

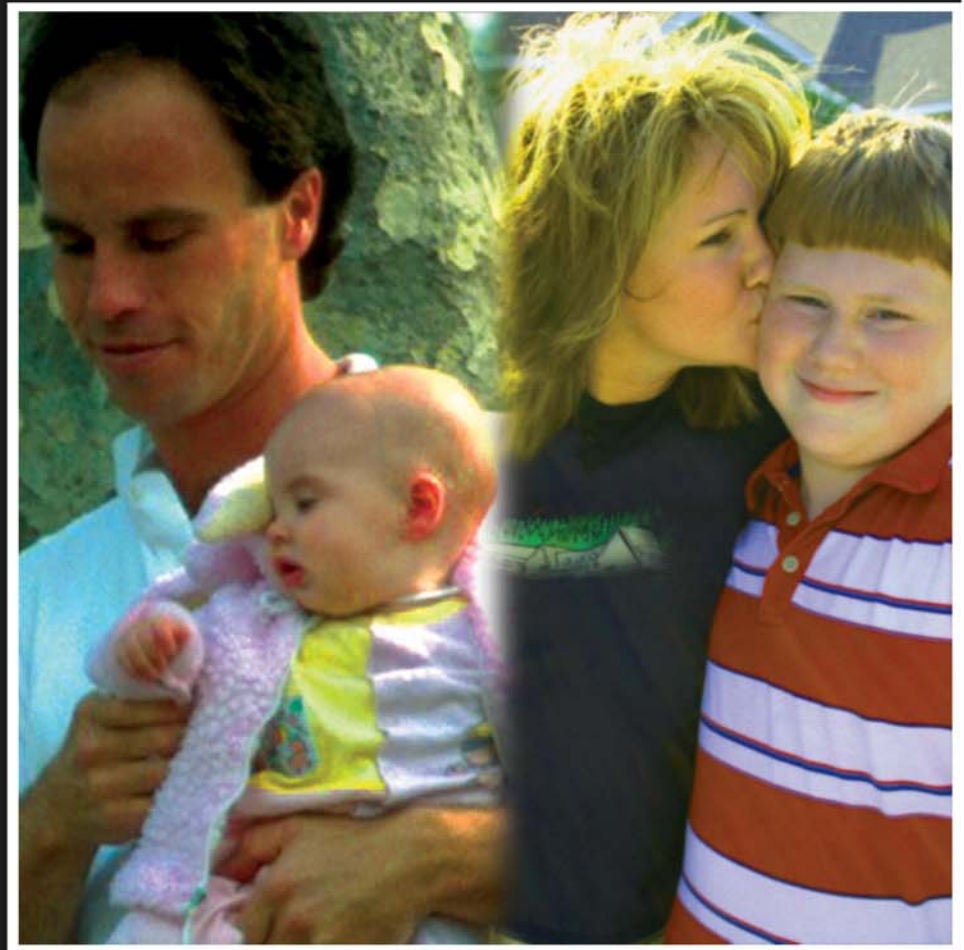
# **PARENTING PLAN PACKET**

The information contained within this document is provided by the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit for informational purposes as a service to the public. The document and the information contained therein have not been endorsed, or adopted by the 13<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit. While some of the information may deal with legal issues, it is nothing more than general information and you should not rely on it. You should contact an attorney for legal advice or assistance.

# CONTENTS

I.	BASIC PARENTING PLAN PACKET FOR PARENTS	5
A.	Instructions	7
B.	How to Use Your Basic Parenting Plan Packet	10
C.	Do I Need a Safety Focused Parenting Plan?	11
D.	Parenting Plan template	12
1.	Information about the Family	12
2.	Parenting Time Schedule	13
3.	Decision Making	16
4.	Information Sharing	17
5.	Future Moves by a Parent	17
6.	Parent-Child Communication	17
7.	Exchange of our Child(ren)	18
8.	Mutual Respect	18
9.	Other Terms	18
10.	Dispute Resolution	18
11.	Signatures	18
II.	SAFETY FOCUSED PARENTING PLAN GUIDE FOR PARENTS	19
A.	Do I Need a Safety Focused Plan?	21
B.	Who Can Help Me Make a Parenting Plan?	22
C.	Instructions for completing the plan	23
D.	Parenting Plan – Option A – Supervised	25
E.	Parenting Plan – Option B – Unsupervised/No Overnights	31
F.	Parenting Plan – Option C – Overnights	39
III.	SHARED PARENTING CONTACT AND GUIDELINES	47
A.	Introduction	49
B.	Birth to 6 months	50
C.	Age 6 months through 18 months	51
D.	Age 18 months to 3 years	53
E.	Age 3 to 5 (The Preschool Child)	54
F.	Age 6 through Eleven years	55
G.	Age 11 through 18 years	60
IV.	WORDS I NEED TO KNOW	67

# Basic Parenting Plan Packet



## BASIC PARENTING PLAN INSTRUCTIONS

### Notice about these instructions:

These instructions are not a complete statement of the law and are not a substitute for the advice of an attorney. These instructions cover basic procedure for parenting plans in uncomplicated divorce or unmarried parent custody cases.

For more information consult the ***Basic Parenting Plan Guide for Parents***, the ***Safety Focused Parenting Plan Guide*** and the ***Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines***. This information is on the courts web page at [www.fjud13.org](http://www.fjud13.org). Both of these guides have information about how to select a parenting plan that is best for you and your child(ren), and give examples of parenting plans that you may wish to use. The guides also include information about where to get basic legal information. The Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines provide information concerning developmental considerations when making time sharing decisions.

### Begin:

1. Before you fill in any part of the Basic Parenting Plan, you should make a copy of the blank form. Save this copy for use when you are ready to fill out a final version of the Basic Parenting Plan to file with the Court.
2. On the top left side of the page, fill in the names of the Petitioner and the Respondent on the lines provided. If you have an existing court case, use the labels and names as they appear on the original documents filed with the court. If you do not have an existing court case, then it does not matter who is the petitioner or respondent until the case is filed.
3. On the top right side of the page, enter your case number, if you have one. If the Parenting Plan you are submitting is agreed upon by both parents, check the box that says 'Agreed upon by both parents.' Otherwise, check the box that says 'Proposed by \_\_\_\_\_' and fill in the name of the parent who is proposing the Parenting Plan.

### Section:

1. **Information About the Family:** Insert all information concerning the Mother and Father. Write down the full legal name (do not use nickname), date of birth, and sex (male or female) of each child of this relationship.
- 2.-2.2 **Parenting Time Schedule:** Explain when your child(ren) will be in the care of each parent. Create a schedule for weekdays and for weekends. Also indicate whether this schedule will continue during the summer, or if you will have a different schedule for the child(ren) during the summer months.
- 2.3-2.6 **Holiday Schedule:** Explain how the child(ren) will be spending time during holidays. Fill in the blanks by writing the appropriate parent's name to show where the child(ren) will be for the holidays. Remember to write in beginning and ending times for pick up and drop off of the child(ren). You may add other special occasions you celebrate below the printed list.

Below the chart, provide details about how time will be shared during Winter Break, Spring Break, and the birthdays.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** Your decisions about how much time the child(ren) will spend in the care of each parent may have important financial implications. This decision may affect how much child support a parent is responsible for, whether a parent can claim a tax dependency deduction, etc. You should consult an attorney or your caseworker regarding the consequences of your decisions about how much time the child(ren) will spend with each parent.

Check one or both of the boxes below the table if you would like either of the options described to apply to your holiday parenting plan, or add your own.

- 2.7-2.8 Temporary Changes to the Schedule:** Read these sections carefully. In section 2.7 indicate whether you will require make-up parenting time or changes to the schedule to be in writing.
- 2.9 Alternate Care:** You may choose to select a parent (or another person) as the alternate care provider in certain circumstances; for example, when the child(ren) would otherwise be in daycare, while a parent works, or when children would be with a child care provider for overnights. You may choose to set limits on who may provide alternate care for your child(ren).
- 2.10 Primary Residence (Optional):** See the explanation of this term in the “*Words I Need to Know*” section of the *Basic Parenting Plan Guide for Parents*.
- 3. Decision Making:** Choose an arrangement for making “Major Decisions,” including decisions about the education, non-emergency health care, and religious training. If both parents will share in the responsibility for making “major decisions,” then check the appropriate box. You can share responsibility in major decision making even though the child(ren) are not in the care of each parent an equal amount of the time. If one parent has Sole Custody of the child(ren), indicate whether the parent with Sole Custody will be required to talk to the other parent prior to making “major decisions.” You may also describe in more detail how major decisions will be handled or shared between the parents.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** A decision other than one for Shared Parental Responsibility has important legal consequences. You are strongly encouraged to consult with an attorney regarding these consequences before making your final decision.

- 4.&5. Information Sharing and Future Moves By a Parent:** Review the information provided here about sharing information between parents, school involvement, and relocation of a parent who is thinking about moving out of the area.
- 6. Parent/Child Communication:** You may select the option for unrestricted communication between both parents and the child(ren), and/or you may write in your own communication arrangements.
- 7. Exchange of our Child(ren):** Describe the details of the plan for exchanging the child(ren) for parenting times.

- 8.&9. **Mutual Respect and Other Terms**: Read the Mutual Respect terms carefully. Describe any other provisions you would like to include in your Parenting Plan.
10. **Dispute Resolution**: Decide whether you will agree to resolve any disputes that may arise in the future through mediation or other means.
11. **Signatures**: If the plan is proposed by only one parent, that parent alone should sign. If the plan is agreed to by both parents, both parents should sign. If you are filing the parenting plan with the Court, attach it to the appropriate legal document, such as the petition or judgment.

## HOW TO USE YOUR BASIC PARENTING PLAN PACKET

**WHY DO I NEED A PARENTING PLAN?** Florida law requires parents (married or unmarried) to file a Parenting Plan (a document that states when the child(ren) will be with each parent and how decisions will be made). The purpose of these materials is to help you develop a basic parenting plan. We recommend that you file a plan when first filing your case in the court.

**WHAT SHOULD MY PARENTING PLAN LOOK LIKE?** Your parenting plan may be either general or detailed. In either case, the plan must at least state the time the child(ren) will be with each parent and can also state who will do what parenting tasks.

