



Parenting Plan Checklist

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” and “access.” A parenting plan doesn’t have to use legal terminology. It needs to focus on describing parenting arrangements such as:

- how decisions about the child are made (for example, jointly or individually but in consultation with the other parent)
- 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 interests and 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 deals only with parenting and child support and does not address issues such as property division or spousal support. 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. The Public Health Agency of Canada has some useful information about helping children involved in separation and divorce. For example, this information points out some special considerations, depending





on children's ages and stages. You can find this information at:
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/2-eng.php>

You can develop a parenting plan together if there is agreement. If you need help reaching agreement, mediation or collaborative decision-making processes can be helpful in making a parenting plan. Lawyers, counsellors, therapists or social workers may also be able to help. It is a good idea to seek independent legal advice about your parenting plan.

NOTE: If there has been family violence in your relationship, special considerations may apply. For more information on family violence see: "Abuse is Wrong" at <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fv-vf/pub/abus/aiw-mei/index.html#18>.

What to Consider When Making a Parenting Plan

1. Living arrangements and parenting schedules

- Residential arrangements (Will the child live mainly in one residence or will the child move between two homes?)
- Geographical considerations (Will the parents live within a certain distance of each other?)
- 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)
- Moving Away (What if one parent proposes to move? What if one parent proposes to move with the child? How much notice should be given e.g. 30, 45, 60 days? How will notice be given e.g. e-mail, letter? Will consent of the other parent be required when the move of a child is proposed? How will parenting arrangements be affected?)
- Childcare and babysitting arrangements
- Communication with child while with the other parent (Will communication be through phone, e-mail, pictures, Skype?)
- 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? Will there be make-up time?)





- 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?)

2. Vacation, holidays and special days

- Arrangements for holidays (Consider school breaks, summer vacation, school holidays, statutory holidays, religious holidays. Will the child spend certain holidays with one parent every year? Will holidays alternate between households?)
- Arrangements for other significant days (Consider birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other events such as weddings, graduations, funerals, etc.)

3. Health care

- Decisions about medical or dental care (How will decisions be made about dental or medical treatment? What about vaccinations or other preventative treatments?)
- 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?)
- Health card arrangements (Who will hold the child's health card? Will the card move between homes with the child?)
- Access to medical records (How will medical information be accessed or shared?)
- Medical insurance arrangements (Will there be medical insurance for the child? Who will obtain the insurance? Who will submit claims for insurance? Who will pay any extra costs?)
- Arrangements for any special needs of your child (Consider orthodontic treatment, counselling, physiotherapy, speech therapy, diet, glasses, prescription drugs.)





4. Education

- Decisions about any choice or change in school, school program, special educational needs, tutoring etc. (How will these decisions be made?)
- School records (How will this information be accessed or shared?)
- Attendance at parent-teacher conferences and school events (Who will attend?)
- School trips (Consider signing of permission forms, payment for trips, parent attendance)
- School absences (Under what circumstances will your child be removed from school? By whom?)

5. Extra-curricular activities

- Extra-curricular activities (How many? What type?)
- Schedule of activities for children (Consider whether one parent can schedule activities during the child's time with the other parent. Who will pay? Who will transport your child to and from activities?)

6. Religion

- Religious upbringing and activities (How will these decisions be made?)

7. Culture

- Cultural events, education and activities (How will these decisions be made?)
- Language instruction

8. Grandparents and extended family

- Visits (How often and when will visits with extended family take place? Who will be in attendance?)
- Communication (How and when will children communicate with their extended family?)



9. Travel

- Notice of travelling with the child (Will notice of travel be given to the other parent? Should notice be given for all travel or just travel that is out of province? What type of information is to be shared? Consider flight information as well as contact information for children during time away in case of emergency.)
- Written consent for child to travel out of the country may be required (Consider:
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/preparation_information/consent-letter_lettre-consentement-eng;
- Child's passport (Who will keep the child's passport? Will each parent have a copy of the passport number?)

10. Communication between parents

- Type of information to be communicated (Consider medical information, school information, change of address, telephone numbers, travel plans)
- Method of communication (Consider e-mail, communication notebook, text-message, telephone, internet tools)
- Frequency of communication
- Emergency communication

11. Making changes to parenting plan

- Process for making changes to the parenting schedule or other parts of the parenting plan (Consider a process for reviewing arrangements as circumstances of you and your child change.)

12. Solving Problems

- Method for resolving disagreements over the parenting plan (Consider the use of counsellor, therapist, mediator, or lawyer)
- Payment of costs (Who will pay for these services?)



13. Other parenting issues

These issues may not apply to every family situation and some will depend on the age of your child. You may choose to discuss these issues on an ongoing basis rather than dealing with them in the parenting plan.

- Basic safety requirements, including supervision (Consider the use of helmets, car seats, snowmobiles, a car, drugs or alcohol, etc., and the age when child can stay home alone)
- Discipline and lifestyle expectations (Consider rules on bedtimes, homework, allowance, piercing, tattoos, dating, part-time employment, 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
- Gifts (Should gifts to the child be coordinated? Who will purchase gifts for the child to give to others?)
- Photographs (Can the child's photo be posted on a parent's social networking site?)
- 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.)

CHILD SUPPORT

Child support is the amount one parent pays to another for the financial support of a child. Children need the financial support of both parents, even after separation or divorce, and both parents have the joint obligation to provide that support according to their ability to do so. For further information on child support, please see:

<http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fcy-fea/sup-pen/index.html>





The booklet called The [Federal Child Support Guidelines: Step-by-Step](#) contains clear instructions and work sheets to help calculate child support. This booklet also has a list of provincial/territorial contacts that offer information about rules and the family justice system in the provinces and territories.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Alberta

http://justice.alberta.ca/programs_services/families/Pages/default.aspx

British Columbia

<http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/family-justice/>

Manitoba

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/family/law/index.html>

New Brunswick

www.familylawnb.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador

<http://www.court.nl.ca/supreme/family/index.html>

Northwest Territories

<http://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/FamilyLaw/index.shtml>

Nova Scotia

www.NSFamilyLaw.ca

Nunavut

www.justice.gov.nu.ca

Ontario

<http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/>

Prince Edward Island

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/jps/index.php3?number=1036986&lang=E>

Quebec

<http://www.justice.gouv.qc.ca/english/publications/generale/sep-div-a.htm>

Saskatchewan

<http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/familyjusticeservices>

Yukon

<http://www.yukonflic.ca/index.html>

