

Putting together a Parenting Plan
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A Parenting Plan is a written document that outlines how parents will raise their child after separation or divorce. You may have heard of legal terms such as “custody” pre the New Children’s Act and currently the term “care and contact”.

Parenting Plans encompass and involve the New Children’s Act.

A Parenting Plan focuses on describing parenting arrangements such as:

- how decisions about the child are made;
- how information is shared between parents
- when each parent will spend time with the child;
- how other parenting issues may be addressed;

A Parenting Plan should reflect the best interests and the needs of the child. A Parenting Plan can also help to reduce conflict between parents by setting out clear guidelines and expectations. Reducing conflict is important. Research shows that children’s chances of coping successfully with their parents’ separation or divorce are better if their parents co-operate with each other.

A Parenting Plan should have enough detail to be useful, yet enough flexibility to be realistic. Consider the age of your child and how well you are able to work with the other parent when thinking about how specific your Parenting Plan should be. A Parenting Plan can minimize conflict by clearly setting out guidelines and expectations.

This checklist can help identify issues to consider when developing a Parenting Plan.

The checklist identifies topics for consideration along with some questions to consider. These questions are not exhaustive and are simply meant to help guide your thinking and discussions on the topic.

You know your child best. There may be some issues in the checklist that do not apply to your situation and there may be others not listed that are unique to your situation.

What to Consider When Making a Parenting Plan

- Living arrangements and parenting schedules;
- Residential arrangements;
- Movement of your child between homes (What are the details about drop-off and pick-up? Consider specifying times, days, location, and person responsible for pick up and drop off);
- Childcare and babysitting arrangements;
- Communication with child while with the other parent;

- Changes to the parenting schedule (Discuss circumstances that might require schedule changes: illness, lateness, social events, special occasions, unforeseen events. How will schedule changes be managed? How much notice of the change is required?)
- Child's belongings (Will belongings move between homes with your child? Will your child have two sets of some items? Who will purchase which items for your child?)
- Child's social life (How will the child spend time with friends? Who will take the child to social events such as birthday parties or sleepovers? Who will buy gifts for the child to give?)
- Holidays and special days;
- Arrangements for holidays, as also Public Holidays, religious holidays;
- Arrangements for other significant days (Consider birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other events such as weddings, graduations, funerals, etc.);
- Health care :
 - Decisions about medical and mental health care;
 - Emergency medical treatment (How will parents notify each other?);
 - Arrangements for medical or dental check-ups (Who will take the child to doctor or dentist's appointments?);
 - Care of child if child is ill (Who will take time off work?)
- Maintenance costs:
 - Day to Day maintenance costs;
 - Medical Aid and/or Hospital Plan - payments and excesses
 - Arrangements for any special needs of your child (Consider orthodontic treatment, counselling, physiotherapy, speech therapy, diet, glasses, prescription drugs.) ;
 - Children with special needs;
 - Arrangements for any special treatments, therapies or services needed now as well as in the future (Consider ongoing physical or occupational therapy, counselling or frequent medical appointments.);
 - Education Costs (inclusive of Extra Murals, books stationery and Uniforms, tours, after care, au pair, transportation);
 - Tertiary Education Costs

Religious and Spiritual Upbringing;

Grandparents and extended family

Other parenting issues

Discipline and lifestyle expectations (Consider rules on bedtimes, homework, allowance, etc.)

Child's use of the computer, including social networking, or other electronic devices such as cellular phones, e-tablets, or gaming systems (Consider what type of rules around supervision or access are needed)

Child's use of the phone

Diet and nutrition

Family pets (Where is the pet going to live? Can the pet move between homes with the child?)

Involvement of new partners and family (Consider when to introduce new partner or sibling to child.)

Remember one size does not fit all. The plan you and your child's other parent develop will be as unique as each of the individuals in your divorced family. The ideal plan will take into consideration all of your family members' needs - especially your children's needs and to balance these where possible. Try to see this experience through your children's eyes. It will likely be quite different from yours.