



# Planning for Parenting Time

*Ohio's Guide for Parents Living Apart*







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December 2025

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## A Note To Parents

Raising children can be challenging even under the best of circumstances. When parents live in separate homes, the challenges are greater because relationships become more complicated. Sometimes parents disagree about how much time children should spend with each parent.

Unless special circumstances exist, preserving a healthy and ongoing relationship between children and both parents after a divorce or separation is of greatest importance. Positive involvement with both parents furthers the child's emotional and social development, academic achievement, and overall adjustment. Adult children of divorce describe the loss of contact with a parent and conflict between their parents as the most painful parts of divorce or parental separation.

The *Planning for Parenting Time: Ohio's Guide for Parents Living Apart* provides helpful ideas to parents for determining a parenting time schedule, which establishes when the children will be with each parent. This Guide contains sample schedules and provides information on how to address special circumstances, like relocation and long-distance parenting, to help parents reduce conflict and reach an agreement more easily.

Each child and each family are unique. There is no "standard" parenting schedule nor minimum or maximum amount of parenting time for either parent that fits all families. Decisions about parenting time depend on many things, particularly the age of the child, as well as such factors as geographic proximity of the parents, history of child abuse or domestic violence, substance use, etc.

Attorneys, mental health professionals, mediators, and judges also may find the Guide useful in resolving family court disputes. You are encouraged to share it with your attorney and other professionals assisting you in the court process.

## Limitations of This Guide

This Guide is for general educational and informational purposes only and is not intended to serve as a substitute for the advice of licensed professionals.<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Court of Ohio and the authors do not render legal or other professional advice or services through this Guide.

The material contained in this Guide carries with it important legal consequences. Users of this material are solely responsible for determining the applicability of any information to their situation. You are strongly encouraged to seek professional legal and other expert assistance in resolving your parenting issues.

If a domestic violence protection order prohibits contact between the parents or between one parent and the children, parents subject to the order should be aware that discussing parenting time schedules or making agreements with the other parent as suggested in this Guide, without the court's permission, will violate this order.

A parent may still use the Guide, without having contact with the other parent, to identify issues and prepare a proposed parenting time schedule for the court to consider.

*See page 53 for more information on Safety Issues.*

Parents who feel in danger from a family or household member may contact the police and seek to obtain a civil or criminal protection order. Contact your local courts for procedures on how to obtain a protection order. Protection order forms can be found on your local court's website, the Supreme Court's website at [www.supremecourt.ohio.gov](http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov), or Ohio Legal Help at [www.ohiolegalhelp.org](http://www.ohiolegalhelp.org). You do not need a lawyer to seek a protection order.

The information contained in this resource is a compilation of statutes, court rules, and court decisions in the State of Ohio, and it is intended as a summary of the law to assist judges, lawyers, and the general public. The information does not represent binding statements of law by the Supreme Court of Ohio.

This Guide is a tool to help you design a parenting time schedule that will work best for you and your children.

The sample schedules do not mandate a minimum or maximum amount of parenting time for either parent.

The court MAY reject your schedule or create its OWN that is different from these samples.

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<sup>1</sup> Laws and interpretations of laws change frequently and the information in this Guide is subject to change. Readers should verify the accuracy of any information before relying upon it.

## Why Parenting Plans Are Necessary

In Ohio, the court must decide where the children live, and which parent is responsible for making certain decisions regarding the children. This is by a written court order. This process is known as “allocating parental rights and responsibilities.”<sup>2</sup>

Written parenting time schedules provide children and parents with predictability and consistency and can prevent future conflict. Parents are asked to give the court a parenting time schedule for its consideration. The schedule is attached to either the “Parenting Plan” or “Shared Parenting Plan” that is submitted to the court. The Parenting Plan and Shared Parenting Plan forms can be found on your local court’s website or the Supreme Court’s website at [www.supremecourt.ohio.gov](http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov). A successful parenting time plan will clearly state how all decisions regarding the children will be made and includes a schedule for parenting time.

Courts prefer that parents reach agreements about parenting time together. Parents are generally in a better position than the courts to determine what works best for themselves and their children and are more likely to follow a schedule they created. This hopefully leads to greater parental cooperation as their children grow up and creates a less stressful environment for children. Children who experience ongoing conflict between parents are at high risk for suffering serious long-term emotional problems.

