

These Model Parenting Plans represent the collective work of a Task Force of judges, lawyers, probation officers and mental health professionals. They combine the latest research on the needs of children with the experience of professionals who have worked extensively with children and families going through divorce and separation. The plans focus primarily on children's needs. Several plans are suggested, depending on the age of the children and the prior involvement of the parents with their children.

The Model Parenting Plans are not mandatory or presumptive. They do not represent the "law". They are not intended to be strict guidelines; nor do they indicate that there should be a minimum or maximum amount of parenting time for either parent. The plans are designed to be educational, informational and practical tools for parents who face important decisions relative to the care of their children.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the members of the Task Force listed below who spent countless hours volunteering their time to develop how to present these plans. I specifically would like to thank the co-chairs Hon. Elizabeth O'Neill LaStaiti and Peggie Ward, Ph.D., who spearheaded this project.

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**DESIGNING A PLAN IN THE BEST INTEREST OF YOUR CHILD:
INFORMATION YOU SHOULD CONSIDER**



Factors:

- 1. Level of tension or conflict between parents**
- 2. Parenting skills already in place**
- 3. Child's physical and emotional health**
- 4. Child's temperament and adaptability to change**
- 5. Child's developmental age and abilities**
- 6. Child's daily schedule**
- 7. Availability of each parent**
- 8. Location of both parents**
- 9. Parent's ability and willingness to learn basic care giving skills**
- 10. Sibling groups**
- 11. Close caretaking relationships**

PLEASE NOTE:

Every case is unique and every child and parent is unique. The parenting plan options contained in these informational sheets are intended to provide guidance only to parents in developing a parenting plan for their family. The suggestions may not fit the needs of every family. These plans are not intended for parents with mental illness affecting parenting functioning, parents with untreated substance abuse difficulties or parents where domestic violence is a concern.

BIRTH TO



5 YEARS

BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS



This is a busy and important time. Infants are totally dependent on the adults around them while they touch, listen, and observe the world. By 12 months your child explores his/her environment, says a few words, and has a grasp of routine. Infants know people around them when they are within sight, but “out of sight is out of mind.” At this age, more frequent contacts, even if brief, help infants build a close relationship with both parents. Parenting time for the parent who is not the major caregiver needs to be in predictable patterns and, if possible, in the same location. Infants learn to attach to parents and others through consistent, loving responses such as holding, playing, feeding, soothing, talking gently and lovingly, stimulating, and creating bedtime and bath time routines. It is important at this age to maintain sleep, feeding, and waking cycles. It is important to consider the needs and routines of the breast-feeding infant and balance the infant’s need to nurse with the infant’s need to bond with the other parent.

Involvement Necessary to Form and Maintain Close Relationship with a Child:
10 – 12 parenting times [three times weekly] per month. Plans will vary depending on previous relationship and time spent with child.

SUCCESSFUL PLANS COULD INCLUDE:

1. Three time periods of 2 - 3 hours during the week (e.g. Monday, Wednesday and Saturday)
2. Two weekday contacts of 2 – 3 hours and one weekend contact of 4 – 8 hours
3. Two weekday contacts of 3 – 4 hours and one longer weekend contact, including an overnight if that parent has previously cared for the child overnight

Communication between parents is essential for infants. Parents need to let the other parent know about things like: Sleeping and naps, feeding and any new foods, changes in behavior, special games or toys, illness or fever, any new adults in the infant’s life and any new skills emerging. This can be done using notes, email or phone.

12 MONTHS TO 24 MONTHS



This is a period of rapid development. The baby has developed greater physical skills. Children this age can feel comfortable with multiple caregivers. One to two year olds are becoming independent and developing the ability to comfort themselves (thumb sucking or holding favorite toy or blanket.) Children continue to need a great deal of holding, caressing, gentleness, and direct eye contact. They still need their adult caregivers to meet their physical and emotional needs. They benefit from repetitive play and still need similar routines (sleep, eat, wake) in both households. Children this age can hold a memory of an adult they haven't seen for a short amount of time (a day or two) but may still show fear or distress at the time of next contact, and cannot tolerate long separations. They also recognize and react to harsh words or anger. Reliability and consistency of time spent continues to be crucial. Transitions between homes may become difficult at this age. It important to be sensitive to what the child is experiencing but recognize that most children calm down within a short period of time after the exchange has occurred.