**WHO CAN HELP ME MAKE A PARENTING PLAN?** There are many places to find help.

- **ON-LINE:** The Thirteenth Judicial Circuit's website, [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org) has forms and instructions for completing the packet. The Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines can also be viewed on the web. These guidelines will give you ideas on the needs at different age ranges.
  - A full-length **Basic Parenting Plan Guide** and a **Safety Focused Parenting Plan Guide** can be found there or you can ask at the place where you got this packet if copies of these guides are available. Both guides have a list of "Words to Knows to help you understand the process better. The basic guide also has information on needs at different times and a list of questions to help you-get started on your parenting plan.
- **LEGAL SERVICES:** You can locate a private attorney through the Florida State Bar at [www.flabar.org](http://www.flabar.org). Free or low-cost legal advice may be available to you through non-profit agencies, volunteer programs, or the bar association of your county.
- **PARENT EDUCATION:** A list of parenting courses is available at the information booths in your courthouse, as well as in Family Court Resources, in Room 208, Edgecomb Courthouse.
- **MEDIATION:** A mediator may be able to help you and the other parent through the process of creating a parenting plan. A mediator can help parents to find ways to talk to each other about their child(ren). If you have safety concerns about the other parent (see checklist on the next page), mediation may not be appropriate. Family mediation services are available through your local court and through private providers.
- **LEGAL INFORMATION CENTER:** This office is located on the second floor of the Edgecomb Courthouse.
- **PARENT COORDINATOR:** A PC helps parents implement their parenting plan and solve difficult parenting issues outside of court. More information on Parent Coordinators is on the website @ [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org) - Click on Family Law Advisory Group FLAG.

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION

You are not required to have a lawyer to create a parenting plan, but be aware that the provisions of your parenting plan may have important legal consequences. **READ THE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY** (these are a separate document at the back of the packet) and consult with an attorney **BEFORE** filing your parenting plan if you want to know about these legal consequences or if you have other questions.

DO I NEED A SAFETY FOCUSED PARENTING PLAN? The list below can help you decide.

Has the other parent:

- acted as though violent behavior toward you or your child(ren) is OK in some situations?
- damaged or destroyed property or pets during an argument?
- threatened to commit suicide?
- pushed, slapped, kicked, and punched on physically hurt you or your child (ren)?
- had problems with alcohol or other drugs?
- needed medication to be safe around others?
- made multiple threats not to return or has not returned your child(ren)?
- used weapons to threaten or hurt people?
- threatened to kill you, your child(ren) or anyone else?
- sexually abused anyone by force, threat of force or intimidation?
- been served a domestic violence injunction or a protection or no contact order?
- been arrested for harming or threatening to harm you or anyone else?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, please continue to take your safety, and your child(ren)'s safety, seriously. You may need to include a Safety Focused Parenting Plan. To get a copy of the Safety Focused Parenting Plan Guide, go to Room 208, Edgecomb Courthouse, or the courts website [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org).

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA  
FOR THE COUNTY OF HILLSBOROUGH**

Petitioner \_\_\_\_\_

CASE NO: \_\_\_\_\_

and

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_

**Parenting Plan**

**IMPORTANT NOTICE: The provisions of your Parenting Plan have important legal consequences. You should consult the complete BASIC PARENTING PLAN GUIDE FOR PARENTS available at [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org) before filling out this form. You should consult an attorney before filing your Parenting Plan.**

**1. INFORMATION ABOUT THE FAMILY**

**Mother:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ SS#: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

**Father:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ SS#: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

**Children:**

Full Name	Date of Birth/Age	Sex (circle one)
_____	_____	M/F
_____	_____	M/F
_____	_____	M/F
_____	_____	M/F
_____	_____	M/F

## 2. PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE

### 2.1 Weekday and Weekend Schedule.

For examples of possible parenting time schedules, see the Shared Parenting Contact & Access Guidelines.

A. The child(ren) shall spend time with \_\_\_\_\_ on the following days and times:  
(name of parent)

WEEKENDS: { } every { } every other { } other (specify \_\_\_\_\_

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

WEEKDAYS: Specify days \_\_\_\_\_

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER:(specify) \_\_\_\_\_

B. The child(ren) shall spend time with \_\_\_\_\_ :  
(name of other parent)

(Choose one)

{ } At all times not specified above, or

{ } On the following days and times:

WEEKENDS: { } every { } every other { } other (specify \_\_\_\_\_

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

WEEKDAYS: Specify days \_\_\_\_\_

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER:(specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Check box if there is a different parenting time schedule for any child. Complete a separate Attachment for each child for whom there is a different parenting time schedule. Label it Attachment 2.1(C). You may use the same format as above.**

{ } There is a different parenting time schedule for the following child(ren) in Attachment 2.1(C):

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of child) (name of child) (name of child)

### 2.2 Summer Schedule. (Choose one)

{ } The summer schedule will remain the same as during the school year.

{ } The summer schedule will remain the same as during the school year, except for the following vacation times:

A. The child(ren) shall spend time with \_\_\_\_\_ on the following times:  
(name of parent)

WEEKENDS: { } every { } every other { } other (specify):

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

WEEKDAYS: Specify days

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER: (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

B. The child(ren) shall spend time with \_\_\_\_\_:  
(name of parent)

(Choose one)

{ } At all times not specified above, or

{ } On the following days and times:

**WEEKENDS:** { } every { } every other { } other (specify)

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**WEEKDAYS:** Specify days

from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER: (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### 2.3 Holiday Schedule.

The following holiday schedule will take priority over the regular weekday, weekend, and summer schedules described above. Fill in the blanks below with the parent's name to indicate where the child(ren) will be for the holidays. Provide beginning and ending times. If a holiday is not specified as even, odd, or every year with one parent, then the child(ren) will remain with the parent they are normally scheduled to be with.

<u>Holidays</u>	<u>Even Years</u>	<u>Odd Years</u>	<u>Every Year</u>	<u>Beg/Ending Times</u>
Mother's Day	_____	_____	_____	_____
Father's Day	_____	_____	_____	_____
Thanksgiving	_____	_____	_____	_____
Christmas Eve	_____	_____	_____	_____
Christmas Day	_____	_____	_____	_____
Easter	_____	_____	_____	_____
Memorial Day Weekend	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fourth of July	_____	_____	_____	_____
Labor Day Weekend	_____	_____	_____	_____

Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This holiday schedule may affect your regular Parenting Time Schedule. You may wish to specify one or more of the following options:

{ } When parents are using an alternating weekend plan and the holiday schedule would result in one parent having the child(ren) for three weekends in a row, the alternating weekend pattern will restart so neither parent will go without having the child(ren) for more than two weekends in a row.

{ } If a parent has our child(ren) on a weekend with an unspecified holiday or non-school day attached, they shall have our child(ren) for the holiday or non-school day.

{ } Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2.4 Winter Break.**

{ } Our child(ren) will spend half of Winter Break with each parent.

{ } Other: Details for sharing time with our child(ren) during Winter Break (including New Year's Day) are: \_\_\_\_\_

**2.5 Spring Break.** (The weekday days of school Spring Break).

{ } Our child(ren) will alternate spending spring break with each parent, spending it with \_\_\_\_\_ in even years and with \_\_\_\_\_ in odd years.  
(parent name) (parent name)

{ } Our child(ren) will be in the care of each parent according to the schedule described in Section 2.1 above.

{ } Our child(ren) will spend part of spring break with each parent (provide details): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2.6 Birthdays.**

{ } Our birthdays will be planned so that both parents may participate in the birthday celebration.

{ } Our child(ren) will be in the care of each parent according to the schedule described in Section 2.1 to 2.6 above.

{ } Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2.7 Temporary Changes to the Schedule.**

Any schedule for sharing time with our child(ren) may be changed as long as both parents agree to the changes ahead of time:

{ } in writing; { } orally (choose one)

Activities scheduled that will affect the other parent's time must be coordinated with the other parent.

Makeup and Missed Parenting time: Only substantial medical reasons will be considered sufficient for postponement of parenting time. If a child is ill and unable to spend time with a parent, a makeup parenting time will be scheduled. If a parent fails to have the child(ren) during their scheduled parenting time for any other reason, there will be no makeup of parenting time unless the parents agree otherwise:

{ } in writing { } orally (choose one)

**2.8 Permanent Changes to the Schedule.**

We understand that, once the judge signs the final judgment in our case and approves this Parenting Plan, any changes that we do not agree on can be made only by applying to the court for a modification. **One parent cannot change a court-ordered Parenting Plan on their own.**

Before applying to the court, we understand that we can agree to try to resolve our dispute through mediation or other means (See Section 10).

**2.9 Alternate Care.** (See Instructions)

We choose not to specify ground rules for alternate care.

Alternate care for our child(ren) will be handled as follows:

---

---

**2.10 Primary & Secondary Residence.**

Shared Parental Responsibility

\_\_\_\_\_ shall be considered the primary residential/  
custodial parent.

\_\_\_\_\_ shall be considered the secondary  
residential/custodial parent.

Shared Parent responsibility with neither parent being the primary/custodial residential parent.

Rotating custody. The parents are co-primary residential/custodial parents.

Sole Parental Responsibility.

\_\_\_\_\_ shall be considered the sole custodial parent.

**3. DECISION MAKING:**

**3.1 Day-to-Day Decisions.**

Each parent will make day-to-day decisions regarding the care and control of our child(ren) during the time they are caring for our child(ren). This includes any emergency decisions affecting the health or safety of our child(ren).

**3.2 Major Decisions (Shared or Sole Parental Responsibility).**

Major decisions include, but are not limited to, decisions about our education, non-emergency healthcare and religious training.

**Shared Parental Responsibility - Choose One:**

Both parents will share in the responsibility for making major decisions about our child(ren).  
or

Shared Parental Responsibility with the following Parent having ultimate decision making authority on designated major decisions about our child(ren).

Issues (e.g.: Education, Health, Extra Curricular activities, Religion)	Decision Maker

**The above will be implemented if the parties do not agree otherwise.**

**If a parent is designated with sole parental authority then that parent will have the option to consult with the other parent prior to making major decisions.**

**4. INFORMATION SHARING.** Unless there is a court order stating otherwise:

Both parents have equal rights to inspect and receive the school records, and both parents are encouraged to consult with school staff concerning the welfare and education. Both parents are encouraged to participate in and attend the school events.

Both parents have equal rights to inspect and receive governmental agency and law enforcement records concerning the child(ren).

Both parents have equal rights to consult with any person who may provide care or treatment for the child(ren) and to inspect and receive the medical, dental and psychological records.

Each parent has a continuing responsibility to provide a residential, mailing, or contact address and contact telephone number to the other parent.

Each parent has a continuing responsibility to immediately notify the other parent of any emergency circumstances or substantial changes in the health of the child, including the child's medical needs.

**5. FUTURE MOVES BY A PARENT.**

Relocation:

{ } The primary residential parent shall not permanently relocate the minor child(ren) from the State of Florida without the written consent of the other parent or an order of the court.

{ } Parents who have a rotating custodial arrangement (50/50 timesharing) agree that neither parent shall relocate to any residence more than ten (10) miles from the other parents home.

{ } Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6. PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION**

{ } Both parents and child(ren) shall have the right to communicate by telephone, in writing or by emailing between \_\_\_\_a.m./p.m. and \_\_\_\_a.m./p.m. without interference or monitoring by the other parent.