Ask the court if it offers any dispute resolution programs, such as mediation or parenting coordination, if you need help coming to an agreed upon schedule with the other parent.

When the court makes its decision, it will allocate how parenting time and parenting responsibilities are divided among the parents. When parents both are designated as residential parents and share in the responsibilities of raising their children, this is called “shared parenting.” Parents who have shared parenting make such decisions together unless otherwise specified in the court order. When parents do not have shared parenting, one parent is designated as the residential parent and legal custodian and the children primarily reside with that parent who has the right to make major decisions about the children’s health, education, and activities. In both arrangements, there must be a court-approved parenting time schedule.

Parents are encouraged to develop a schedule that promotes a meaningful relationship with both parents. A shared parenting time schedule does not necessarily have equal parenting time. If the parenting time schedule proposed by the parents is in the children’s best interests, the court can accept it. If parents cannot agree on decision-making and parenting time, the court will decide who will make major decisions for the children and order a parenting plan that is in the children’s best interests.

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<sup>2</sup> If parents are not married at the time the child is born, the biological father has no legal right to parenting time until paternity is legally established, and the court orders the father custody and parenting time. [R.C. 3109.042]

## Which Schedule Should You Choose?

A parenting time schedule should be developed after considering the family's unique circumstances and what is best for the child. Children differ in how long they are comfortable being away from each parent. Some children like spending more time at one parent's home during the week. Other children move back and forth between their parents' homes with ease. Regardless of the schedule, children need a sense of security and well-being.

When choosing a schedule, parents should think about the child's relationship with each parent. Schedules may change as the child gets older. If a parent has never been a part of a child's life or has not had contact with the child for an extended period, parenting time should start slowly and gradually increase as the child adjusts and feels comfortable. The court may also order supervised parenting time at first until the parent has gained parenting skills and developed a relationship with the child. It is common for schedules to change over time.

The sample schedules below consider the age and developmental stages of the child at various stages of childhood. Each stage of development offers sample schedules that serve as a starting point as you create a parenting time schedule that meets your family's needs. Your child's best interest must be first and foremost considered. Keep in mind that parent and child relationships grow and change over time.

### Questions to Consider

- How old is the child?
- How mature is the child?
- What is the child's personality?
- How strong is the child's attachment to each parent?
- Does the child have any special needs?
- What are the child's relationships with siblings and friends?
- Are the parents' homes close enough to maintain regular and frequent contact?
- How flexible are the parents' and children's schedules?
- What childcare arrangements are needed?
- How and where will exchanges take place?
- How will transportation be provided?
- How well can the parents communicate and cooperate?
- What are the child's and the parents' cultural and religious practices?
- Are there any parental fitness concerns, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health problems?
- What is each parent's ability and availability to care for the child's needs?
- Will the parent be able to exercise the parenting time consistently?
- What are the wishes of the child, if appropriate?

Children BENEFIT when parents:	Children are HARMED when parents:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help their child have regular contact with the other parent by phone, letter, audio and videotapes, e-mail, and other forms of communication</li> <li>• Keep predictable schedules</li> <li>• Are on time and have their child ready when it is time for the child to go with the other parent</li> <li>• Exchange their child without arguing</li> <li>• Exhibit respect for the child's independent relationship with the other parent</li> <li>• Let their child carry "important" items, such as favorite clothes, toys, and security blankets with them between the parents' homes</li> <li>• Follow similar routines for mealtime, bedtime, and homework time</li> <li>• Handle rules and discipline in similar ways</li> <li>• Support contact with grandparents, step-parents, and other extended family so their child does not lose these relationships</li> <li>• Are flexible so their child can take part in special family celebrations and events</li> <li>• Give as much advance notice as possible to the other parent about special occasions or necessary changes to the schedule</li> <li>• Provide the other parent with travel dates, destinations, and places where their child and the parent can be reached when on vacation</li> <li>• Establish workable and respectful communication with the other parent</li> <li>• Plan vacations around their child's regularly scheduled activities</li> <li>• Have good communication about doctors' appointments or school/social events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make their child choose between them</li> <li>• Question their child about the other parent's activities or relationships</li> <li>• Make promises parents do not keep</li> <li>• Drop in and out of their child's life</li> <li>• Are inconsistent in using their parenting time</li> <li>• Argue with or put down the other parent in front of their child or where their child can overhear</li> <li>• Discuss personal problems with their child or where their child can overhear</li> <li>• Use their child as a messenger, spy, or mediator</li> <li>• Stop or interfere with parenting time because child support has not been paid</li> <li>• Do not show respect for each other</li> <li>• Undermine their child's relationship with the other parent</li> </ul>



