

What is a parenting plan?

Parenting plans are legal agreements that outline clear schedules for the children and provide guidelines for the parents. They include each parent's coparenting responsibilities and decision making roles. Parenting plans help parents understand long-term plans and expectations for their children. They provide a sense of continuity and security for children and a sense of control for both parents. Parenting plans coordinate rules, schedules, schooling, and transitions between homes. When devising a parenting plan, parents should be flexible, committed, and considerate of their children's perspective.

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

In this issue:

- What is a Parenting Plan?
- Tips for developing a Parenting Plan.
- What should be included in a parenting plan?



Important tips when developing a parenting plan

- Address all decisions that affect parenting.
- Consider and respect ideas from both parents.
- Define new roles and responsibilities that the parent has in the children's life.
- Parenting plans need to be understandable and realistic.
- Make a distinction between the spousal and parental roles.
- A judge will decide any unresolved decisions.

Monthly tip for families:

Set aside time this month to play a board game of your child's choice.



What should be included in a parenting plan?

1. Purpose of Plan

This section should include the name and date of birth of all children. Parents should also include their parenting values and intentions. View this section as a pledge to work together for children's best interests.

2. Standards of Conduct

This section includes ground rules for how parents expect to organize their day-to-day life. Listed below are some sample standards.

- Addresses, phone numbers, and emergency contacts should be available to both parents
- Medical and school records should be available to both parents
- Both parents will accommodate their children's desires to spend time with their other parent
- Parents agree that children will have unrestricted phone access with the other parent
- Parents will communicate regularly to discuss the needs of the children

3. Legal Terms Defining Parental Responsibilities

This section includes how parents will divide or share responsibilities for their children. Terms such as "custody" or "visitation" may be required in this section.

4. Religious Affiliation

Choosing a religious affiliation is a major decision for parents. Decisions concerning costs associated with membership should be discussed.

5. Basic Education and College

Parents must decide who will attend school conferences and receive report cards. Parents must also decide how tuition, transportation, uniforms, and school supplies will be divided. Planning for college funding should also be discussed.

6. Insurances (medical, dental, and vision)

Parents need to make decisions concerning doctors and dentists. Medical insurance, surgeries, and medical records should be discussed as well. Parents must decide how medical expenses will be divided.

7. Insurances (life and auto)

Parents need to make decisions concerning life insurance beneficiaries. They also need to determine how auto insurance payment will be paid.

8. Child Care

Parents need to decide how child care will be chosen and paid for when parents are working.

9. Children's Schedule with Each Parent

Parents need to specifically decide when children will spend time with each parent. The parenting plan should cover weekday and weekend visits. Listed below are some other examples of scheduled visits:

- School year (overnights and activity time)
- Summers (overnights and activity time)
- Holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, Good Friday, Easter, spring break, winter break, Hanukkah, Passover, High Holy Holidays, Chinese New Year)
- Three-day holidays/weekends (President's Day, Martin Luther King Day, July Fourth, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Veteran's Day, Columbus Day)
- Birthdays (both child and parent)

10. Transportation and Travel

Parents must decide how to divide travel costs, including gas, buses, trains, and planes. Deciding when and where to meet should be clear and specific.

11. Financial Contributions

This section of the parenting plan includes child support. This financial contribution by the nonresidential parent goes toward the costs of raising children. Guidelines for determining child support vary by state. Parents need to include method of payment in their parenting plan.

12. Duration of Agreement and Revisions of the Parenting Plan

Parenting plans are legally binding when filed with the court, but parents can go to court to modify the plan. However, if both parents agree on the modifications, they can move forward with the new plan. If parents disagree about the modification, they should first try to resolve it by discussing the issue. Consulting a trained mediator or attorney may resolve the disagreement. Going to court should be the last approach that parents take.

13. Tax Consequences

Parents need to discuss who will claim the children as deductions on their taxes.

14. Access to Children's Information and Records

Parents should include a written statement that grants them continued access to medical, educational, and other records.

15. Deaths, Illnesses, and Unexpected Events

Although an unpleasant topic, parents need to make out wills and have guardians in place if an unexpected death or illness occurs. This section of the parenting plan will help to ensure that children are safe and being cared for.



Additional Resources:

www.extension.usu.edu/stepfamily

www.healthyrelationshipsutah.org

www.strongermarriage.org

www.stepfamilies.info

www.twoofus.org

For more information, contact:

Shannon Cromwell, M.A.

Extension Assistant Professor

Utah State University Extension

435-283-3472

shannon.cromwell@usu.edu