new developments

BABY: 9 – 18 Months The transition from infant to toddler gradually occurs as the child develops motor skills: crawling, standing, walking, communication skills and beginning emotional expressions, i.e. hugging, kisses, anger, fear, anxiety.

Predictability and consistency are important. Your child will respond to multiple caregivers if the caregivers are present for their eating, sleeping, waking schedules are consistent and their needs are met.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Baby, Remember:

- Each parent should participate in daily routines, such as feeding, playing, bathing, soothing
- Separations of more than three days may interfere with your child's development of healthy attachments.
- Parents should develop similar routines in each home with a shared communication log

TODDLER: 18-36 Months Your baby will experience rapid physical, emotional and social change after 18 months. They have formed attachments and have begun to trust that caregivers will meet their needs. Toddlers can respond to different parenting styles. They are more independent and are developing means to comfort themselves.

Toddlers will begin to express themselves and will exert their own will with the newly discovered word: "no." Some children may become fearful of separations and transitions between parents may be difficult. Such resistance is normal. Predictable schedules will help transition difficult exchanges.

Do not argue or use harsh words in the presence of your toddler. Toddlers are particularly sensitive to tension, anger and violence in the parental relationships.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Toddler, Remember:

- Each parent should become competent and comfortable in all aspects of the child's daily routine.
- Each parent should participate in daily routines feeding, playing, bathing, soothing, reading, and arranging age appropriate activities
- Daily telephone contact at a regular hour will reassure the child.
- Keep a picture of each parent in the child's room.

PRE-SCHOOL: 3-4 Years Your child is experiencing many developmental changes. Your parenting styles may need to accommodate the children's new development changes. You will need to guide and support your preschooler as they believe they are the center of the universe.

They may feel they are responsible for the parental separation. They may say what they believe their parent's want to hear. Remember, their statements may not reflect the child's real experiences.

Preschoolers are impulsive and concrete in their thinking. They may experience nightmares and may exhibit transition difficulties when moving from one house to the other. Both parents must exhibit a positive attitude during transitions and give notice of any anticipated changes.

Preschoolers will benefit from structured time with children of their own age, away from their parents. They will begin to understand days and weeks but not time.

Preschoolers need consistency and predictability. They may no longer need naps and parents must communicate and modify the child's sleep schedule.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Preschooler, Remember:

- Each parent should become competent and comfortable in all aspects of the child's daily routine.
- Each parent should participate in daily routines feeding, playing, bathing, soothing, reading, and arranging age appropriate activities
- Daily telephone contact at a regular hour will reassure the child.
- Keep a picture of each parent in the child's room.

EARLY-SCHOOL: 5-9 Years Your child is naturally experiencing more separations from parents (i.e. school, relatives, friends, sports). Your child is developing peer relationships, community relationships, personal skills, social skills and self esteem. They are beginning to understand concepts of time and routine with security in two residences. Parents can be more creative in developing parenting plans.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your child, Remember:

- Use a child's calendar to inform and remind the child of the schedule.
- Ensure both parents are involved in the child's academic and other activities.
- Develop homework schedules where each parent is active.
- Ensure the child's social activities are a schedule priority.
- Try to limit the transitions for the child, allowing parents more time with each scheduled contact with fewer weekday exchanges.

PRE-TEEN: 10-12 Years Your preteen has a greater capacity for time, plans and schedules. Your preteen tends to be rule bound, aligning themselves with one particular parent. If this is significant, you may need assistance from a counselor.

Your preteen should be encouraged to try activities outside the home to begin to develop social and intellectual skills. Parents should support increased independence to craft the child's self-esteem and self-confidence.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Pre-Teen, Remember:

- Parenting plans must provide frequent contact with both parents.
- Plans should not provide for contact away from either parent for a period greater than 3-4 days.
- Your pre-teen needs privacy for telephonic contact to the other parent.
- Accommodate the child's social activities and commitments.

TEEN: 13 -15 Years Your child is using each parent as a base of support and guidance. At this age, decision making ability varies widely from child to child and from situation to situation. Despite protests, your child needs nurturing and oversight. However, your roles is to assist your child with increasing independence from the family and encourage emergence into a separate identity. Girls will mature earlier than boys. Parents must encourage social relationships and activities outside the family while balancing basic structure and close family relationships. These events will require cooperation by the parents to implement the events into the parenting plan. Parents must cooperate and communicate to be certain the child is safe and accountable.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Teen, Remember:

- The child's schedule, commitments, and obligations must be considered
- Flexible creative plans may fit the Teen's schedule: alternating week, alternating week days, etc.
- Parents should increase contact with the teen by attendance at academic, athletic, or social events.
- Test your child's answers, your child may play one parent against the other

OLDER ADOLESCENT: 15-18 Years Parents should support a healthy and gradual independence from parents. You need to assist your child in developing an individual identity. Parents must encourage their understanding of emotional and sexual feelings of the child.

When Designing your Parenting Plan for your Older Adolescent, Remember:

- Communication is essential, especially regarding curfews, driving, dating and overnights away from parents.
- The older child's participation in the schedule is essential. Increased schoolwork, extracurricular activities, jobs, peer relationships and sports are important in defining your child's identity.
- Parents should be aware of the child's need to be consulted, informed and involved in scheduling. **HOWEVER**, the ultimate decisions belong to the parents not the child.
- Test your child's answers, your child may play one parent against the other

REMEMBER:

- CHILDREN DEVELOP BEST WHEN BOTH PARENTS HAVE MEANINGFUL AND STABLE INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LIVES.
- EACH PARENT HAS DIFFERENT AND VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAKE TO THEIR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT.
- IT IS BETTER FOR YOUNG CHILDREN TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH PARENTS AND LESS TIME WITH 3RD PARTY CAREGIVERS. WHEN BOTH PARENTS WORK, PARENTS SHOULD MAKE EVERY ATTEMPT TO CHOOSE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CAREGIVER.
- COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION BETWEEN PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT IN ARRANGING CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES. CONSISTENT RULES IN BOTH HOUSEHOLDS CREATE A SENSE OF SECURITY FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES.
- TO PROVIDE SECURITY FOR YOUR CHILDREN, ALLOW THEM TO BRING PERSONAL ITEMS BACK AND FORTH, NO MATTER WHO PURCHASED THEM.
- THE ESSENCE OF GOOD PARENTING IS TO REASSURE CHILDREN THAT THEY ARE LOVED, CARED FOR AND PROTECTED BY BOTH PARENTS.
- PUT YOUR CHILDRENS NEEDS AHEAD OF YOUR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.
- PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM YOUR OWN CONFLICTS, DISAPPOINTMENTS AND ADULT CONCERNS.

REMEMBER

As you develop your parenting plan **Focus on your child(ren)'s needs and interests.**



BE HONEST. Think about your child(ren)'s ages, personalities, their likes and dislikes, interests, activities, ability to talk to the other parent, etc. Each family is different. There is no single parenting plan that is right for every family. Each parent will be asked to define a schedule that works best for your child(ren).



THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO CREATE A SCHEDULE THAT WORKS FOR YOUR CHILD(REN). REMEMBER YOUR PARENTING SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AS YOUR CHILD(REN) GROW.

REVIEW YOUR PARENTING PLAN WHEN:

- * a child starts school
- * a child's schedule changes
- * a parent remarries
- * any one experiences any major change