## Children From Birth to Age 2

Babies learn quickly to love and trust familiar caregivers. Active involvement from both parents in a child's early years is essential to build bonds, develop a sense of security, and promote healthy development. Babies become attached to parents and other caregivers through consistent physical contact, such as holding, playing, and feeding. Babies begin to respond to a range of different (but equally valuable) types of parenting styles that each parent provides through bedtime and bathtime routines and prompt attention to their needs.

Most parents have different ways of parenting. It is helpful if parents share information about how they are parenting the child while the child is in their care; this helps with stable transitions and routine between households. In addition, parents need to be sensitive to their baby's emotional reactions, ability to adjust to changes when going from one parent to the other, and mood. It helps when parents talk about these things when making or changing schedules.

## Understanding Developmental Needs

Babies cannot remember things they experienced over time – in other words, “out of sight, out of mind.” Therefore, it is important that babies have frequent contact with each of their parents and have a stable schedule and routine.

On the other hand, babies do have “emotional memories” of conflict that can have long-term negative effects, so parents should not argue when children, even babies, can hear the arguing. Many babies are sensitive to the tension between the parents at exchange time, so if you cannot be pleasant to each other, you may need someone else to help with the exchange times.

At around six months, babies can recognize their parents and other caregivers and may become uneasy around strangers. Regular caregivers understand how the child signals the need for food, comfort, and sleep.

When babies are away from their parents or significant caregivers, they may become anxious and have eating and sleeping problems. However, being away from one parent or caregiver and in the care of the other parent to whom the child is bonded should not be a problem for most babies.

Babies have basic sleep, feeding, and waking schedules. It is important to keep the baby on these schedules. Parents should work out their own schedules, so they do not interfere with the baby’s normal routine. Also, in creating parenting schedules for this age group, parents should think about the special needs of breast-feeding babies. Nursing mothers may want to express milk and send bottles with the baby so the other parent can feed the baby the mother’s breast milk during the other parent’s time with the child.

One- to two-year-olds are becoming more aware of the world around them and the people who have a lot of contact with them. A baby at this age can be attached to many caregivers, including grandparents, extended family members, and daycare providers. Babies also are becoming independent and developing the ability to comfort themselves by thumb sucking or holding onto favorite blankets or toys. Their sleeping and eating schedules are becoming regular. Babies continue to respond to the different types of nurturing provided by their parents. Two-year-olds commonly test parental limits (“terrible twos”), and consistent and loving parental responses can build the child’s self-esteem for years to come.

Make exchanges easier for your child by following predictable schedules, avoiding conflict with the other parent in front of your child and supporting your child’s relationship with the other parent.

Moving between the parents' homes may be difficult for some youngsters, and they may become upset at these times. For some children, resistance to exchange time is normal. This behavior does not necessarily mean that the other parent is not a good parent or that the child does not want to be with the other parent. While parents need to be sensitive to whatever the child is experiencing, most children calm down shortly after the exchange. You can make exchanges easier for your child by following predictable schedules, avoiding conflict with the other parent in front of your child, and supporting your child's relationship with the other parent.

### Breastfeeding

Children develop secure and positive relationships when they have frequent contact with a parent who holds, talks, comforts, and feeds them in a sensitive and caring manner, whether the parent is breastfeeding or using a bottle. Parents who are not raising their child together must balance the baby's need to nurse with the baby's need to bond with the other parent. Breastfeeding should not be used to stop the other parent from spending time with the child.

Parents should talk often and openly with each other about the baby's feeding routine and be flexible with one another when it comes to parenting time. The other parent can feed an infant with the mother's expressed (pumped) milk with a bottle, particularly after nursing routines are established. Parents should consult the child's pediatrician if they have any questions about feeding schedules.