{ } Procedures for telephone, written, or email access (describe ground rules for parent-child communication).  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. EXCHANGE OF OUR CHILD(REN)**

Both parents shall have the child(ren) ready on time with sufficient clothing packed and ready at the agreed-upon time of exchange. All clothing that accompanied our child(ren) shall be returned as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

{ } While both parents continue to reside in the same locale, both parents shall share equally in the responsibility of exchanging our child(ren) from one parent to the other.

{ } Other: (provide details for the exchange of the child(ren)):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**8. MUTUAL RESPECT**

Parents will not say things or knowingly allow others to say things in the presence of our child(ren) that would take away our love and respect for the other parent.

**9. OTHER TERMS**

Add any other items regarding the child(ren) you would like to include in your Parenting Plan. Use additional sheets if necessary.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

{ } Additional sheets attached

**10. DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

We will first attempt to cooperatively resolve any disputes that may arise over the terms of this Parenting Plan. If that attempt fails (choose one):

{ } We will use mediation or other dispute resolution methods before filing a court action.

{ } Mediation or other dispute resolution methods will not be required before filing a court action.

**11. SIGNATURES**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and agree with what has been decided and written in this document.

Petitioner:

Respondent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Safety Focused Parenting Plan Guide



For Parents



## Safety Focused Parenting Plan

Do you need a Safety Focused Plan? This list can help you decide.

Has the other parent:

- acted as though violent behavior toward you or your child(ren) is OK in some situations?
- damaged or destroyed property or pets during an argument?
- threatened to commit suicide?
- pushed, slapped, kicked, punched, or physically hurt you or your child(ren)?
- had problems with alcohol or other drugs?
- needed medication to be safe around others?
- made multiple threats not to or has not returned your child(ren)?
- used weapons to threaten to hurt people?
- threatened to kill you, your child(ren) or anyone else?
- sexually abused anyone by force, threat of force, or intimidation?
- been served a domestic violence injunction or a protection or no contact order?
- been arrested for harming or threatening to harm you or anyone else?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, please continue to take your safety, and your children's safety, seriously. You may need to use a Safety Focused Parenting Plan.

Florida law requires parents to file a **Parenting Plan** (a document that states when the child will be with each parent and how decisions will be made) with the final request for divorce or child custody order. Parenting Plans may be modified by agreement of the parties (see the paragraph entitled “Changes to the Parenting Plan”) or by returning to court seeking a modification. The purpose of these materials is to help you develop a safety focused parenting plan. We recommend that you file a plan when first filing your case in the court. This packet offers three samples of safety focused parenting plans:

**Option A:** You feel your child cannot be safe alone with the other parent- *supervised parenting time or no parenting time.*

**Option B:** You feel your child can safely spend limited time with the other parent under certain conditions- *no overnight parenting time.*

**Option C:** You feel your child can safely spend time with the other parent, but you are not safe when the other parent is with you- *overnight parenting time, public drop off and pick up sites.*

Before making a plan selection, review the Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines on the courts webpage at [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org).

**WHO CAN HELP ME MAKE A PARENTING PLAN?** There are many places to find help.

- **ON-LINE:** The Thirteenth Judicial Circuit’s website, [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org) has forms and instructions for completing the packet. The Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines can also be viewed on the web. These guidelines will give you ideas on the needs at different age ranges.
- A full-length **Basic Parenting Plan Guide** and a **Safety Focused Parenting Plan Guide** can be found there or you can ask at the place where you got this packet if copies of these guides are available. Both guides have a list of “Words to Knows to help you understand the process better. The basic guide also has information on needs at different times and a list of questions to help you-get started on your parenting plan.
- **LEGAL SERVICES:** You can locate a private attorney through the Florida State Bar at [www.flabar.org](http://www.flabar.org). Free or low-cost legal advice may be available to you through non-profit agencies, volunteer programs, or the bar association of your county.
- **PARENT EDUCATION:** A list of parenting courses is available at the information booths in your courthouse, as well as in Family Court Resources, in Room 208, Edgecomb Courthouse.
- **MEDIATION:** A mediator may be able to help you and the other parent through the process of creating a parenting plan. A mediator can help parents to find ways to talk to each other about their child(ren). If you have safety concerns about the other parent (see checklist on the next page), mediation may not be appropriate. Family mediation services are available through your local court and through private providers.
- **LEGAL INFORMATION CENTER:** This office is located on the second floor of the Edgecomb Courthouse.
- **PARENT COORDINATOR:** A PC helps parents implement their parenting plan and solve difficult parenting issues outside of court. More information on Parent Coordinators is on the website @ [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org) - Click on Family Law Advisory Group FLAG.

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

You are not required to have a lawyer to create a parenting plan, but be aware that the provisions of your parenting plan may have important legal consequences. **READ THE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY** (these are a separate document at the back of the packet) and consult with an attorney **BEFORE** filing your parenting plan if you want to know about these legal consequences or if you have other questions.

These instructions are not a complete statement of the law. For legal information, please talk to a lawyer. Your court may also have local rules, programs and procedures that are not explained in these instructions.

### Instructions for completing the plan that you have chosen

- **Names:** On the lines provided, fill in the names of the Petitioner and Respondent. If you have an existing court case, use the labels and names as they appear on your original documents filed with the court.
- **Case Number:** On the right side, enter your case number. A case number is assigned when papers are filed with the court.
- **Information About The Child(ren):** Write down the full legal name (do not use nicknames) and date of birth for each child of this relationship.
- **Who Are You?** The primary residential parent is the term for the parent with whom the child(ren) lives most of the time. The other parent is the secondary residential parent. These labels are used throughout the parenting plan.
- **Parenting Schedule:** In deciding on a schedule you may want to refer to the **Shared Parenting Contact/Access Guidelines** adopted by the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit, located at [www.fljud13.org](http://www.fljud13.org).

**Parenting Plan -  
Option A  
Supervised**

(Option A - Supervised)

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA  
FOR THE COUNTY OF HILLSBOROUGH

Petitioner \_\_\_\_\_

CASE NO.:

And

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_

Parenting Plan

1. **The Parties.** Petitioner and Respondent are the parents of:

<u>Full Name</u>	<u>Date of Birth</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

They shall be collectively referred to as "the child(ren)" throughout this parenting plan.

The primary residential parent is the parent with whom the child(ren) lives most of the time.

Petitioner shall hereafter be referred to as the (check one)

Primary residential parent

Secondary residential parent

Respondent shall hereafter be referred to as the (check one)

Primary residential parent

Secondary residential parent

2. **Parenting Time.** (Choose only one):

**No Parenting Time.** The secondary residential parent shall have no contact with the child(ren) until further court order. All parenting decisions shall be made by the primary residential parent.

**Supervised Parenting Time.** Whenever the child(ren) are with the secondary residential parent, the supervisor shall be present. The secondary residential parent has the right to spend time with the child(ren) even though the primary residential parent will be making most, if not all, of the parenting decisions which need to be made on the behalf. The child(ren) shall be with the secondary residential parent on any schedule agreed to between the parents, but not less than is set forth in the following supervised schedule (choose only one).

\_\_\_\_\_ hours per week. The place(s), day(s), and time(s) shall be set by the residential parent.

From \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. to \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. on the following day(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. **Supervisor.** The person supervising the parenting time shall (choose one):

- Be selected by the primary residential parent.
- Be selected by the secondary residential parent, subject to the primary residential parent's prior approval.

4. **Access to Activities and Events.** The secondary residential parent (choose one):

- Shall not attend the school activities and athletic events.
- May attend the school activities and athletic events.
- The secondary residential parent must stay \_\_\_\_ feet from the primary residential parent.

5. **Child Safety.** The secondary residential parent shall follow the safety rules check below. If the secondary residential parent violates any of the rules below, the primary residential parent may seek the court's help through contempt action. In addition, if the violation poses an immediate threat to the child(ren), the specific parenting time may be stopped.

(Check all safety rules that apply):

- There shall be no firearms in the secondary residential parent's home, car or in the presence during the parenting time.
- The secondary residential parent shall not consume alcoholic beverages beginning 12 hours before the child(ren) arrive up to the point they are returned to the residential parent.
- The child(ren) shall not be physically disciplined.
- The following person(s) present a danger to the child(ren) and shall not be present during parenting time \_\_\_\_\_.
- The secondary residential parent shall not be under the influences of intoxicating liquor or a controlled substance (e.g. drugs) as said terms are defined in F.S. 893.03 during any period of time that he or she is to be with the child(ren).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Location.** The secondary residential parent shall spend his/her parenting time with the child(ren) at the following location(s):

- Supervised visitation center
- \_\_\_\_\_ (location) or any other location designated by the primary residential parent.
- Any location designated by The secondary residential parent with approval by the supervisor.

7. **Exchange Point.** The exchange of the child(ren) shall occur at (Choose all that apply):

- The site of the supervised visit
- Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- The secondary residential parent may not come to the exchange point.

8. **Transportation.** The primary residential parent or other person chosen by the primary residential parent shall be responsible for transporting the child(ren) to the exchange point. The child(ren) shall be picked up and/or returned to the exchange point by (choose one).

- The secondary residential parent with the supervisor present.
- The supervisor alone.

The child(ren) shall not be driven in a car unless the driver has a valid driver's license, auto insurance, seat belts, and child safety seats as required by Florida Law.

9. **Communication with the Child(ren).** The secondary residential parent (check all that apply):

- Shall not telephone, write, or e-mail the child(ren) unless the contact is agreed to in advance by the residential parent.
- May write or e-mail the child(ren) at any time. Each parent shall provide a contact address (and e-mail address if appropriate) to the other parent.
- May call the child(ren) on the telephone \_\_\_\_\_ times per week. The call shall last no more than 15 minutes and shall take place between \_\_\_\_\_ m. and \_\_\_\_\_ m. Long distance telephone calls made by the child(ren) shall be paid for the parent receiving the call. Each parent shall provide a telephone number to the other parent.

10. **Changes to the Parenting Plan.** A specific parenting time may be denied due to the safety concerns listed in Paragraph 5. Changes to the parenting plan are allowed whenever both parents agree to a change. Agreed upon changes will be temporary and will be enforced by the court only if the change is written down, is dated, signed by both parents before a notary public and submitted to the court leaving a space for the Judge's signature.

11. **This is part of a Court Order when attached to a signed Judgment.** Each party has been put on notice that an intentional failure to follow the rules of this parenting plan is punishable through the contempt of powers of the court. One parent's failure to comply with the rules does not excuse the other party from following the rules.

12. **Signature(s)**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and agreed with what has been decided and written in this document.

Petitioner:

Respondent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

# **Parenting Plan- Option B**

**Unsupervised/  
No Overnights**

(Option B - Unsupervised; No Overnights)

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA  
FOR THE COUNTY OF HILLSBOROUGH

**Petitioner** \_\_\_\_\_

CASE NO.:

and

**Respondent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parenting Plan**

1. **The Parties.** Petitioner and Respondent are the parents of:

<u>Full Name</u>	<u>Date of Birth</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____

They shall be collectively referred to as "the child(ren)" throughout this parenting plan.

