

# THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A PARENTING PLAN

## When You Separate or Divorce



Separating or divorcing can be a very challenging time for most parents. They often feel overwhelmed and emotional. One of the most important questions weighing heavily on their minds is what is going to happen with the children. This is a new situation for the family and there needs to be a plan in place.

A parenting plan is a written agreement that outlines how parents will take care of their children after a separation or divorce. This agreement covers topics such as living arrangements, the parenting schedule and making decisions for their children.

When creating a parenting plan, it is crucial to stay focused on what is best for your children. This can be difficult for parents when they have different perspectives.

But if they work together soon after the separation to reach an agreement, parents will have a plan to follow even if there are times when they are having trouble seeing eye-to-eye. It can also set a positive tone for their future coparenting relationship.

Conflict between parents has a very negative impact on children. When parents argue about child-related issues, the children may think the separation is their fault or they need to choose between their parents. Having a parenting plan to follow will provide clear guidelines and expectations reducing the chance for misunderstandings and conflict. This can lead to better communication and cooperation between you and the other parent.

Parents who communicate and work well together can have a parenting plan that allows for flexibility.

Perhaps one parent needs to go out of town for work during their parenting time. The parents can discuss this and adjust the parenting schedule so the other parent will care for the children while that parent is away and there can be make-up parenting time when they return. If parents are arguing and not communicating well, they will need to have a more detailed parenting plan that allows for little to no flexibility in order to prevent conflict. Sometimes this happens at the beginning of a separation and improves over time.

Parenting plans are customizable and unique for each family. They provide consistency and stability for children. Factors that may be taken into consideration when putting together a parenting plan include the children's ages and needs, their activities, where they go to school and the parents' work schedules. Most children will want to know what their lives are going to look like after the separation. One way to help them feel more secure is to have a family calendar that shows the parenting schedule and the children's activities so they know what to expect. Keep in mind that parenting plans can be reviewed as circumstances change or as children grow older.

You can reach an agreement about a parenting plan without going to court or even if you have already started a court case. One option would be to use an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process such as Mediation.

During this process, a mediator helps you to communicate with one another, work through conflict, and guides and supports both of you. The mediator does not take sides or make decisions for you. The parents are the decision makers as they know their children the best. Reaching an agreement in mediation is quicker, more affordable and can be made legally binding.

It is understandable that going through a separation or divorce can be very tense and emotions may run high. Putting together a parenting plan when you separate will reduce conflict and help you build your co-parenting relationship. This benefits the parents by minimizing misunderstandings and disagreements, and the children by creating consistency and security. Mediators are professionals who can assist you with making a parenting plan with clear guidelines and expectations about where your children are going to live, how you will spend holidays with them, and who will make decisions about their health, education and other important matters.

**If you would like to talk to us about how you can resolve your separation and divorce matters through mediation, we offer a 20-minute free phone consultation that remains confidential. A professionally trained and certified Family Mediator can answer your questions and provide you with support.**

**Contact Michelle**



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