### Tips for Effective Parental Communication

Parenting communication applications such as AppClose, Talking Parents, and Our Family Wizard can also assist in scheduling, communicating, and sharing important information about the child's well-being. Effective communication between co-parents is vital for the child's well-being.

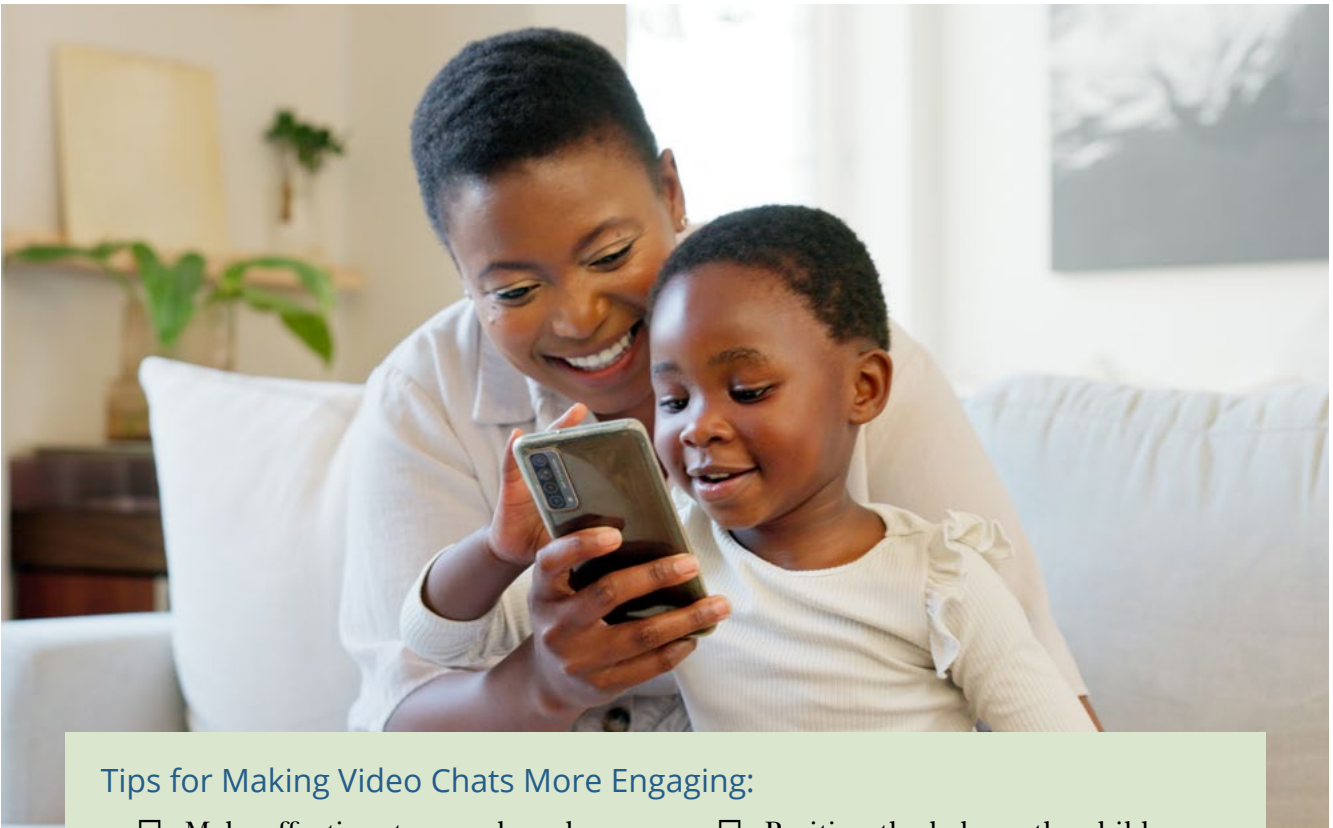
Parents should:

- Use co-parenting apps to manage schedules and share information.
- Attend co-parenting counseling sessions to learn effective communication strategies.
- Establish clear communication protocols to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Prioritize the child's needs and well-being in discussions.

## Using Technology to Build Parental Bonds

In today's digital age, technology plays an important role in maintaining and strengthening parent-child bonds. Parents can use video "phone calls" to continue contact during the times the child is with the other parent. These video chat applications (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Facebook Messenger) can also help babies connect with parents or caregivers who may be out of town temporarily, in the military, or living away from the child.