Involvement Necessary to Form and Maintain Close Relationship with a Child:
10 – 12 parenting times [three times weekly] per month. Plans will vary depending on previous relationship and time spent with child.

SUCCESSFUL PLANS COULD INCLUDE:

1. Three time periods of 4 - 6 hours during the week (e.g. Monday, Wednesday and Saturday)
2. Two weekday contacts of 4 - 6 hours and one longer weekend contact which might include an overnight
3. Two weekday contacts of 4 – 6 hours and one longer weekend contact, including an overnight if that parent has previously cared for the child overnight

Communication between parents is essential. Parents need to let the other parent know about things like: Sleeping and naps, feeding and any new foods, changes in behavior, special games or toys, illness or fever, any new adults in the child's life and any new skills emerging. This can be done using notes, email or phone.

24 MONTHS TO 36 MONTHS



Toddlers experience rapid physical, emotional and social growth. They are developing a sense of independence and more control over the world around them. As they try to understand the world, they also try to change the rules; they have learned the word “no”. They need supervision, encouragement, and a high level of caregiver involvement. They need a balance between their desire for greater independence and their equally strong need for fair and consistent limits to keep them safe. They may still resist separation, even from one parent to the other. Reliability and consistency and predictable routine continue to be crucial. It is important to include physical care and comfort as well as stimulation.

Involvement Necessary to Form and Maintain Close Relationship with a Child:
10 – 12 parenting times [three times weekly] per month. Plans will vary depending on previous relationship and time spent with child.

SUCCESSFUL PLANS COULD INCLUDE:

1. Three time periods of 4 - 6 hours during the week (e.g. Monday, Wednesday and Saturday)
2. Two weekday contacts of 4 - 6 hours and one longer weekend contact which may include an overnight
3. Two weekday contacts of 4 – 6 hours and two weekend overnights (e.g. Friday evening until Sunday morning) if parent has previously cared for child overnight

Communication between parents is essential. Parents need to let the other parent know about things like: Sleeping and naps, feeding and any new foods, changes in behavior, special games or toys, illness or fever, any new adults or new friends in the child’s and any new skills emerging. This can be done using notes, email or phone.

AGE THREE TO FIVE YEARS (PRESCHOOL)



Preschoolers are busy and creative in their thinking. They want to learn and try things out. They have a strong attachment to regular caregivers and see others as people separate from themselves. They can hold a mental image and remember details clearly. Parents can help children be successful by adjusting their parenting styles to accommodate their children’s new development while keeping in mind that preschoolers continue to require support and guidance. Preschoolers are beginning to enjoy time with other children and learning how to cooperate and share. They may show increasing discomfort when moving between parents’ homes but this does not mean that the other parent is not a good parent or that the child does not want to be with the other parent.

Involvement Necessary to Consolidate Previous Relationship or Form Closer Relationship: 8 parenting times per month extending to 10 contact times or shared time depending on previous parental contact with child. Plans will vary depending on previous relationship and time spent with child. Newly separating or divorcing parents should monitor children’s progress within a particular plan over time; parents may need to step back to a plan for an earlier stage of development and make changes as necessary with children’s comfort and development

SUCCESSFUL PLANS COULD INCLUDE:

1.	One to two periods of 4 – 6 hours (e.g. Monday and Wednesday) and one overnight (e.g. Friday or Saturday) until noon the next day
2.	Week One: One mid-week contact of 4 – 6 hours (Monday or Tuesday) and two consecutive overnights (Thursday to Saturday or Friday to Sunday) Week Two: One mid-week contact of 4 – 6 hours and one overnight during the weekend
3.	Split Week and weekend (example: Sunday – Wednesday, Wednesday through Sunday, often with contact with the other parent during this block.)

Communication between parents is essential. Parents need to let the other parent know about things like: Sleeping and naps, feeding and any new foods, changes in behavior, special games or toys, illness or fever, any new adults or new friends and any new skills emerging. This can be done using notes, email or phone.

6 YEARS TO



12 YEARS

Communication between parents is essential. Parents need to let the other parent know about things like: any child behavior changes, extra-curricular activities (for example sports or music), health issues, social issues (for example new friends), and parental supervision (for example television shows, video games, cell phones).