The primary residential parent is the parent with whom the child(ren) live most of the time and who also has legal custody of them.

Petitioner shall hereafter be referred as the (check one)

Primary Residential Parent

Secondary residential Parent

Respondent shall hereafter be referred as the (check one)

Primary Residential Parent

Secondary residential Parent

2. **Parents' rights.** The secondary residential parent has the right to spend time with the child(ren) even though the primary residential parent will be making most, if not all, of the parenting decisions which need to be made on the behalf. The child(ren) shall be with the secondary residential parent on any schedule agreed to between the parents, but not less than is set forth in the following schedule. The primary residential parent shall be in charge of the child(ren) at all other times.

2.1 The child(ren) shall be with the secondary residential parent on the following **regular schedule** (Choose only one)

**First and third weekends** of each month. These are day periods only, not overnights. The "first" weekend of the month is the first weekend in the month that both Saturday and Sunday fall within the new month. For example, if Saturday is in the old month and Sunday is in the new month, the first weekend for the new month would be the next weekend.

A weekend is defined as (check one or more)

10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Saturday

10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Sunday

10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Monday if the parent's weekend falls on a weekend during the school year on which that next Monday is a state or federally recognized holiday on which there is no school.

**OR**

Other regular schedule (for example, if a parent works weekends).

---

2.2 **Additional Times** (Optional). The secondary residential parent may also spend the following time with the child(ren):

---

2.3 **Exchanging the Child(ren)**. All parenting time shall take place in a prompt manner. No parent need wait more than 15 minutes after the set exchange time for the other parent to arrive. The exchange point shall be (choose only one):

The front steps of the primary residential parent's address.

A neutral place, \_\_\_\_\_ is selected by the primary residential parent. Examples include the school or daycare, the public library, a fast-food restaurant, etc.

Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

2.4 **Transportation**. The primary residential parent or other person chosen by the primary residential parent shall be responsible for transporting the child(ren) to the exchange point. The child(ren) shall be picked up and/or returned to the exchange point by (check all that apply):

The secondary residential parent.

The following individual(s) known to the child(ren):

---

2.5 **Access to Activities and Events**. The secondary residential parent (choose only one):

Shall not attend the school activities and athletic events.

May attend the school activities and athletic events.

Parties must stay \_\_\_\_\_ feet away from each other.

3 The following rules shall apply to the use of parenting time:

3.1 **Parenting Time Make-Ups**. There will be no make-ups required if a medical or true emergency causes the cancellation of parenting time.

3.2 **Clothes**. Each parent shall return *all* clothing that came with the child. It is recommended that each parent maintain a supply of basic clothing for the child(ren) at his or her own residence to assure that this does not become a problem.

3.3 **Communication with the Child(ren)**. The secondary residential parent (check all that apply):

Shall not telephone, write, or e-mail the child(ren) unless the contact is agreed to in advance by the residential parent.

May write or e-mail the child(ren) at any time. Each parent shall provide a contact address (and e-mail address if appropriate) to the other parent.

May call the child(ren) on the telephone \_\_\_\_\_times per week. The call shall not last more than 15 minutes and shall take place between \_\_\_\_\_m. and \_\_\_\_\_m. Long distance telephone calls made by the child(ren) shall be paid for by the parent receiving the call. Each parent shall provide a telephone number to the other parent.

The child(ren) shall have the right to call the secondary residential parent (choose only one)

\_\_\_\_\_ times per week between the hours of \_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. and \_\_\_\_\_a.m./p.m.

Unlimited right to call the secondary residential parent.

3.4 **Parent to Parent Communication.** Communication between the parents shall be by (check all that apply):

**Telephone.** Each parent shall provide a contact telephone number to the other parent.

**In writing.** Each parent shall provide a contact address to the other parent.

**E-mail.** Each parent shall provide an e-mail address to the other parent.

Communications between the parents shall be (check all that apply):

For any reason the parents may wish to communicate with each other.

Limited to issues relating to the child(ren).

Limited to changes to the parenting plan (dates, times, etc.).

4 The following rules apply to both parents.

4.1 **Daily Care.** The residential parent is responsible for the primary care. The secondary residential parent shall provide care for the child(ren) only while that are staying with him or her and will make only *emergency* medical decisions on the behalf. The secondary residential parent's right to make reasonable decisions regarding a child's care while the child is with him or her does not include giving the child haircuts or making any change in a child's appearance (i.e., tattoos, ear piercing, etc.) unless the residential parent has agreed in advance in writing, dated, and signed.

4.2 **Major Decisions (Shared or Sole Parental Responsibility).**

Major decisions include, but are not limited to, decisions about our education, non-emergency healthcare and religious training.

**Shared Parental Responsibility - Choose One:**

{ } Both parents will share in the responsibility for making major decisions about our child(ren).  
or

{ } Shared Parental Responsibility with the following Parent having ultimate decision making authority on designated major decisions about our child(ren).

Issues (e.g.: Education, Health, Extra Curricular activities, Religion)	Decision Maker

**The above will be implemented if the parties do not agree otherwise.**

**If a parent is designated with sole parental authority then that parent will have the option to consult with the other parent prior to making major decisions.**

4.3 **Child Safety.** It is the duty of both parents to keep the child(ren) safe.

Each parent shall protect the child(ren) in the following ways:

- Not use illegal drugs at any time or abuse alcohol while the child(ren) are present.
- Not allow the child(ren) to ride in a car unless the driver has a valid driver's license, auto insurance, seat belts and child safety seat(s) as required by Florida law.
- The child(ren) must be given medication as directed. This means the right amount and at the right time. The child(ren) must have the medication when parenting time starts, and it must be returned with the child(ren) at the end of parenting time.

The secondary residential parent shall follow the safety rules checked below. If the secondary residential parent violates any of the rules below, the residential parent may seek the court's help through a contempt action. In addition, if the violation poses an immediate threat to the child(ren), the specific parenting time may be stopped (check all that apply):

The secondary residential parent shall not be under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance (e.g. drugs) during any period of time that he or she is to be with the child(ren). The secondary residential parent shall not consume alcoholic beverages beginning 12 hours before the child(ren) arrive up to the point they are returned to the residential parent.

There shall be no firearms in the secondary residential parent's home, care, or in the presence during parenting time.

The child(ren) shall not be physically disciplined.

The following person(s) present a danger to the child(ren) and shall not be present during parenting time \_\_\_\_\_.

Other:

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**5. INFORMATION SHARING.** Unless there is a court order stating otherwise:

Both parents have equal rights to inspect and receive the school records, and both parents are encouraged to consult with school staff concerning the welfare and education. Both parents are encouraged to participate in and attend the school events.

Both parents have equal rights to inspect and receive governmental agency and law enforcement records concerning the child(ren).

Both parents have equal rights to consult with any person who may provide care or treatment for the child(ren) and to inspect and receive the child(ren)'s medical, dental and psychological records.

Each parent has a continuing responsibility to provide a residential, mailing, or contact address and contact telephone number to the other parent.

Each parent has a continuing responsibility to immediately notify the other parent of any emergency circumstances or substantial changes in the health of the child, including the child's medical needs.

6. **Changes to the Parenting Plan.** A specific parenting time may be denied due to the safety concerns listed in Paragraph 4.3. Changes to the parenting plan are allowed whenever both parents agree to a change. Agreed upon changes will be temporary and will be enforced by the court only if the change is written down, is dated, signed by both parents before a notary public and submitted to the court leaving a space for the judge's signature.

7. **This is part of a Court Order when attached to a *signed* Judgment.** Each party has been put on notice that an intentional failure to follow the rules of this parenting plan is punishable through contempt powers of the court. One parent's failure to comply with the rules does not excuse the other party from following the rules.

8. **Signature(s)**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and agree with what has been decided and written in this document.

Petitioner:

Respondent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Parenting Plan  
Option C  
Overnights**

(Option C - Overnights)

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA  
FOR THE COUNTY OF HILLSBOROUGH

**Petitioner** \_\_\_\_\_

and

CASE NO:

**Respondent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parenting Plan**

1. **The Parties.** Petitioner and Respondent are the parents of:

Full Name

Date of Birth

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

They shall be collectively referred to as “the child(ren)” throughout this parenting plan.

The primary residential parent is the parent with whom The child(ren) live most of the time and who has legal custody of them.

Petitioner shall hereafter be referred to as the (check one)

Primary Residential Parent

Secondary Residential Parent

Respondent shall hereafter be referred to as the (check one)

Primary Residential Parent

Secondary Residential Parent

2. **Parent’s Rights.** The secondary residential parent has the right to spend time with the child(ren) even though the primary residential parent will be making the most, if not all, of the parenting decisions which need to be made on the behalf. The child(ren) shall be with the secondary residential parent on any schedule agreed to between the parents, but not less than is set forth in the following schedule. The child(ren) shall be with the primary residential parent at all times not specifically designated for them to be with the secondary residential parent.

2.1 The child(ren) shall be with the secondary residential parent on the following **regular schedule** (choose only one):**Secondary weekend schedule.** (For example, if a parent works weekends.)

Non-weekend schedule. (For example, if a parent works weekends.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Weekends.** The secondary residential parent shall have the child(ren) on the **first** and **third weekends** of each month. The "first" weekend of the month is the first weekend in the month that both Saturday and Sunday fall within the new month. For example, if Saturday is in the old month and Sunday is in the new month, the first weekend for the new month would be the next weekend.

A weekend is defined as commencing (choose only one):

At 7:00 p.m. on Friday and ending at 7:00 p.m. on the following Sunday.

After school on Friday and ending at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday.

At 10:00 a.m. on Saturday and ending at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The weekend shall be extended (optional):

To Monday at 7:00 p.m. if it falls on the parent's weekend during the school year on which the next

Monday is a state or federally recognized holiday on which there is no school.

Other regular schedule:

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2.2 **Additional Times** (for example, holidays). The secondary residential parent may also spend the following time with the child(ren):

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---

2.3 All parenting time shall take place in a prompt manner. No parent need wait more than 15 minutes after the set exchange time for the other parent to arrive. The exchange point shall be (choose only one):

The front steps of the primary residential parent's residence.

A neutral place selected by the primary residential parent. Examples include the school or daycare, the public library, a fast-food restaurant, etc.

Other (describe):

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---

2.4 **Transportation.** The primary residential parent or other person chosen by the primary residential parent shall be responsible for transporting the child(ren) to the exchange point. The child(ren) shall be picked up and/or returned to the exchange point by (check all that apply)

The secondary residential parent.

The following individual(s) known to the child(ren):

---

2.5 **Access to Activities and Events.** The secondary residential parent (choose only one):

Shall not attend the school activities and athletic events.

May attend the school activities and athletic events.

3. The following rules shall apply to the use of parenting time:

3.1 **Parenting Time Make-Ups.** There will be no make-ups required if a medical or true emergency causes the cancellation of parenting time.