Video chat technologies allow babies to respond through gestures and expressions as reactions to the person on the screen. This allows the infant and the parent to have back-and-forth communication, even when they are not together. Video contact should be consistent and done regularly so that it becomes part of the baby's routine.



### Tips for Making Video Chats More Engaging:

- Make affectionate sounds and gestures to the infant (e.g., blowing screen kisses, playing peek-a-boo). This helps the baby understand that the interaction is real and encourages positive interaction.
- "Sharing" things through the screen with the baby having the same item (e.g., book, toy, food) engages the infant.
- Position the baby so the child can make eye contact with the person on the screen.
- Use a mobile device instead of a laptop or computer because it reduces the distraction of other buttons that can take the infant's attention away from the interaction.

## Developing a Schedule

- The child should have frequent, but short visits with the parent with whom the child does not primarily reside.
- There should be consistency and predictability.
- Parents should consider dividing holidays or days of special meaning in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.
- Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule are not recommended unless the parents agree.

### Parents Should Consider Their:

- Work schedule and other time commitments
- Ability to effectively communicate
- Bond with child
- Geographic proximity of parents' residences
- Living arrangements
- Prior history caring for the child
- Ability to care for child overnight

### Example Distributions of Parenting Time:

- Three days of three to five hour visits each week
- Two days of four-to-six hour visits each week
- Two days of three-to-five-hour visits and one eight-hour visit each week
- Two days of three-to-six-hour visits and one overnight visit each week
- One day of three-to-six-hour visits and two non-consecutive overnight visits each week
- Equal parenting time where the child is not away from one parent for more than two consecutive days

These schedules are SAMPLE parenting time schedules that serve as a starting point for your discussion with the other parent or caretaker. Each family will have a unique schedule that best fits their circumstances. However, parents should be guided first and foremost to create a schedule that is in the best interest of the child.

The following schedules show which portion of each day children would spend with Parent A or Parent B.

Parenting time with  
Parent A

Parenting time with  
Parent B

See page 13 for a sample completed schedule.

## Sample Schedule A

Three periods of 3-5 hours spaced throughout the week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B			Parent A		Parent A
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B			Parent A		Parent A
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B			Parent A		Parent A
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B			Parent A		Parent A

## Sample Schedule B

Two periods of 3-5 hours and one period of 8 hours spaced throughout the week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A
Parent A			Parent A			
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A
Parent A			Parent A			
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A		Parent B	

## Sample Schedule C

Two periods of 3-6 hours and one overnight spaced throughout the week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B

## Sample Schedule D

Equal parenting schedule where the child is not away from the other parent for more than two consecutive days. This schedule requires a **HIGH** degree of communication between the parents, especially when used for children under the age of 1 year old.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A
Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B
Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A

ADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES	DISADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child has frequent but short visits with Parent B.</li> <li>• There is consistency and predictability.</li> <li>• Parent A gets self-care time throughout the week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are multiple exchanges each week, which can be challenging if the parents do not communicate effectively.</li> <li>• The week may seem “choppy” or broken up.</li> <li>• The child may spend less time with one parent due to work schedules, geographic proximity, living arrangements, or limited parental skills.</li> </ul>

### Sample Schedule C – Completed

2 periods of 3-6 hours and 1 overnight with Parent B.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B Until Noon	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B Noon – Overnight
Parent B Until Noon	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B Noon – Overnight
Parent B Until Noon	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B Noon – Overnight
Parent B Until Noon	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B 4 – 7:30		Parent B Noon – Overnight

There are many considerations to developing a parenting time schedule. Parents’ work schedules, childcare arrangements, and geographic proximity to one another are important factors. Adjust the days of the week and times to meet the needs of both parents.

## Children Age 3 to 5

This is an important time for children to develop independent skills. Children may say “NO!” to parents’ requests and demands just to express their independence. At the same time, they still may cling to their caregiver and resist separation, even from one parent to the other. They also may be fearful about unfamiliar activities and objects, and may experience night fears like “monsters” under their bed as children begin to use their imaginations.

