



6 Types of Parenting

The most common options for parenting after separation are:

- Co-parenting
- Parallel parenting

Co-parenting

Co-parenting means the parents may have joint or sole custody of the children and they work in a cooperative way with each other.

In co-parenting parents are able to work together to make many decisions regarding their children. Usually the parents agree on most things and have few arguments about their children's lives. For example, they often have similar ideas about food choices, bedtimes or rules. Even if they don't totally agree on these things they can respect the differences and still make decisions together.

In separations involving conflict, co-parenting can present more challenges, but some parents may still be able to manage the conflict well enough to make decisions about their children together.

Co-parenting may not work if there is intense conflict and/or a history of family violence before, during, or after the separation. It also may not work if one parent cannot properly care for the children because of mental health or addiction issues.

☀ Parallel Parenting

Parallel parenting is based on the idea that each parent has a positive contribution to make while with the children. This approach is useful in situations where direct contact between the parents may be harmful to the children because of conflict.

In parallel parenting, the parents have very little contact with each other. When there is a high level of conflict, parallel parenting can be the best way to look after the needs of your children.

Some important things to remember in parallel parenting are that you should:

- Avoid bickering over things that happened in the past.
- Give each other important information about your children (e.g., about health, education, or interests).
- Avoid arguing about the parenting plan.
- Develop separate relationships with doctors, teachers, coaches and friends.
- Take turns taking your children to see the doctor or dentist or decide who will be responsible for this task.

- Do not complain if the other parent is a few minutes late for an exchange with the children.
- Communicate by email, fax or mail. (Use faxes only if you have privacy where you receive the fax.) Do not share your communications with the children.
- Avoid sarcasm.
- Consider using a notebook that can go back and forth with important information about the children, especially with younger children regarding things such as toilet training, eating habits, bedtime or homework.
- Avoid telling the other parent how to be a good parent.

REMEMBER:

- You cannot change the way your former partner parents. You can only do your best when the children are with you, without criticizing the other parent.
- Children know when the rules in mom’s and dad’s houses are different and are usually able to adjust to the differences.
- Parallel parenting will often involve children spending more time in the care of one parent who has sole custody while the other parent has access, although in some cases the children can spend roughly equal time with each parent.
- Over time, the conflict may become less intense and you may be able to make co-parenting work, but this may take a long time and in some cases will never occur. Counselling may help you both move to co-parenting, but this is not always a realistic possibility.
- Parallel parenting arrangements do not work if there is ongoing risk to children and/or one of the parents. In these situations there are options such as supervised exchanges, supervised access, and in extreme cases, no contact at all.

Understanding the difference between co-parenting and parallel parenting

This chart describes differences between these two parenting styles.

CO - PARENTING

PARALLEL PARENTING

Parents communicate regularly.

Parents might sometimes communicate directly, but mostly indirectly through email, letters or phone messages.

Parents work together in the best interests of the children.

Parents work separately in the best interests of interests of the children.

There are smooth exchanges of children from one home to the other.

Children may be exchanged in a public place or by using a third party

The schedule can change – it can be flexible and negotiable.

The schedule needs to be detailed and the parties need to stick to this plan.

Developing a Parenting Plan

Parents who can continue to parent together often develop what is called a Parenting Plan.

Contents of Plan

This is a document that explains the decisions you have made about caring for the children. For example, a Parenting Plan describes:

- How each parent will spend time with the children.
- How you will share information with the other parent.
- How you will make decisions about the children.
- How you will deal with other parenting issues.



Parallel Parenting Plan

Where the level of conflict between the parents is high, a detailed plan can help avoid misunderstandings and confusion. For example, rather than a plan that says “reasonable and generous access,”, the plan should state the days and times a parent sees the children, and who is responsible for picking them up and dropping them off.

The parenting plan:

- Is very detailed.
- Provides for the safety of the children and a parent if necessary.
- Considers the emotional needs of the children.
- Includes details about day-to-day access.
- Lists details about arrangements for all important holidays.
- Gives details about time children will spend with other family members such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts.
- Doesn’t assume or expect flexibility. Flexibility can be a breeding ground for new conflict.
- Clearly states each parent’s responsibilities and how major decisions will be made about things such as health, education, and religion.

- Has a plan for how disagreements can be worked out, and if this doesn't happen, a plan for mediation.
- Includes details about how exchanges of the children will happen.
- States how and when parents will communicate with each other (e.g., by email only, or by phone at certain times only).
- States how the children will communicate with the other parent they are not with.
- Includes details about how each parent will be informed about the children's report cards and school or sports events.

The plan should be enforceable – that is, it should be in the form of a court order or written agreement that has some “teeth” in the event that one parent does not stick to the plan.



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Parenting Plan Issues

First, think about what will be best for the children in the following areas:

Week-to-week time arrangements

The overall schedule and plan for the child(ren)'s move between the parents' homes.

Time arrangements for holidays and special days

- School vacations.
- Parents' vacations with and without children.
- Child's illness (interrupting access arrangement).

Health care decisions

- Emergency medical treatment.
- Informing other parent.
- Check-ups (medical and dental).
- Access to medical records.

Education decisions

- Consultation between parents on any change in school, special educational needs or tutoring.
- Access to school records.
- Attendance at parent-teacher conferences and school events.

Cultural decisions

- What First Nation a child shall be registered with.
- What cultural events and activities the child will attend.

Religion

- Religious education and attendance at services (if any).

Grandparents and extended family

- Visits with the children, involvement with the children.

Communication between parents

- What type of information should be communicated about the children and how it should be communicated.
- Communication when the child is with the other parent.

Changes in parenting schedule

- What happens if a parent cannot spend time with a child when scheduled.

Dealing with disagreements/changes in the Parenting Plan

- How to deal with disagreements.
- How to change arrangements as children's and parents' circumstances change.
- What happens if one parent wants to move to another community or province.

Sample Parenting Plan

Use your own Plan or use this as a guide to make your own Parenting Plan.

This is the Parenting Plan between _____ and
_____ (“We”)

We agree that the following schedule will be our guide, and that we will be flexible with each other if minor changes are necessary.

Week-to-Week Time Arrangements

We agree to spend blocks of time with our children. Each block of time will be _____ in length and will begin at 6:00 p.m. and continue until 6:00 p.m. on the return date. Our children will go to the other parent’s home together. The parent picking up the children is responsible for their dinner.

Birthday Arrangements

For the children’s birthdays, we agree that whoever has the children during that “block” will have the child’s birthday party. The parent who does not have the child during that time is free to plan a party the day before or the day after. We agree to work together to make our children’s birthdays special for them.

We also agree that we will make sure that we alternate birthdays so that the parent who does not have the child one year on the child’s birthday, will have the child the next year on the child’s birthday.

Vacation Arrangements

We will discuss with each other how to spend our respective vacation times with the children. We agree to give the other parent advance notice of planned vacation. If possible, we will give at least two weeks’ notice.

We agree to tell the other parent of the vacation details, e.g. places and telephone numbers where the children may be reached.

Medical Arrangements

We agree to notify the other parent of illnesses the children may have.

We agree that the parent who has the child at the time he/she suffers a medical condition has the authority to make any decision regarding emergency medical care. We agree to notify the other parent of the emergency as soon as possible.