AGE 6 –9 (EARLY SCHOOL AGE - ELEMENTARY SCHOOL)

This and the next age period are typically the most flexible years of development. That allows you as parents to be more creative in developing parenting plans. Early school age children can be more independent than their younger brothers and sisters, and more secure with the idea of two residences; they can usually adjust better to different parenting styles.

These children have a more developed sense of time. If you use a wall calendar to inform and remind your children of the parenting plan as well as their other activities, it helps to organize them, to increase their security (they can anticipate changes and not be surprised each time), and to make their adjustment to the transitions or “back and forth” much easier. As in many other aspects of their life, it is usually a lot easier for them if they know what is coming. They benefit from routine and consistency in weekly planning. They need your support to try out interests and activities that would help them to become more independent and self-confident. With predictable schedules and your help, they can plan to get together with friends at whichever home they are in. At the same time, children of this age (and the next) are generally among the most flexible in terms of the kinds of parenting plans and time they can spend with each of you. They have more comfort and experience with separations from you, but have not yet settled into friendship groups or activities that tie them more to one residence or town. At the same time, it is best to avoid too many transitions in one week, since that can be confusing for them.

Where one parent has significantly more hands-on parenting experience than the other parent prior to separation

Week One	One overnight (up to 12 hours) Thursday	
Week Two	Three consecutive overnights from Thursday to Sunday at 6 PM	This plan may need to be implemented gradually

Where one parent has done somewhat more hands-on parenting than the other

Week One	Monday Dinner One overnight up to 12 hours (Thursday)	
Week Two	Four consecutive overnights (Thursday through Sunday overnight)	Pick up and drop offs are at school

Where each parent has significant hands-on parenting of the children

Many plans work in this category of sharing 7 out of 14 overnights. There should be no more than two transitions per week (e.g. Wednesday and Sunday). For example, Monday and Tuesday nights with one parent, Wednesday and Thursday nights with the other parent, alternate Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

AGES 10-12 (LATER SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN)

Some call these the “pre-teen years,” as these children begin to make the transition into puberty and adolescence. Many will want to do more things for themselves. Your “pre-teens” usually do best when you encourage activities outside of the home; this fosters social skills and other capabilities that help in the development of their independence, which contributes to their self-esteem and confidence. Having friends becomes increasingly important for most later school-age kids, although peer acceptance, while helpful to them, is not typically as important as it becomes in the next stages. Social skills, self-confidence, and the development of values provide a good foundation for the teenage years in the next stage, which brings lots of changes.

Children of this age usually understand time well and can appreciate future plans and weekly schedules. They balance different values and parental practices that might exist in your two residences, although they can become quite rule-bound. If you are able to keep them out of parental disagreements, that can permit them to use their energies for constructive activities in school and with friends or in the community.

Ten to twelve year olds continue to need predictability in their weekly schedule and activities and, ideally, to have open lines of communication with each of you. As such, it is appropriate for you to allow your children to express their feelings about the need for greater control over their own time, while making it clear that you as parents make the final decisions. It is a challenge to help them balance their time with each of you, with friends, and in activities; that requires some flexibility on your part and a commitment by each of you to maintaining a strong relationship for the children with the other parent.

Where one parent has significantly more hands-on parenting experience than the other parent prior to separation

Week One	One overnight (up to 12 hours) Thursday	
Week Two	Three consecutive overnights from Thursday to Sunday at 6 PM	This plan may need to be implemented gradually

Where one parent has done somewhat more hands-on parenting than the other.

Week One	Monday Dinner One overnight up to 12 hours (Thursday)	
Week Two	Four consecutive overnights (Thursday through Sunday overnight)	Pick up and drop offs are at school

Where each parent has significant hands-on parenting of the children

Many plans work in this category of sharing 7 out of 14 overnights. There should be no more than two transitions per week (e.g. Wednesday and Sunday). For example, Monday and Tuesday nights with one parent, Wednesday and Thursday nights with the other parent, alternate Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

13 YEARS TO



18 YEARS

Communication between parents is essential. Parents need to let the other parent know about things like: any behavior changes in your adolescent, extra-curricular activities (for example sports or music), health issues, social issues (for example new friends, dating), and parental supervision (for example television shows, video games, cell phones, computers and driving).