Having consistent parenting styles and routines across both homes is crucial for a child’s sense of security and stability. This includes consistent sleep and nutrition routines. Disruptions to a child’s sleep and nutrition routines can lead to behavioral issues. Parents should work together to ensure the child’s sleep schedule and dietary habits remain stable, even when transitioning between homes. When parents collaborate to maintain similar routines, children can better adjust to transitions and develop a clear understanding of the expectations. This in turn supports their overall well-being.

Children typically express their feelings through their actions. Parents should help them learn the words to say or ways children can communicate how they are feeling instead of acting out.

### Understanding Developmental Needs

This is a stage where children’s gross motor skills, ability to communicate, and social skills are rapidly developing. Children become more coordinated, as they can go up and down stairs, run, and throw a ball. Young children can feed, dress, and go to the bathroom with little to no assistance by the time they reach age 5.

Communication skills are also increasing, as children are now able to speak in complete sentences. Their vocabulary is expanding as they learn new words. Children ask a lot of questions, as this is a time of curiosity, exploration, and observation.

Children this age are still not able to communicate their feelings. A child may become upset and frustrated when trying to communicate, and the parent does not understand. This may result in the child acting out or throwing a temper tantrum. Parents can guide children through finding the right words for their emotions by showing them pictures or having the child draw a picture.

Parents can help children regulate their emotions, including their fears, by having predictable, regularly scheduled routines. This helps the child learn that the world is a safe place. Moving between parents’ homes may become difficult for some children at this age, and they may become upset. This behavior does not necessarily mean that the other parent is not a good parent or that the child does not want to be with the other parent.



A child's behaviors may regress because of the stress and anxiety the child is experiencing during this time of change. How parents communicate with one another and to the child is crucial at this stage of development. Parents need to regularly reassure the child that both parents love him or her. If needed, a parent should seek support from a mental health professional to help their child (and the parents themselves) navigate through these changes.

Parents must continue to ensure that the transitions between the two parents' homes are free of parental arguing and tension. Children are aware of others' feelings and recognize this conflict. This may cause the child to become difficult to manage or act out negative feelings. Parents should, at a minimum, be civil to one another if they are unable to get along, during the exchange. Do not use the child as a messenger to communicate with the other parent. The child may feel more comfortable if the child can take a favorite toy, stuffed animal, photos, or other object with them to the other parent's home.



### Developing Social Skills

Social skills begin to develop during this stage, as children are beginning to recognize basic emotions from other people. At age 3, they typically play near a friend and need reminders to share and take turns. By age 5, children play with each other and develop friendships.

Three-to-five-year-olds may benefit from structured time with children their own age away from their parents. This may occur at preschool, playdates with other children, gymnastics, sports, or other activities. These activities help children build social skills needed to interact with other children and other non-parent adults. They also provide opportunities for children to learn how to follow basic instructions and understand that there are consequences for their actions.

Time away from their parents helps children learn that they can be safe and happy away from both parents. It helps reduce separation concerns because the child learns that the parent will return. This builds self-confidence and the independence the child will need once he or she goes to school.

### Using Technology to Maintain Regular Contact

As children in this age range may be spending increased time away from one parent, technology can be used to maintain contact with the other parent. This is particularly helpful in addressing a child's fears about being away from one parent. These fears can often show up at bedtime when the child's activity level decreases and the child is more aware that the other parent is absent. The child may become difficult to soothe and refuse to go to sleep.

Parents can use video “phone calls” to talk to the child when the child is with the other parent. Video chat applications (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Facebook Messenger) can also be used when one parent may be out of town temporarily, in the military, or living away from the child, but not as a substitute for a parent’s regular in-person parenting time.

### Tips for Making Video Chats More Engaging

- Make it an interactive experience by singing songs, using finger puppets, or playing games like peek-a-boo.
- Use props such as toys or stuffed animals.
- Share in the same activity such as reading a book, coloring, or eating a snack.

### Managing Screen Time

As the use of electronics increases, parents need to monitor and regulate screen time for young children. Excessive screen time can interfere with sleep, play, and other activities. Parents should set consistent rules and age-appropriate limits about the use of electronics in both homes to help maintain a balanced lifestyle for the child. If a parent withholds the use of an electronic device as a disciplinary strategy, the parent should provide a different way for the child to contact the other parent so that communication can continue.



