

Parenting Plan Template: A Co-Parenting Plan for Separated and Divorced Parents

Read the article first. This template accompanies [How to Write a Parenting Plan: A Co-Parenting Template for Separated and Divorced Parents](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains each section and the alternatives inside it. Search “how to write a parenting plan” on the site to find it.

A parenting plan decides in advance, while things are calm, what happens when both parents have sincere reasons to want the same time with the children. We fill it in together, section by section. This is a working draft for conversations at home, in therapy, and in mediation. The version filed with the court gets finished with a mediator or attorney, on the form our state requires.

BEFORE WE START Agree on the default	Both of us will sometimes be right about our own pain, and there is still one child and one stretch of time. Comparing whose need is greater settles nothing. So we agree on one rule before anything else. <i>When we cannot both agree to a change, the plan stands.</i>
SECTIONS 1 TO 10 The core plan	Schedule, holidays, breaks, decisions, exchanges, communication, consistency, records, and how changes happen. These cover most families. Where a section offers options, we check one and add our own details.
SECTION 11 Shared values	Common-sense defaults that let us act as a united front, including risky activities and new partners. When we cannot agree in the moment, the default decides.
LAST PAGE Add-ons and protections	Areas that apply to some families, and the situations where the plan needs stricter conditions to protect the children.

A WORKED EXAMPLE, FROM THE ARTICLE

THE REQUEST	One parent's family is holding a reunion at Christmas. That parent asks to trade Thanksgiving for Christmas this year.
WHAT THE PLAN SAYS	Requests for a holiday trade come in writing at least three months ahead, and the other parent answers within a week.
IF WE AGREE	We write the trade down, including when the favor comes back next year.
IF WE DON'T	The plan stands as written, and nobody has to argue the case any further.

OUR DEFAULT RULE, IN OUR OWN WORDS

Writing it in our own words makes it easier to point back to on a hard day.

The priority order for every section is the children's stability first, and our own lives and work second.

1. The regular schedule

Both rotating schedules alternate weekends. The 7-7 trades some weekday rhythm for fewer transitions.

SECTION 1

Our weekly rhythm

Check the schedule we choose.

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|--|---|
| ☐ 2-2-3: weekdays rotate, short gaps between parents (younger children) | ☐ 5-2-2-5: same weeknights every week, weekends alternate (school-age) |
| ☐ 7-7, week on, week off: one exchange a week (teens, longer distances) | ☐ Every other weekend plus a midweek dinner (distance or work) |

EXCHANGE DAY AND TIME

OTHER DETAILS OF OUR SCHEDULE

2. Holidays, birthdays, and special days

Holidays usually alternate by odd and even years and override the regular schedule.

HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

Write which parent has each day, and the start and end times.

DAY	EVEN YEARS	ODD YEARS	TIMES
Thanksgiving			
Winter break, first half			
Winter break, second half			
Christmas Eve and Day			
New Year's			
Spring holiday			
Mother's Day and Father's Day	<i>With the parent being honored</i>	<i>With the parent being honored</i>	
If both parents celebrate the same day			
Each child's birthday			
Each parent's birthday			
Other family or cultural days			

BIRTHDAYS

Our children's birthdays

Check the arrangement we choose.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ One party, both parents attend | ☐ Hosting alternates each year |
| ☐ Two parties, one in each home | ☐ Other (below) |

TRADES

Holiday swaps

How far ahead a trade is requested, how fast the other parent answers, and how it is written down. If we don't agree, the plan stands.

REQUEST AT LEAST ___ MONTHS AHEAD, ANSWER WITHIN ___ DAYS

3. School breaks and vacations

The more we plan ahead, the less the children absorb the cost of last-minute conflict.

SECTION 3

Breaks and travel

Summer, spring break, and travel with the children.

☐ Summer follows the regular rotation

☐ Summer shifts to longer blocks (two weeks is common)

YEARLY DEADLINE FOR SUMMER PLANS AND CAMP SIGN-UPS

NOTICE BEFORE A VACATION (DATES, DESTINATION, CONTACT)

OUT-OF-STATE OR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL REQUIRES

4. Decision-making

Joint unless we list an exception. Day-to-day decisions belong to the parent who has the children that day.