3.2 **Clothes.** Each parent shall return *all* clothing that came with the child(ren). It is recommended that each parent maintain a supply of basic clothing for the child(ren) at his or her own residence to assure that this does not become a problem.

3.3 **Day Care.** The secondary residential parent shall be responsible for arranging day care for the child(ren) during his or her time with them. No child under the age of 11 shall be unsupervised.

3.4 **Communication with the Child(ren).** The secondary residential parent (check all that apply):

Shall not telephone, write, e-mail the child(ren) unless the contact is agreed to in advance by the primary residential parent.

May write or e-mail the child(ren) at any time. Each parent shall provide a contact address (and e-mail address if appropriate) to the other parent.

May call the child(ren) on the telephone \_\_\_\_\_ times per week. The call shall last not more than 15 minutes and shall take place between \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. and \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. Long distance telephone calls made by the child(ren) shall be paid for by the parent receiving the call. Each parent shall provide a telephone number to the other parent.

The child(ren) shall have the right to call the secondary residential parent (choose only one):

\_\_\_\_\_ times per week at reasonable times.

Unlimited right to call the secondary residential parent.

3.5 **Parent to Parent Communication.** Communication between the parents shall be by (check all that apply)"

**Telephone.** Each parent shall provide a contact telephone number to the other parent.

**In writing.** Each parent shall provide a contact address to the other parent.

**E-mail.** Each parent shall provide an e-mail address to the other parent.

Communication between the parents shall be (check all that apply):

For any reason the parents may wish to communicate with each other.

Limited to issues relating to the child(ren).

Limited to changes to the parenting plan (dates, times, etc.).

4. The following rules apply to both parents.

4.1 **Daily Care.** The primary residential parent is responsible for the primary care. The secondary residential parent shall provide care for the child(ren) only while they are staying with him or her and will make only *emergency* medical or dental decisions on the behalf. The secondary residential parent's right to make reasonable decisions regarding care of the child(ren) while with that parent does not include giving the child haircuts or

making any change in a child's appearance (e.g.: tattoos, ear piercing etc.) unless the primary residential parent has agreed in advance, in writing, dated, and signed.

**4.2 Major Decisions (Shared or Sole Parental Responsibility).**

Major decisions include, but are not limited to, decisions about our child(ren)'s education, non-emergency healthcare and religious training.

**Shared Parental Responsibility - Choose One:**

Both parents will share in the responsibility for making major decisions about our child(ren).

or

Shared Parental Responsibility with the following Parent having ultimate decision making authority on designated major decisions about our child(ren).

Issues (e.g.: Education, Health, Extra Curricular activities, Religion)	Decision Maker

**The above will be implemented if the parties do not agree otherwise.**

**If a parent is designated with sole parental authority then that parent will have the option to consult with the other parent prior to making major decisions.**

**4.3 Child Safety.** It is the duty of both parents to keep the child(ren) safe.

Each parent shall protect the child(ren) in the following ways:

- Not use illegal drugs at any time or abuse alcohol while the child(ren) are present.
- Not allow the child(ren) to ride in a car unless the driver has a valid driver's license, auto insurance, seat belts and child safety seat(s) as required by Florida law.
- The child(ren) must be given medication as directed. The medication should be the right amount and at the right time. The child(ren) must have the medication when parenting time starts and it must be returned with the child(ren) at the end of parenting time.

The secondary residential parent shall follow the safety rules checked below. If the secondary residential parent violates any of the rules below, the primary residential parent may seek the court's help through a contempt action. In addition, if the violation poses an immediate threat to the child(ren), the specific parenting time may be stopped (check all safety rules that apply):

The secondary residential parent shall not be under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance (e.g. *drugs*) during any period of time that he or she is to be with the child(ren).

The secondary residential parent shall not consume alcoholic beverages beginning 12 hours before the child(ren) arrive up to the point they are returned to the primary residential parent.

There shall be no firearms in the secondary residential parent's home, car or in the presence during parenting time.

The child(ren) shall not be physically disciplined.

The following person(s) present a danger to the child(ren) and shall not be present during parenting time

---

Other:

---

5 **INFORMATION SHARING.** Unless there is a court order stating otherwise:

Both parents have equal rights to inspect and receive the child(ren)'s school records, and both parents are encouraged to consult with school staff concerning the child(ren)'s welfare and education. Both parents are encouraged to participate in and attend the child(ren)'s school events.

Both parents have equal rights to inspect and receive governmental agency and law enforcement records concerning the child(ren).

Both parents have equal rights to consult with any person who may provide care or treatment for the child(ren) and to inspect and receive the child(ren)'s medical, dental and psychological records.

Each parent has a continuing responsibility to provide a residential, mailing, or contact address and contact telephone number to the other parent.

Each parent has a continuing responsibility to immediately notify the other parent of any emergency circumstances or substantial changes in the health of the child, including the child's medical needs.

6 **Changes to the Parenting Plan.** A specific time may be denied due to the safety concerns listed in paragraph 4.3. Changes to the parenting plan are allowed whenever both parents agree to a change. Agreed upon changes will be temporary and will be enforced by the court only if the change is written down, is dated, signed by both parents before a notary public and submitted to the court leaving a space for the judges signature.

7 **This is part of a Court Order when attached to a *signed* Judgment.** Each party has been put on notice that an intentional failure to follow the rules of this parenting plan is punishable through contempt powers of the court. One parent's failure to comply with the rules does not excuse the other party from following the rules.

8 **Signature(s)**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and agree with what has been described and written in this document.

Petitioner:

Respondent:

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Signature

---

Date



# **Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Determining parent access to children is one of the most difficult and problematic areas of divorce. It often contributes significantly to parent conflict and litigation. Yet, there is a limited amount of empirical research on the most appropriate arrangements for children. There is no single time-sharing arrangement that has been determined to be optimal for all children. Thus caution is important in proposing a specific visitation arrangement.

The circumstances of each family are unique, however, and recognition of their unique circumstances is central to making good parenting choices. Moreover, as will be discussed below, the leading experts in the field agree that “one size fits all” approaches to developing parenting arrangements are inappropriate and may be harmful to some families. It is NOT the purpose of this review to establish a single standard or “best” parenting arrangement. The results of social and behavioral research are necessarily generalizations and should not be automatically applied to individual families. These generalizations may usefully inform the choices of individual families and the way legislation is framed. It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to offer “customized” recommendations for the numerous special situations that may exist in particular families.

At the time of publication of these guidelines, research does not reveal any particular residential schedule to be most beneficial for children. There are no significant advantages to children of joint physical custody, but also no significant disadvantages to children of joint physical custody or of any other residential schedule. The weight of evidence, however, also does not suggest that, absent parental conflict, high levels of contact between the child and the parent are harmful to children. Parental conflict is a major source of reduced well-being among children of divorce. Research indicates that joint physical custody and frequent contact between the child and the parent have adverse consequences for children in high-conflict situations.

While age and developmental needs may be important factors in determining access, they are not the only factors that may be considered. Other factors are also important such as:

- the psychological attachment of the child to the parent
- the manner in which child-rearing tasks have been shared
- the consistency and predictability of the scheduled time-sharing
- the child’s temperament, resilience, and resourcefulness
- the child’s ability to handle change
- the parents’ work and work schedules.

The following suggestions are merely guidelines that reflect that children’s needs vary from birth through adolescence. These guidelines are based on the child’s age and changing developmental needs. They take into account attachment, children’s sense of time, the importance of maintaining attachment over time, the need for children to have contact with parents, the needs for children to have relationships with peers, teams, clubs, and school, etc. There are also certain assumptions that are made in recommending the following guidelines; that is

- the child has a bond with both parents
- both parents have adequate capacity to parent
- both parents have the desire and the time to interact with the child regularly
- both parents can provide for the child’s physical needs and emotional needs

The evidence reviewed here does not reveal any particular residential schedule to be most beneficial for children. Research clearly suggests, however, that parental conflict is a major source of reduced well-being among children of divorce.

## **Age Birth to 6 months**

### **DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTACT**

Children between birth and the age of 6 months develop a strong bond with at least one person. This is called attachment. Bowlby (1973, 1982) first proposed attachment theory and Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al, 1978) completed empirical testing of his theory. Attachment provides the framework for relationships and explains why the disruption of the bond between the primary caregiver and the infant can result in problem behavior. Disruption can occur through loss and /or separation from the primary caregiver or even the threat of separation and loss.

Infants begin to attach to caregivers at approximately 6 months of age. Attachment develops slowly over the first year and is determined by the quality of the interaction between the adult and the child, not just by who feeds and changes diapers. It includes interest and attention through smiling, reaching, cooing, touching, etc. It is clear that children do not just attach to one person. However, there is controversy over whether children have a tendency to form a single “primary” attachment, regardless of how many other attachments they form. (Warshak, 2000; Solomon, 2005). Visitation schedules must insure that children have the opportunity to establish and maintain such attachments as well as insure that existing attachments are not disrupted or threatened.

## **Know How Your Child Grows**

### **A. Normal Developmental Stages:**

Eating, sleeping, and routine are primary needs of children this age. Stability in caregivers and routines, particularly in eating and sleeping, are critical. Predictability, consistency, and stability of help to establish security and reduce tension and anxiety. Attachment begins at this stage. Bowlby (1969) suggested that between birth and two months is the preattachment stage. The infant responds to any adult. However, by six months, the infant will recognize familiar caregivers and be wary of unfamiliar people. Some of the developmental tasks of infancy between birth and six months include:

1. **Physical Development**
  - a. Infant begins to sit up
  - b. Reaches with both arms
  - c. Can hold objects
2. **Cognitive (Mental) Development**
  - a. Starts to explore things by taste
  - b. Seeks visual stimulation
  - c. Protests if needs are not met
3. **Social Development**
  - a. Smiles, laughs
  - b. Knows the difference between parents and strangers
  - c. Gestures to be picked up

4. Emotional Development
  - a. Need to attach
  - b. Need for nurturing, love, affection, and attention

## **CONTACT FOR BIRTH TO SIX MONTHS**

One of the most important considerations is for attachment with both parents. It is important for visitation to provide opportunities to establish a bond between the child and the parent. Generally, frequency of visitation is given more consideration than duration of visitation. Making up for less frequent visits by increasing the length of time of visits is not recommended for infants (Hodges, 1991). Skafte (1985) recommended daily visits, but if this is impractical, then visits should be spaced no more than two days apart. Overnight visits are not generally recommended (Hodges, 1991; Biringen, et al, 2002). There is research, however, to show that overnight visits with the parent can occur, provided that the parent has been a significant caretaker and a primary attachment figure (Warshak, 2000).

Suggested: Daily visits of 1 to 3 hours

## **WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER**

- Keep sleeping and eating arrangements consistent and stable.
- Since children this age develop and change rapidly, communicate frequently with one another about eating habits, elimination, health, medicines, new behaviors, sleep patterns, etc. Use of a tablet for written communication and accessible to each parent is often a useful way to provide this information.
- Share favorite toys, blankets, etc.
- Furnish pictures of one another to have in each home.