### Tips for Effective Parental Communication

Parenting communication applications such as AppClose, Talking Parents, and Our Family Wizard can also assist in scheduling, communication, and sharing important information about the child’s well-being. Effective communication between co-parents is vital for the child’s well-being.

Parents should:

- Use co-parenting apps to manage schedules and share information.
- Attend co-parenting counseling sessions to learn effective communication strategies.
- Establish clear communication protocols to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Always prioritize the child’s needs and well-being in discussions.

## Holidays, Days of Special Meaning, & Vacations

After age three, children become more aware of holiday celebrations. Parents should secure holidays or other days of special meaning (e.g., birthdays, religious, cultural, national) for the child and family in the parenting time schedule. Parents may alternate, share, or split vacation time. *See additional information on page 43.*

## Developing a Schedule

- The child should have frequent, but short visits with the parent with whom the child does not primarily reside.
- There should be consistency and predictability.
- Each parent should have solid blocks of time with the child.
- Parents should consider the child's preschool and activity schedule.
- Parents should consider dividing holidays or days of special meaning in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

### Parents Should Consider Their:

- Work schedule and other time commitments
- Ability to effectively communicate
- Bond with the child
- Geographic proximity of parents' residences
- Living arrangements
- Prior history of caring for the child
- Ability to care for the child overnight

### Example Distributions of Parenting Time:

- Two days of four-to-six-hour visits each week
- Two days of three-to-five-hour visits and one eight-hour visit each week
- Two days of three-to-six-hour visits and one overnight visit each week
- One day of three-to-six-hour visits and two non-consecutive overnight visits each week
- Two days with one parent (including overnights) followed by three days (including overnights) with the other parent
- Equal parenting time where the child is not away from one parent for more than two consecutive days

These schedules are SAMPLE parenting time schedules that serve as a starting point for your discussion with the other parent or caretaker. Each family will have a unique schedule that best fits their circumstances. However, parents should be guided first and foremost to create a schedule that is in the best interest of the child.

See page 21 for a sample completed schedule..

## Sample Schedule A

Two periods of 3-6 hours and one overnight spaced throughout the week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B
Parent B	Parent A		Parent A		Parent A	Parent A
Parent A		Parent B		Parent B		Parent B

## Sample Schedule B

One period of 3-6 hours and two non-consecutive overnights spaced throughout the week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A
Parent B		Parent B				
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	
Parent B		Parent A			Parent A	
Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A
Parent B		Parent B				
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	
Parent B		Parent A			Parent A	
Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A
Parent B		Parent B				
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	
Parent B		Parent A			Parent A	

## Sample Schedule C

Two days with one parent, followed by three days with the other parent, including overnights for both.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A
Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A

## Sample Schedule D

Equal parenting schedule where the child is not away from the other parent for more than two consecutive days. This schedule requires a **HIGH** degree of communication between the parents.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A
Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B
Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A

ADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES	DISADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each parent has solid blocks of time with the child.</li> <li>• The child has frequent but short visits with Parent B.</li> <li>• There is consistency and predictability.</li> <li>• Parent A gets self-care time throughout the week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are multiple exchanges each week, which can be challenging if the parents do not communicate effectively.</li> <li>• The week may seem “choppy” or broken up.</li> <li>• The child may spend less time with one parent due to work schedules, geographic proximity, living arrangements, or limited parental skills.</li> <li>• It may be confusing to follow and remember what days each parent has.</li> </ul>

### Sample Schedule C – Completed

2 days with one parent, followed by 3 days with the other parent.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A
Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A

There are many considerations to developing a parenting time schedule. Parents’ work schedules, childcare arrangements, and geographic proximity to one another are important factors. Adjust the days of the week to meet the needs of both parents.



## Children Age 6 to 12

School-age children experience significant change during the ages of 6 and 12. Not only do their physical appearances change, but also their favorite activities and with whom they want to spend time. Children begin to spend a lot of time away from their parents at school, in activities such as baseball, art class, or at friends' houses. As they gain independence from their parents, children become more attached to their friends.

While children are developing a better understanding of the world around them, they are still learning to recognize and verbalize their emotions. They may be confused, angry, embarrassed, and sad about their parents' separation. Children may blame one parent for the breakup of the family and may side with one parent. Alternatively, they may also try to reunite their parents. Parents should listen to their children's feelings and reassure them that both parents love them, even if they do not all live in the same house.