AREA

JOINT OR ONE PARENT

NOTES

Education

Non-emergency healthcare

Mental health care

Religious upbringing

Extracurricular activities

In an emergency, either parent acts first and tells the other right away. If joint decisions keep deadlocking, we can give each parent the final say in one area after a good-faith conversation.

5 to 7. Exchanges, communication, and contact

SECTION 5

Exchanges and the first call

When the parent on duty can't cover childcare, the first call goes to the other parent, before a sitter, a grandparent, or a new partner.

EXCHANGE LOCATION, AND WHO DRIVES

FIRST-CALL RULE APPLIES TO ABSENCES LONGER THAN ___ HOURS

WHAT TRAVELS WITH THE CHILDREN

SECTION 6

Communication between us

One main channel. We never pass messages through the children.

☐ Text and a shared calendar

☐ A co-parenting app (OurFamilyWizard, TalkingParents)

RESPONSE TIME FOR NON-URGENT MESSAGES, AND WHAT COUNTS AS URGENT

SECTION 7

Children's contact with the other parent

The children can reach either parent at any time. Any structure is for our consistency, never to restrict them.

REGULAR CALL TIMES, IF ANY

8. Consistency across households

Two homes will never match exactly. The main expectations hold wherever the children wake up.

AREA	WHAT WE AGREE ON
School-night and weekend bedtimes	
Screen time and devices	
Homework: when, where, who checks	
Discipline and consequences	
Chores and meals	

If one of us is considering a consequence outside our usual range, we talk first. Neither of us criticizes the other where the children can hear, or asks them to carry messages, keep secrets, or report on the other home.

SECTION 9 Records, school, and activities	Both of us have full access to records and can attend events, whoever has the children that day. WHO REGISTERS THE CHILDREN, AND HOW WE SHARE REPORT CARDS, MEDICAL UPDATES, AND SCHEDULES
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SECTION 10 Changes, disputes, and review	One-time swaps are requests, and no is a legitimate answer. Lasting changes go through mediation before court. HOW FAR AHEAD WE ASK FOR A ONE-TIME SWAP, AND WHETHER MISSED TIME IS MADE UP OUR MEDIATOR OR DISPUTE PROCESS, AND OUR NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW NOTICE BEFORE EITHER OF US RELOCATES
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11. Shared values and common-sense defaults

Our children's safety, healthy development, and growth in school, activities, and sports.

RISKY ACTIVITIES

When we can't agree, we go with what most parents would say, usually the more cautious answer.

SITUATION	OUR AGREEMENT
Motorcycles, ATVs, dirt bikes	
Small aircraft, helicopters	
Sleepovers and trips with other families	
Riding with teen drivers	

NEW PARTNERS Introductions	No introductions to a new partner until the relationship has lasted at least six months, longer for young children. This protects the children from another loss, and from adult matters too early. MINIMUM BEFORE INTRODUCTIONS, AND HOW WE TELL EACH OTHER FIRST OVERNIGHT STAYS WHILE THE CHILDREN ARE PRESENT
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Add-ons

Areas that don't apply to every family. Each gets a default for when we can't agree in the moment.

COSTS

Extracurricular costs

Enthusiasm alone doesn't commit the other parent to half the cost.

- ☐ Split by agreement, up to \$_____ ☐ Split in proportion to income
- ☐ The parent who wants it pays, if the other doesn't agree ☐ Other (below)

CARE

Special needs

Therapies, specialists, IEP meetings, medications, and how both of us stay connected to providers.

PHONES, GAMES, AND PETS

AREA

OUR AGREEMENT

DEFAULT IF WE CAN'T AGREE

Age for a first phone

Social media accounts

Video games and ratings

Pets, and which home they live in

When the plan needs to be stricter

Some situations call for clear conditions, written with a mediator or attorney, to protect the children.

Check any that apply to our family.

- ☐ Ongoing substance or alcohol misuse ☐ Domestic violence in either household
- ☐ A partner or household member with a history of violence ☐ A parent's mental health crisis that affects safety
- ☐ Threats to leave the area with the children ☐ Other safety concern

OUR CONDITIONS

For example: the children do not stay in a home where a partner with a history of abuse is present, guaranteed before any overnight. Other tools: supervised time or exchanges, sobriety requirements, communication only through an app.

OUR AGREEMENT

We wrote this plan together, while things were calm, for the moments when they won't be.

PARENT A, SIGNATURE AND DATE

PARENT B, SIGNATURE AND DATE