

Focus on Kids: Parenting Plans

Remember these things when you and your ex-spouse create a parenting plan:

- All decisions that affect parenting need to be addressed
- Ideas from both parents should be considered; when both parents feel that they are actively involved in the process, they are more likely to respect and follow the plan.
- Both parents need to define their role in the children's lives after the divorce. The parenting plan should reflect these new roles and responsibilities.
- Parenting plans should be structured enough to be understandable and flexible enough to be realistic.
- A distinction between the spousal and the parenting role should be made when creating the parenting plan.
- Anything left undecided by parents will be decided by a judge.

Some issues to be considered when developing your Parenting Plan:

A. The Children's Schedule

1. Where will they stay on weekdays?
2. Where will they stay on weekends?
3. How will holidays be divided?
4. How will vacations be handled?
5. What will be done when a conflict arises in this schedule?

B. Child Support

1. How much child support is needed?
2. For how long will child support continue?
3. What will child support be used for?
4. How will it be paid?
5. How often will it be paid?
6. How will support be adjusted to the cost of living; will it increase with inflation?
7. Will support be adjusted to children's developmental needs?
8. What will be the method of payment?
9. If needed, how will renegotiation take place?

C. Child Care

1. Who will care for the children when parents are working?
2. Should the other parent be called for child care before calling a baby-sitter?
3. How will child care or baby-sitters be selected?

D. Sick Children

1. Will parents be informed of illnesses or injuries that occurred during the other parent's time?
2. How will the children's schedule be handled when they are ill?

E. Extended family

1. What will the grandparent's role be in the children's lives after the divorce? (In Missouri, grandparents do have a right to see grandchildren. Each parent should incorporate his or her own family of origin).

F. Religion

1. If parents are of different religions, which religion will the children experience?
2. Which church will the children attend?
3. Who pays for religious education or special events (confirmations or Bar Mitzvahs, for example)?

G. Extracurricular activities or specialized training

1. How will decisions be made about which camps, lessons, clubs, or sports the children will participate in?
2. How will these costs be covered?

H. Education after high school

1. How will these costs be divided?
2. How will the decision of which school the children will attend be made?
3. Will support continue during college?

I. Travel

1. *According to Missouri Law, the parent traveling with the children must notify the other parent, and receive permission, to take the children out of the county.*
2. If traveling outside the immediate area, will the parent traveling with the children notify the other parent?

J. Moving

1. How will moving affect custody arrangement? (Missouri law states that a custodial parent must have permission from the noncustodial parent or have a court order to move outside of the state.)
2. What school will the children attend?
3. How will travel costs be covered?

K. Remarriage

1. How will remarriage by either parent affect child support?
2. How will remarriage by either parent affect the children's schedule?
3. What role will the new stepparent play in the children's lives?

L. Death

1. How will contact with the deceased parent's family of origin remain in the children's lives?
2. Who receives custody of the custodial parent dies?

M. Access to records (legal custody)

1. Regardless of custody, both parents retain access to all the children's records.

N. Health insurance

1. *Parents must incline health insurance as part of child support when private health insurance is available to the supporting parent at a "reasonable cost." Thus, a family plan should be maintained.*
2. How will any uncovered expenses be paid?

O. Tax consequences

1. Who will claim the children as deductions for income tax?
2. Who will claim the "head of household status?"

P. Life insurance policies on parents

1. Who will be named as beneficiaries?

Q. Revisions of the Parenting Plan

1. How will revising the parenting plan be accomplished?
2. Do the children have a voice in determining if the parenting plan needs to be changed or updated?
3. *It is recommended that an annual meeting is set to discuss possible revisions to the parenting plan.*