## **AGE 6 Months through 18 Months**

Children at this age continue to establish attachment. They begin to show stranger anxiety and apprehension. Even though an infant may have shown no signs of being upset previously, the child will now cry when the parent leaves. This starts at about 9 months and may continue until about 2 years old. Separation from one of the parents during this period might cause impairment to the attachment process (Horner and Guyer, 1993). Children continue to need familiarity and predictability. Children need love, attention, talk and play.

## **KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD GROWS**

### **A. Normal Developmental Stages:**

Children this age continue to grow rapidly, particularly in their mobility. They crawl, stand, and walk. Although the child will explore the environment and begin to assert himself, the parent must still provide for structure, predictability, and familiarity that will help to build trust and security. Children desire more independence, but continue to need the security of the

attachment figure. Negative behaviors may appear between 15 and 18 months. The child may become more demanding, erupt in tantrums, and begin to say “no.” There is an emerging sense of self as well as fear of loss of the attachment. Since anxiety begins, it is especially important to maintain regularity in the visitation and to insure that the visitation does not involve long separations (Ram, Finzi, and Cohen, 2002).

1. Physical Development
  - a. Walking, running, climbing
  - b. Can throw an object
  - c. Can grip a crayon and scribble
  
2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
  - a. Begins to speak
  - b. Learns by exploring
  - c. Can follow a simple direction
  
3. Social Development
  - a. Copies and imitates
  - b. Waves goodbye
  - c. Responds to verbal request
  
4. Emotional Development
  - a. Separation anxiety begins
  - b. Exhibits a temper when frustrated

## **CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD**

### **AGE: Six months through Eighteen Months**

Since separation anxiety begins during this period, the issue of visitation is especially important. How often and the length of time of each visit depend, in part, on the prior contact of the child and visiting parent. If the parent has participated in, then visitation can be greater in duration and more frequent. Otherwise, short but frequent visits are suggested. Skafte (1985) recommended that no more than 2 or 3 days pass without the parent visiting. Solomon and George (1999) found that a repeated overnight separation from the primary caretaker was associated with disruption in attachment. Overnight visits, while still controversial at this age, are sometimes recommended, again, dependent on the amount of, involvement, and availability of the visiting parent (Warshak, 2002).

Suggested Visits: 1 to 4 hours every other day

## **WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD’S VISITATION EASIER**

- Maintain a routine, especially in eating and sleeping, in each household
- Use a communication log, or notes to inform one another of new behaviors, habit changes,
- Patience, as well as firm and consistent limits are necessary
- Share favorite toys, blankets, stuffed animals, etc.
- Provide familiar articles, pictures, etc. for each household
- Insure a safe environment and supervise the exploring child

- Try to spend some time of a visitation doing a care taking activity in the home of the primary caretaker (such as feeding, bathing, bedtime)

## **AGE 18 Months to 3 Years**

Children at this age continue to explore and establish increasing independence and mobility. These are “toddlers” that will start to become individuals and begin to establish some separateness from their parents (Sroufe, 1979). Children continue to require consistency and firmness from parents. They can remember people they have not seen for days, so children can tolerate longer times between visits.

### **KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD GROWS**

A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Toddlers between the ages of 18 months and 3 years significantly improve their communication skills, begin to toilet themselves, eat with use of a spoon and fork, play by themselves, and become somewhat more resistant and self-centered. They may refer to themselves by name, all part of becoming separate from their parents. They are often easier to discipline through humor and distraction.

1. Physical Development

- a. walks well, goes up and down stairs
- b. attempts to dress self
- c. becoming independent in toileting and eating

2. Cognitive (Mental) Development

- a. Says words, phrases, and simple sentences
- b. Avoids simple hazards
- c. Understands simple directions

3. Social Development

- a. May refer to self by name
- b. Can play alone

4. Emotional Development

- a. Self-centered, possessive, often negative
- b. Enjoys affection
- c. Often resistant to change

## I. CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD

### **AGE: 18 Months to 3 Years**

Children this age can handle visitation that is less frequent than for infants. Visits should continue to be consistent and frequent. At 18 months a child can visit for several hours at a time and research supports an overnight visit in the older children in this category [www.coloradofivorcemediation.com](http://www.coloradofivorcemediation.com), Warshak (2000). Skafte (1985) believed that full weekends were too long for three years olds. Long visitations and travel to distant geographic locations are not recommended (Hodges, 1991).

Suggested Visits: One weekend day, including overnight; two weekdays for 3 hours. For example, Saturday, 10 AM to Sunday, 10 AM and Every Monday and Wednesday, 5:00 PM to 7:30 PM.

## II. WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER

- Insure safety in the environment
- Make sure that overnights include the bedtime routine similar to that practiced in the primary residential home
- If a parent has not had regular visitation because of geographic distance, then visitation should be short, regular visits for part of the day in the custodial parent's location
- Communicate through use of a log to provide feedback to the other parent on changes in habits, new tasks, etc.
- Have some of the child's favorite things available in each home

## **Age 3 to 5 (The Preschool Child)**

Preschool children enjoy predictability. They like fairness and well-defined and consistent guidelines set by parents. Visitation needs to follow these same tenets.

### **Know How Your Child Grows**

#### **AGE: 3 through 5 Years**

##### **A. Normal Developmental Stages:**

Preschoolers have large vocabularies and show significant growth in their communication. They can tell simple stories, ask endless questions, and are interested in their environment. They have a more secure and greater sense of personal identity. They move from play by themselves to cooperative play and begin enjoying the company of others. They are beginning to be adventuresome, but need controlled freedom. They are eager to carry out some responsibility and feel pride in their accomplishments. Routine and consistency continue to be very important.

1. Physical Development
  - a. Runs, climbs
  - b. Begins to ride tricycle, similar vehicle
  - c. Begins to write own name
2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
  - a. Communicates well verbally
  - b. Asks questions
  - c. Tells simple stories
3. Social Development
  - a. Seeks peer interaction
  - b. Talkative, versatile
  - c. Cooperative play
4. Emotional Development
  - a. Likes to follow rules
  - b. Enjoys responsibility

## **CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD**

### **AGE: Three through Five YEARS**

Preschoolers are more aware of the differences between parents. Although they can tolerate overnight visits developmentally, parent conflict may interfere significantly with visitation and smooth transitions. Parents need to make greater effort to insure that preschoolers witness appropriate behaviors between parents.

Suggested Visits: Every other weekend and one weekday overnight, i. e., Every Thursday overnight and every other weekend, Friday to Sunday, 6PM. Or, Every Thursday overnight and Every other weekend, Friday to Sunday overnight. During the summertime, preschoolers may be ready for a full week visitation.

## **WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER**

- Provide mementos, including photos, from each other's homes
- Become involved in preschool and increase access through activities
- Provide a lot of reinforcement and opportunities for approval and recognition
- Insure that transitions from one home to another are smooth and without conflict
- Make sure that the child calls the other parent daily

### **AGE: Six through Eleven Years**

## **SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTACT**

(Ages Six years to Eleven years)

Children between the ages of six and eleven are focused on becoming hard-working and independent. Achievement in school tasks and acceptance from their peers, therefore, is critical. Parents must be certain that visitation schedules are consistent, predictable and organized (Amato 1991). This will allow the child to focus on the very important school and social tasks that are foremost in their life at this stage. Children of this age are developing moral reasoning, and socializing independently for the first time. Attending and becoming involved in school and extra-curricular activities are important, and must be encouraged by both parents during their contact time with the child/ren.

Between the ages 6½-8, children will often openly grieve for the departed parent. Children have fantasies that their parents will happily reunite in the not-so-distant future. Children in this developmental stage have an especially difficult time with the concept of the permanence of the divorce. Between the ages of 8 and 11, feeling of anger and a feeling of powerlessness are the main emotional response in this age group. Like the other developmental stages, children at this age experience a grief reaction to the loss of their previously intact family. Research by Lerman (1989) explores the adjustment of latency age children finding that children who believe that they were rejected from the absent parent was a significant predictor of a child's self-esteem. There is a greater tendency this age children to label a 'good' parent and a 'bad' parent. At this age children may attempt to take care of a parent at the expense of their own needs. (Wallerstein 1989)

## Know How Your Child Grows

### A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Children are in a psychosocial age of industry where they want to please their parents with their efforts. They are developing their ability to think logically, and are beginning to understand the concept of fairness. Moral reasoning is beginning and children are concerned with rules. They have a growing awareness of right and wrong. Independent thinking starts, and becomes more constant along with predictable feelings. Social feelings are developing and children can begin showing empathy and sympathy for others.

1. Physical Development
  - a. Growth is slow and steady.
2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
  - a. Moving toward understanding abstract ideas. Things are often "black or white" - there is very little middle ground.
  - b. Look to adults for approval.
  - c. Like encouragement and suggestions for improvement.
  - d. Need Opportunities to share thoughts and reactions.
  - e. Thinking is concrete, but beginning to think logically
3. Social Development
  - a. Like to join organized groups.
  - b. Beginning to take responsibility for own actions.
  - c. Decision-making skills are being developed.
4. Emotional Development
  - a. Strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile.
  - b. Beginning to build and understand friendship.

# Know How Your Child Grows

## SIX to EIGHT YEARS

1. Physical development
  - a. Physical play very lively; sporting skills develop quickly
2. General behavior
  - a. Bathes, dresses, sleeps, and eats well; talks to strangers; takes part in team sports; drawings show some proportion and perspective.
3. Language
  - a. Reads with understanding; learns spelling and grammar; starts to add and subtract two or three digit numbers and multiply and divide single digit numbers.
4. Typical personality
  - a. Self reliant, sociable and outgoing; active; may be critical of others.

# Know How Your Child Grows

## NINE to ELEVEN YEARS

1. Physical development
  - a. Skilled with hands and fingers; special skills such as in sport and music become evident.
2. General behavior
  - a. Well behaved; works or plays hard; self-sufficient and may enjoy being alone.
3. Language
  - a. Masters basic techniques of reading, writing, adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing; reads stories and writes brief letters to relatives.
4. Typical personality
  - a. Sensible; self motivated; may be shy in social situations; may talk about sex information with friends; interested in body organs and functions; less afraid of dark; not afraid of water.
5. Common normal 'problems'
  - a. Worried and anxious; has physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches when has to do disliked tasks; rebels against authority; sex swearing beginning; perseveres with tasks.

## After Divorce Needs

In terms of divorce, children of this age wish their parents to reunite (90% of seven-year-old children) and may still attempt to reunite their parents. They fear losing both

parents and may still blame themselves for the divorce. They often react to the divorce with sadness. It is common for children of this age to have difficulties concentrating in school because they are thinking about the loss and reunification and they may have some academic risk. Children of this age can typically move between two homes with minimal stress. Most children at this time need a home base where they can work on basic academics, do homework consistently and have their friends easily available. They need routines and schedules. Children in grades 1-3 are often more able to interact with a same-sex parent around hobbies, interests and feelings than younger children who depend on basic care. For primary school age children, the parenting schedule should minimize the interference with peer relationships. To do otherwise may cause your child's resentment and rejection.

