



Putting the Children First

Parenting Plan Tips Notebook



Building a Co-Parenting Bridge

- Children can thrive when their parents build and maintain a safe, stable co-parenting bridge with healthy attitudes that are supported by cooperative actions.
- These goals can be accomplished with a well-written parenting plan.
- When parents put in the effort to design a parenting plan that's custom crafted for their own children, everyone can benefit.
- For some parents designing a detailed, well-written plan might feel very challenging, or even impossible. Professionals such as parent educators, coaches, mediators, attorneys, magistrates and judges can be called upon to support the family as a whole and to help with creating the parenting plan.

Build a communication structure

- Many parents have language in their parenting plans stating they will discuss “all major issues regarding the children”, with no specifics about how their communication should happen, and too often children become the messengers.
- Parents usually benefit from addressing their preferences for communication, for example: call, text, email, or use a dedicated co-parenting app for various types of communication. The preferences for communication through social media should also be addressed.
- Response time expectations to the aforementioned communications should be set as well.
- The more conflict that exists between the co-parents, the more structure is needed to reduce that conflict. Communication guidelines like these can help parents avoid confusion, frustration and disagreements. This can serve as an excellent way to set boundaries, expectations, and provide self-care.
- When new partners or relationships are introduced, it can result in conflict. The parenting plan can help reduce conflict if it includes:
 - Specific rules and language pertaining to the new person or persons



Parent Communication

- The way in which parents listen and speak to their children not only strengthens their bond, but increases security and self-esteem for children.
- Opportunities for listening and speaking that can strengthen the parent-child bond might be:
 - Parenting time
 - FaceTime, Skype, texts, emails
 - Phone calls, letters
 - Pick-up or drop-off to/from time with the other parent
- Many parents include details in their parenting plans about how they will communicate with the children when the children are with the other parent.
- Parents can tell their children that they are writing down details onto a note or into their calendars to help their children understand and look forward to important dates or events when they will be with that parent.
 - For example, “I know you are disappointed that our trip to the park was rained out. So am I. Let’s write “PARK” on the calendar so we are sure to go next week.”



COMMUNICATION

Ways parents contact one another _____

Response time (e.g. within 24 hours) _____

Preferred method co-parent should contact you _____

When the child(ren) is/are with one of you, how may they contact the other parent?

When and how may _____ contact the child? _____

When and how may _____ contact the child, when the child is visiting? _____



Schedules

- An important part of a parenting plan is the schedule.
- Parents are encouraged to design a general or default schedule for weekends, weekdays, summers, holidays, and more.
- Children of all ages benefit from the predictability of a schedule as well as the flexibility of their parents to alter the schedule when needed.
- Holiday stress is minimized when parents decide the schedule well in advance of the day.
- Providing a younger child with a color-coded calendar, or an older child with a parent-scheduling app on an electronic device supports a child's need for security and stability.
- When schedule questions come up, both children and parents like to have easy access to an answer, even when they are at school or work.



PHYSICAL CUSTODY (where the child(ren) live)

The child(ren)'s residence is with _____

Describe which days and which times of day the child(ren) will be with each person:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Example schedule:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
@ 8am Parent B			@ 6pm Parent A			

This schedule is every week every two weeks other _____



If not weekly, which of you has the child(ren) the rest of the time _____

Drop-off

Where? _____

When? (time and day) _____

Pick-up

Where? _____

When? (time and day) _____

If one of you doesn't show up, how long will the other wait? _____

If there are extraordinary costs (taxi, train, plane, etc.) who will pay for which costs? _____





Design the Parenting Plan to match your children's ages

- We discussed the developmental needs of children at various ages, consider how you may want to design the parenting plan to match your children's ages.
 - For example, a parenting time schedule to support the attachment needs of an infant is very different from the flexibility a busy teenager may need.
- Many co-parents benefit from designing their parenting time schedule based on the current needs of their children with an understanding and agreement that the schedule will need to be adjusted from time to time as the children grow, parents work schedules change and life happens.



Document what you DO Want

- The parenting plan is the perfect place for parents to document what they DO Want.
- Are you concerned that alternating years for Thanksgiving Day will be hard for you in your off years? Then consider including in the parenting plan how you will celebrate with your children on a different day, or in a different way.
- Children will often adopt the attitude of their parents, and focusing your children on what you do want instead of what you don't want may be something everyone can celebrate.

HOLIDAY SCHEDULE (where will the child(ren) stay)

HOLIDAY	Year ____	Year ____	Every Year ____	
Martin Luther King Day				Summer Vacation:
President's Day				
Easter				
Memorial Day				
4 th of July				
Labor Day				
Yom Kippur				
Rosh Hashanah				
Thanksgiving				
Christmas Day				
Kwanza				
New Year's Eve/Day				
Spring Vacation				
Child's Birthday				
Mother's Day				
Father's Day				
Other holiday: (Chanukah, Passover, Ramadan, etc.)				



Long Distance Parenting Plans



- When one parent lives or moves far away, a well designed parenting plan can reduce uncertainty, stress and misunderstandings. More important, the child will feel secure and loved by each parent.
- Things to consider and include are:
 - Timing/length of the visits
 - Avoid the use of general terms such as, “morning”, “afternoon” and/or “evening”. State specific times such as 9:00 am, or 6:00 pm.
 - How the child will travel from one home to the other
 - How travel costs will be paid
 - Parent –child communication while the child is with the other parent

Temporary Changes to the Parenting Schedule

From time to time, one parent may want or need to rearrange the Parenting Time schedule due to work, family or other events.