AGES 13-15 (MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN)

At this age, children are becoming more independent of their families and develop their own sense of self. Their lives become more complex as they move from classroom to classroom, engage in more activities, and increase their social lives. It is appropriate developmentally for them to spend more time away from their families and be increasingly focused on their peers and their own interests. Parents may experience a sense of loss because of this or feel that the other parent is pulling the child away from them. However, it is also a time of bewildering changes and choices, and, despite what adolescents will often say, familial guidance, support, and limits are crucial to navigating this stage successfully. In developing parenting plans, it is important to recognize that other interests will compete with the scheduled parenting plan, and teen-agers will be resentful and may feel unheard if this is not acknowledged. The challenge for parents is to be flexible and support their children’s growing independence while still providing appropriate structure and supervision in both households. At this age, it is appropriate for children to have and understand the basic parenting schedule while having the freedom to negotiate changes directly with each parent. However, it is critical that parents communicate directly with each other to make sure that the child is safe and accounted for. Children of this age may also wish to establish one primary home base as the rest of their lives become more complicated. Parenting time also often means participation in or attendance at activities, driving, etc. This enables each parent to understand and support what is important in the child's life.

If the attachment/relationship with each parent is close, and the inter-parental conflict is low, any schedule that promotes specific, regular, and consistent contact with each parent may work.

Where one parent has significantly more hands-on parenting experience than the other parent prior to separation

Week One	One overnight (up to 12 hours) Thursday	
Week Two	Three consecutive overnights from Thursday to Sunday at 6 PM	This plan may need to be implemented gradually

Where one parent has done somewhat more hands-on parenting than the other

Week One	Monday Dinner One Overnight up to 12 hours (Thursday)	
Week Two	Four consecutive overnights (Thursday through Sunday overnight)	Pick up and drop offs are at school

Where each parent has significant hands-on parenting of the children

Many plans work in this category of sharing 7 out of 14 overnights. There should be no more than two transitions per week (e.g. Wednesday and Sunday). For example, Monday and Tuesday nights with one parent, Wednesday and Thursday nights with the other parent, alternate Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Adolescents generally want more consolidated time in each home, e.g. alternating weeks.

AGES 16-18 (HIGH SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN)

This is a challenging age as children prepare to leave home for college, work or military service. There are many external pressures, so stability at home is very important. As they prepare to be more independent, children of this age may well value friends, schoolwork, jobs, and activities more than family time, yet they still very much need the support and involvement of both parents. They will resist limits and structure while still needing them. However, it is appropriate within this age group for the teenager to have more of a say in making plans for a schedule as well as other decisions. Parents should listen to and carefully consider their children's input while still making the ultimate decision. If the adolescent's request in terms of scheduling is not being granted, it may be helpful to discuss why it is not. A child might want to be at one house because there is little supervision or because he or she is worried about how a depressed parent will manage without him or her. On the other hand, this is also a time when a teenager may have positive reasons for feeling more aligned with one parent, such as a parent who is better at helping with homework or who shares an interest, perhaps music or athletics, with the child. While the adolescent will appropriately do most of the negotiating for specific details concerning his or her schedule, parent-to-parent communication is crucial, both to be certain that the child is safe and his or her whereabouts known, and also to set similar expectations for driving, curfew, and discipline.

If the attachment/relationship with each parent is close, and the inter-parental conflict is low, any schedule that promotes specific, regular, and consistent contact with each parent may work.

Where one parent has significantly more hands-on parenting experience than the other parent prior to separation

Week One	One overnight (up to 12 hours) Thursday	
Week Two	Three consecutive overnights from Thursday to Sunday at 6 PM	This plan may need to be implemented gradually

Where one parent has done somewhat more hands-on parenting than the other.

Week One	Monday Dinner One overnight up to 12 hours (Thursday)	
Week Two	Four consecutive overnights (Thursday through Sunday overnight)	Pick up and drop offs are at school

Where each parent has significant hands-on parenting of the children

Many plans work in this category of sharing 7 out of 14 overnights. There should be no more than two transitions per week (e.g. Wednesday and Sunday). For example, Monday and Tuesday nights with one parent, Wednesday and Thursday nights with the other parent, alternate Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Adolescents generally want more consolidated time in each home, e.g. alternating weeks.