Divorce at this age group can cause confusion and some feelings of blame. Children's initial concern is who will be there for them. They are concerned about basic needs such as where they will stay. They need a feeling of security at home in order to deal with issues at school or with friends. (Bauserman 2002)

Divorce brings many challenges to children of this age. Younger school-age children tend to feel the loss of the family as a unit and may experience sadness and crying. Older children in this age group may be more likely to experience anger and choose one parent over the other as a way to hold on to their self-esteem and relationships. Your child may feel directly responsible for your divorce, especially if she is put in the middle of your conflict. Some children will show more severe symptoms, including tantrums, regression, sleep problems, behavioral and academic problems in school, withdrawal or aggression with peers, and depression. (Buchman, Maccoby and Dornbusch 1996) Some of these children do not want to grow up, and instead remain emotionally immature. Children in this age group believe in fairness and want to please their parents. They may feel overwhelmed by your conflicts and try to fix them, yet they cannot. If one of the parents is depressed, your child may try to take care of that parent's emotional problems.

- Exchanges should *minimize* your child's exposure to conflict. School or other neutral places are excellent transition places between Mom's house and Dad's house.
- You must find ways to keep your children out of the middle of your conflicts. Do not have your child deliver messages to the other parent, or ask your child to tell you what the other parent is doing. Communication needs to be between the parents only, even if this requires help from a neutral professional.
- To the extent you can, there should be a plan for co-parenting. If your conflict is more extreme, a pattern of parallel parenting and avoidance of each other is best

## CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD

### **AGE: SIX through Eleven YEARS**

1. Every Other Weekend  
(Friday 6:00 p.m. to Sunday 6:00 p.m.)  
4/28 overnights

In a review of a decade of research Kelley (2000) cites the benefit of being close to each parent. This option establishes 12 days separation from the second parent. Divorce research indicates that this is often too long for many children, and may diminish the second parent's importance to the children – with fewer opportunities for involvement in their day-to-day, school and homework activities. (Shafke,1985) In addition, this option provides little relief to the first parent from children responsibilities. This option may be preferred, however, given the parents' history of involvement, available time for parenting, present parenting resources or, as a transitional approach to timesharing.

### Every Other Weekend plus Midweek Visit

(Friday 6:00 p.m. to Sunday 6:00 p.m., with every Wednesday 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.)

4/28 overnights

### Every Other Week

(Friday 6:00 p.m. to following Friday 8:00 a.m.)

14/28 overnights

This parenting plan option creates seven days separation from the other parent, often quite difficult for children younger than six or seven years of age. It eliminates the opportunity for face-to-face parental conflict by minimizing transitions, and allows both parents and mature children to “settle” into a routine. The children’s switching residences can, of course, complicate management of scheduled lessons, activity commitments and daycare arrangements.

Note: changing households on *Friday* after school often works better than on the traditional Monday after school approach (allowing for a “winding-down” at the time of transition, rather than requiring “gearing-up” at that time). Serious reservation of this seven-day option must be given in cases involving parental alienation.

### Summer Vacations

When parents live in separate communities, it can be difficult to plan a schedule. If you have a long-distance relationship, your child will need to be in one home during the school year, and visit the other parent during non-school time. Consider the travel time and your child’s age and activities when you develop your schedule. If you are the “summer parent,” try and spend some time with your child every three months. If your child is young, you might need to do most of the traveling. Once your child is old enough to travel alone, it is still important to visit the child at least once or twice a year. Use three-day weekends for monthly contact during the school year if you live close enough, or longer holiday breaks such as Thanksgiving or Easter if you live farther away.

If you are the “school year parent” and live a long distance from the other parent, try and enroll your child in a year-round school. This allows for more frequent travel to be with the other parent, yet won’t take the child away for as long as the traditional summer break. Consider the day-to-day activities in both communities, since working parents need daycare or planned activities when children come to visit. Your child is likely to do well if your child has all but one week of each break with the long-distance parent. That leaves the child some time to be with friends in the child’s home community and time for vacation trips with each parent.

If your child is in a typical school-year/summer-vacation schedule, your child is likely to have two weeks of vacation at Christmas, another week or two during the spring or near Easter, and about twelve weeks off in the summer. If the child is under age eight, consider having an equal split of the Christmas break, and most spring breaks with the long-distance parent. Try breaking up the summer into three segments: the first and third with the long-distance parent and the middle one with the home parent. This may prevent the child from feeling homesick during the child’s trips. If the child is older and used to being away from home, the child might do well spending most of the summer with the long-distance parent, assuming the child enjoys it there and has a good relationship with that parent. Both of you need to consider the child’s interests, summer camp desires, and vacation needs as you develop your plan. (Lye1999)

# WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER

Children of this developmental stage benefit from parents who:

Make sure your child knows which parent will be picking them up and taking them home. If both parents will be attending an activity, allow the child to visit with both parents during that event. Develop a system where both parents are informed of school conferences, and extra-curricular activities.

1. Establish a homework routine, with assistance as necessary. Be sure to pack all books, school projects, uniforms and extra-curricular sports gear. Establish with the other parent the procedure for when children leave any of the abovementioned at the other parent's home. Decide who will be responsible for getting this to the child.
2. Establish a consistent homework time, bedtime, and mealtime at both homes. Attempt to provide similar diet at both homes. Television, computer, and playtime should be consistent. Agree on similar punishments for poor academic progress and unacceptable behavior.
3. Allow the children to have telephone access to the other parent when they desire. Be considerate of when you call the children, as not to interrupt bedtime or wake-up routines. If needed establish a schedule for the other parent to call.

## AGE: 11 through 18 Years

### SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTACT

Children between the ages of 11 and 18 usually seek more independence as they get older and prefer to do more things with less adult involvement. This pattern becomes more obvious as the children age. As children move through this stage, a good balance of supervision and flexibility is essential. Parents must be sure that visitation schedules are flexible and consider the natural tendency of the child toward increased independence from both parents. As children become more active in school and social activities, visitation likely will need to be reviewed and even restructured from time to time.

## Know How Your Child Grows

### A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Children in this age range are called "adolescents," with 3 different stages as described below. Generally, adolescents move through the following tasks during this period:

Establish a sense of autonomy (self-sufficiency) and personal identity;  
Achieve emotional independence from parents and other adults; and  
Begin process of individuation (separateness) from immediate and even extended family.

1. Physical Development
  - a. If puberty has not occurred yet, it likely will occur during this period, bringing rapid changes and "swings" in the child's hormones and emotions, together with common physical changes of puberty.
  - b. As physical development proceeds, especially sex-related physical changes, the child will likely want more privacy. Boundaries regarding physical contact by

parents may occur. For example, the parent's hug that once was natural and welcomed by the child may now be met with a very different response, including withdrawal and even some rejection.

2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
  - a. Concrete initially, more capacity for abstract thinking develops throughout adolescence
  - b. Greater critical thinking that may result in frequent comparisons and evaluation of others' behavior, appearance and preferences (including parents) with child's own preferences.
  - c. Brain development continues; for much of this period, the portion of brain that supports rational judgement, organization, emotional understanding and decision-making is not fully developed.
3. Social Development
  - a. Peer relationships take on a *much* greater importance.
  - b. Increasing independence from family is sought and demanded.
  - c. Though focused on independence, still concerned with meeting parents' expectations and need assistance in coping with age-related demands.
  - d. Increased interest in sexual matters and sexual identity.
4. Emotional Development
  - a. Increased ability for introspection (self-examination and understanding).
  - b. Identity formation occurs as the child explores various alternatives and makes choices that affect self-concept. Identity formation may include sexual, ethnic and career aspects. For some adolescents, this can be a time of role or identity confusion.
  - c. Puberty and incomplete brain development may result in significant emotional volatility ("moodiness") and, in some cases; this moodiness may be or seem extreme.

## **11 TO 13 YEARS (EARLY ADOLESCENCE)**

1. Physical development: Sexual characteristics of puberty occur or continue to develop; boys typically have higher physical self-concept (recognition of physical ability) than girls.
2. General behavior: Behavior largely decided by or compared to friends and schoolmates; social interaction outside of family more important; as part of individuation, children will more often challenge parents' values and authority. Girls tend to feel better about themselves in social situations than do boys. Same-sex peer groups are more important than opposite sex.
3. Language: Reads with greater understanding; may use language and abstract thinking to write about and report on emotional experiences.

4. Typical personality: Peer relationships and acceptance become increasingly important; complaints about parental restrictions and supervision increase; mood swings common; may vary between need for and rejection of parental affection and expectations.
5. Common or “normal” problems: forgetfulness; minor rebellion against parental rules and restrictions; lack of organization regarding school and home spaces (messy room, locker and/or desk)

## **14 to 16 YEARS (MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE)**

1. Physical development: Puberty completed or nearly completed.
2. General behavior: Increased romantic and/or sexual feelings toward others; Mixed-sex group activities increase; Self-centered; undecided at times regarding issues of separation and independence. Wants greater role in decision-making on issues affecting them.
3. Language: Increased use of language to report on emotional experiences and complaints. Prefer to communicate with peers over parents; may increase use of computers and other technology to maintain regular communication with peers.
4. Typical personality: Increasing efforts to achieve independence from parental restrictions and rules; attempts to bargain regarding attendance at social activities; critical thinking patterns may result in frequent judgments and “black and white” evaluations of issues.
5. Common normal ‘problems’: May begin to associate greater physical maturity with adulthood, leading to increased risk for harmful or premature behaviors; parent-child power struggles, especially around issues such as dating, curfews, household chores and driving privileges. Experimenting with drug and alcohol use and/or sexual behaviors; incomplete understanding of impact of potentially unsafe behaviors (sex, drugs, alcohol,).

## **17 to 18 YEARS (LATE ADOLESCENCE)** **[Note: actually through Age 20]**

1. General behavior: Increased romantic and/or sexual feelings toward others; Individual relationships with others begin to become more important than peer groups; frequently challenge parental authority and restrictions.
2. Typical personality: Self-centered idealism; right and wrong thinking, begins to become more other-oriented. Mood swings of puberty and early post-puberty may stabilize somewhat.

3. Common normal 'problems': School (including college planning) and social activities may compete, causing stress; experimenting with drug and alcohol use and/or sexual behaviors; incomplete understanding of impact of potentially unsafe behaviors (sex, drugs, alcohol, reckless driving).

## **After Divorce Needs**

The needs of adolescents after divorce depend, in part, on whether divorce occurs during this stage or occurs earlier in their development. If the divorce occurs at this stage of development, the need for some structure, consistency and reassurance of each parent's involvement is more important. Anger and blame may be common as adolescents become more judgemental.