The parent asking for the change will ask

in person by letter/email by phone _____

no later than 12 hours 24 hours 1 week 1 month _____

The parent being asked for a change will reply

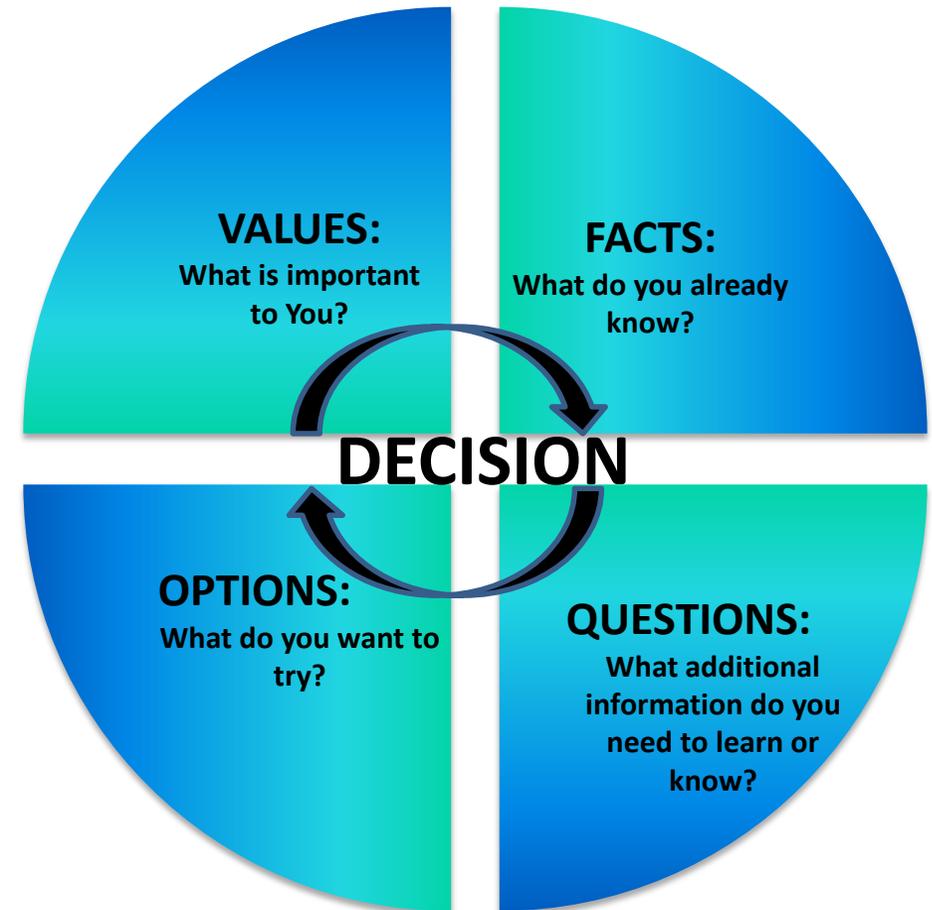
in person by letter/email by phone _____

no later than 12 hours 24 hours 1 week 1 month _____



Decision-making

- Decision making is a critical element of parenting and an integral part of any parenting plan.
- How parents make decisions together and separately should be carefully considered and addressed in the parenting plan.
 - For example, detailing if both parents will have full access to all educational and medical events, records and decisions
 - Extracurricular activities
 - What the parents do if they disagree about a decision and need to find a resolution
- Many parents benefit by meeting with specialists like family mediators or counselors to explore a wide range of possibilities so a default action can be included in the parenting plan to help relieve future disagreements.



Decision Making (who will make decisions about certain things)

Diet	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Religion	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Medical Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Mental Health Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Discipline	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Choice of School	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Choice of Study	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
School Activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
Sports Activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents decide together	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent A	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent B

What process will you use to make decisions?

For example— The parent confronted with or anticipating the choice will call the other parent when the choice presents itself and the other parent must agree or disagree within 24 hours.



CHILD(REN)'S EXPENSES

Expense	Parent A- amount or %	Parent B- amount or %
Health Insurance Coverage		
Medical Care (including co-pays & Rx)		
Dental (braces, filling, etc.)		
Vision (eyeglasses, contacts, etc.)		
Other Health Care		
Mental Health Care		
Education (tuition, books, fees, etc.)		
Childcare (work-related)		
Other (music lessons, sports equipment, car insurance, etc)		
Other		
Other		
Unexpected Expenses not anticipated at this time		

- These (and many more), are things that can be specifically laid out in your parenting plan.
- You are able to customize any part of the parenting plan as you and the co-parent agree. The thing to remember is that communicating, developing and then sticking to the parenting plan will make the process a lot smoother and less stressful for everyone. Especially the children.
- There are general guidelines that can be found in the Ohio Parenting Guide:

<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/Publications/JCS/parentingGuide.pdf>



If you feel that you or your children are unsafe or if you feel that you might harm others or yourself, please reach out to resources in your community or those listed in the Resource Guide.



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