However, as children move into and through adolescence, they may become more focused on the "fairness" of a plan for parental contact and they will likely consider it "fair" to include them to some extent in plans that are made for where they will spend their time. Whether or not parents are married or divorced, adolescence is a time of increasing importance of peer relationships, social activities and independence, a fact that must be considered in any after divorce family.

Parents must be ready to: support their teen's attempts to achieve developmental tasks; accept the teen's beliefs, feelings and attitudes without being judgemental; set appropriate limits on behavior but not on those beliefs, feelings and attitudes; foster empathy with the teen by remembering (not necessarily reciting) your own feelings and behaviors as a teen; allow their teen to be different than the parent is or was at that age or now; acknowledge and support the teen's need for independence and autonomy

## **CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD**

### **FOR ALL ADOLESCENTS:**

Perhaps more than any other age range, and particularly in later adolescence, the flexibility recommended in the literature makes a strict schedule difficult and even harmful to the adolescent's development, in some cases. Longer vacations or contact periods, more creative time-sharing alternatives, and even equal time-sharing may be options, depending on the particular needs of a child and the relationship established before the divorce. All contact arrangements should be negotiated in good faith, keeping in mind your child and the special developmental tasks of adolescents. The suggestions that follow, as mentioned in the introduction, cannot be viewed as appropriate for each situation and each child.

### **11 TO 13 YEARS (EARLY ADOLESCENCE)**

#### Every Other Weekend

(Friday 6:00 p.m. to Sunday 6:00 p.m.)

Many adolescents prefer one primary home (in a large part to avoid confusion for their friends), and only wish to spend weekends or evenings with the other parent. Much of this will depend on the history of the relationship and the availability of the parent to meet their needs.

#### Every Other Weekend/only one weekend overnight

(Friday after school to Saturday 6:00 p.m.) or (Saturday noon to Sunday 6:00 p.m.)

Adolescent children often have multiple projects and school assignments requiring their effort, as well as a number of options for peer-group contact on weekends. Parents may consider structuring weekend overnight visitation on an evening when it is more likely that the child will not have to decline social invitations.

Phone calls should be encouraged and permitted at all reasonable times.

Some contact should occur each week or, at a minimum, every other week.

If the child is not used to having individual and continued contact with the nonresidential parent, consider allowing a friend to join the child on some occasions.

**Other contact:**

If at all possible, offer your child some input into the planned summer vacation contact schedule. Offering a choice between two equally appropriate options can give a child a feeling of some control over his or her time, meeting their need for greater independence. If an extended summer stay with the non-residential parent is likely, that parent should make efforts in advance to locate social and recreational outlets for the child.

During extended time away from either parent, phone calls and email exchanged with that parent may be helpful. This communication should not focus on negative messages about either parent.

School breaks of one week or more should be structured in a way that takes into account the needs of the child noted above.

## **14 TO 18 YEARS (MIDDLE AND LATE ADOLESCENCE)**

**Weekly contact:**

Contact should occur each week. Contact should be structured with some consideration of child's school and social activities. During earlier stages, consistency and predictability are very important; at this age, some flexibility by each parent becomes more important.

Older adolescent children often have multiple projects and school assignments requiring their effort, as well as a number of options for peer-group contact on weekends. Parents may consider structuring weekly contact on a day when it is more likely that the child will not repeatedly have to decline social invitations.

Overnight stays may become increasingly uncomfortable for older adolescents, especially older adolescent girls staying with fathers with whom they have not had open communication and interaction prior to or during the divorce. For this reason, shorter periods of contact should be considered as an alternative.

To avoid frustration, it is helpful for the child and both parents to keep a calendar that outlines visitation as far in advance as possible and be prepared for reasonable changes to be requested by the child.

If child requests additional contact with non-residential parent, contact should be permitted.

Phone calls and appropriate emails, text messages, and other forms of communication should be encouraged and permitted at all reasonable times.

Due to reported and researched risks associated with teenagers who drive without adult supervision, transportation to and from the non-residential parent's home should be coordinated and completed by parents whenever possible, whether or not your child has a

driver's license. This requires that parents are courteous to and respectful of each other as the transfer occurs.

If the child is not used to having individual and continued contact with the parent, consider allowing a same-sex friend to join the child on some occasions.

**Other contact:**

If at all possible, offer your child some input into the planned summer vacation contact schedule. Offering a choice between two equally appropriate options can give a child a feeling of some control over his or her time, meeting the need for greater independence.

Some children as young as age 14 may view summer as a time to earn extra spending money through part-time work. Some consideration should be made for this possibility.

School breaks of one week or more should be structured in a way that takes into account the child's increasing movement toward independence. While you still are the child's parent and have a valuable relationship with your child, the real fact is that most children at this age become less and less interested in having long discussions and extended contact with their parents.

Particularly as a child moves into late adolescence, parents may find the child is increasingly occupied with peer and school activities, leaving only occasional time available to spend with either parent, regardless of their designation as the residential or parent.

Compensate for changes in physical contact by liberal use of phone calls, messages that do not require a response but offer the child encouragement, limited text messages (if parent views a cell phone as appropriate for his or her child), e-mails, greeting cards, notes and letters.

*Interventions for Children of Divorce: Custody, Access, and Psychotherapy, 2nd Edition*  
*Chapter: Visitation/Parent Access: Patterns and Problems.*  
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## **WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S CONTACT WITH NON-RESIDENTIAL PARENT EASIER**

Children in adolescence benefit from parents who both:

Commit to be and are *flexible* about visitation and understand their child's need for greater time with peers and social activities. Though a regular contact schedule appears to encourage more frequent non-custodial parent contact, adolescents report a very strong preference for flexible, unrestricted access.

Offer and accept a greater role by children in determining some details of contact with the secondary residential parent, while continuing to encourage a relationship with each parent as much as possible.

Work diligently to be cordial to one another and minimize conflict.

Do not use adolescents as messengers for information or couriers for documents and records. Parents should work to create a co-parenting relationship that includes respectful discussion and cooperation as it relates to their roles as parents.

Plan for activities that offer some social stimulation to the child; adolescents frequently report being "bored" when their time with the non-custodial parent consists only of "watching TV" or "talking."



## WORDS I NEED TO KNOW

**Court Order.** Any order made by a judge.

**Custody.** See Shared Parental Responsibility, Sole Custody and Rotation Custody

**Dissolution of Marriage.** Divorce.

**Divorce.** The legal process of dissolving a marriage.

**Domestic Violence.** A learned pattern of physical, verbal, sexual, and/or emotional behavior in which one person in a relationship uses force, fear and intimidation to dominate or control the other person, often with the threat or use of violence. Domestic violence is a crime.

**Domestic Violence Injunctions.** The law authorizes courts to issue protective orders (a special type of restraining order) where there has been violence or other forms of abuse within a family. These orders may include orders for custody, support and a parenting plan.

**Facilitator, Family Law Facilitator.** A court employee who helps parents without attorneys by providing assistance with common family law forms and giving information about court procedures and other sources of help in their communities.

**Filing.** Turning your legal papers into the clerk of the court.

**Hearing.** A motion or other legal action that is handled in the courtroom. Parties and attorneys may call witnesses and introduce evidence. A judge will make a decision based on all the evidence and the decision will become a court order.

**Holiday.** Each family has certain holidays and special occasions that it celebrates. A parenting plan would specify who the child will spend holidays with and define each holiday so both parents know when it begins and when it ends.

**Judgment.** See *Court Order*.

**Mediation.** A meeting with a trained, neutral third party *who helps the parties* try to solve problems cooperatively. Most courts provide mediation of custody and parenting plan problems up to a certain number of hours. Mediation may occur face to face or separately, if necessary. Mediation is confidential. The mediator does not tell the parents what they should do or make a recommendation to the court. Mediation may not be appropriate where there are safety issues or domestic violence concerns.

**Modification.** Modification means change. If you wish to change a previous order of the court, you may file in the court file a supplement petition for Modification of Final Judgment.

**Motion.** A formal request filed with the court. A judge makes a decision to allow or deny the request, usually after a hearing or a trial.

**Secondary-residential Parent.** The secondary-residential parent is the parent with whom the children do not live most of the time.

**Order.** See *Court Order*.

**Parenting Plan.** A document that states when the child will be with each parent and how decisions will be made. The parenting plan may be developed by the parents, through mediation, with the help of attorneys or by a judge after a trial or hearing. See also *Custody*.

**Parenting Time.** The actual time a child is scheduled to spend with a parent. During parenting time that parent has primary responsibility for making routine decisions for the child but not major decisions. See also *Custody*.

**Party.** A person involved in a court case.

**Paternity Complaint.** A paper filed in court asking the court to determine that a particular man is the father of a child born to a woman not married to him and also to determine the custody and contact issues relating to the child, to develop a parenting plan and to determine child support.

**Primary Residential Parent.** Typically, the primary residential parent is the parent with whom the children live the majority of the time.

**Pro Se.** Filing legal papers by yourself, without a lawyer. It can also mean appearing in court in front of a judge by yourself, without a lawyer.

**Rotating Custody.** A parenting arrangement where each parent has the children approximately one-half of the time and neither is designated as the primary residential parent.

**Ruling.** See court order.

**Safety Focused Parenting Plan.** A parenting plan specially created for families where there is a mental illness, drug addiction, domestic violence, child abuse, or other circumstances that impact safety of the child or a parent. The Florida Judicial Department and State Family Law Advisory Committee are currently developing such a plan. If you determine that your situation requires a safety-focused parenting plan, you should consult with an attorney.

**Self-Represented.** An individual who files a court case without using the services of an attorney. See also *Pro Se*.

**Shared Parental Responsibility.** Defined in the Florida Statutes as “a court-ordered relationship in which both parents retain full parental rights and responsibilities with respect to their child and in which both parents confer with each other so that the major decisions affecting the welfare of the child will be determined jointly”.

**Sole Custody.** An arrangement where one parent has the right and responsibility to make major decisions for the welfare of the child.

**Statute.** Laws passed by the state legislature (or adopted by initiative). Most code sections relating to family law are in volumes \_\_\_\_\_ of the Florida Statutes and are available at the county law library or on the internet.

**Stipulation.** An agreement between the parties.

**Supervised Parenting Time.** Parenting time during which the parent and child must be in the presence of another specified adult while the parent visits. Supervised visitation may be ordered where there has been domestic violence, child abuse, or a threat to take the child out of state. The third party is responsible for making sure that the child is safe and the rules are followed. Sometimes supervision can be arranged and paid for through an agency or provider. Often, a trusted family member or friend will agree to take on the responsibility. Either way, both the parents and the supervisor need to be informed about the requirements, the expectations and what to do in the event of an emergency or if the visit must be ended. Some courts have guidelines for supervised visits. Ask your local court clerk or facilitator.

**Trial.** A hearing where the judge makes final rulings on issues between the parties.

**Visitation.** Term no longer preferred. See *Parenting Plan, Parenting Time*.

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