As children age, they may be able to adjust to longer periods of parenting time with fewer exchanges between parents. Keeping a consistent routine can make these transitions easier. Parents should try to follow the same schedule for school, homework, and bedtime in both homes. If a child enjoys certain activities or hobbies, parents should make sure their child can continue those things in both homes. This helps the child feel secure and happy, no matter where the child is. Communication between parents is key, so parents keeping each other updated about any changes or special events in a child's life is very important.

Children want to feel more grown-up and responsible. Where appropriate, parents should let them help with planning their schedule and activities. The parenting time schedule should account for school and extracurricular activities, as well as the child's desire for an occasional overnight with friends away from both homes. Parents need to be flexible but also make sure each parent regularly gets to spend time with the child. Parents should keep a routine that includes homework, chores, and fun activities.

### Understanding Developmental Needs

Children at this age need physical activity to build strength, coordination, and confidence. A healthy active lifestyle can improve school performance and build self-esteem. There will be noticeable differences in height, weight, and build among children in this age range. Puberty may begin in the later years of this stage. These hormone-driven changes result in growth spurts, physical developments, and mood changes.

As children become less focused on themselves and develop more concern for others, they also begin to seek approval from others, especially from their friends. They want to be liked and accepted by their peer group and can struggle to deal with peer pressure.

Parents should regularly check in with their child about the child's mental health.

Parents need to support their child's mental health during this period of transition, and as exchanges between parents and separate homes become regular. They should routinely check in with their child and encourage ongoing conversations about how the child is feeling. Parents need to reassure the child that both parents love him or her. If needed, a parent should seek support from a mental health professional to help their child (and the parents themselves) navigate through these changes.

### Using Technology to Maintain Regular Contact

Children differ in how long they are comfortable being away from each parent. Some may be able to handle being away from their primary residential parent for two or three days on a regular basis. Parents should encourage children to express their feelings and reassure them that it is okay to miss the other parent.

It is important for children to maintain regular contact with the other parent, especially as the child spends longer periods of time at the other parent's house. Parents should schedule regular phone calls or video chats with the child. Video chat applications (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Facebook Messenger) can also be used when one parent may be out of town

temporarily, in the military, or living away from the child, but not as a substitute for a parent's regular in-person parenting time.

### Tips for Making Video Chats More Engaging

- Play games like Simon Says, Hangman, Would You Rather, Mad Libs.
- Share in the same activity as reading a book, coloring, or eating a snack.
- Engage in a dance battle, lip sync contest, or karaoke.



### Managing Screen Time

Many children will have their own electronic devices such as tablets or phones. Parents need to regulate screen time and monitor online activities, especially social media use. Excessive screen time can interfere with sleep, school performance, and other activities. Parents should set consistent rules and age-appropriate limits about the use of electronics in both homes to help maintain a balanced lifestyle for the child. If a parent withholds the use of an electronic device as a disciplinary strategy, the parent should provide a different way for the child to contact the other parent so that communication can continue.

### Tips for Effective Parental Communication

Parenting communication applications such as AppClose, Talking Parents, and Our Family Wizard can also assist in scheduling, communication, and sharing important information about the child's well-being. Effective communication between co-parents is vital for the child's well-being.

**Note:** Many school districts and organizations sponsoring extracurricular activities use technology and other applications to communicate about homework assignments, grades, parent meetings, schedules, etc. Parents need to share information on how to register and use these tools with each other so that both parents have access to the same information about their child's schoolwork and activities.

Parents should:

- Use co-parenting apps to manage schedules and share information.
- Attend co-parenting counseling sessions to learn effective communication strategies.
- Establish clear communication protocols to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Always prioritize the child's needs and well-being in discussions.

## Holidays, Days of Special Meaning, & Vacations

Parents should alternate, share, or split vacation holidays or other days of special meaning (e.g., birthdays, religious, cultural, national) for the child and family, and vacations. These days should be included in the parenting schedule. *See additional information on page 43.*

## Developing a Schedule

- There should be consistency and predictability.
- Each parent should have solid blocks of time with the child.
- Parents should consider the child's school and extracurricular activity schedule.
- Parents should consider dividing holidays or days of special meaning in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

## Parents Should Consider Their:

- Work schedule and other time commitments
- Ability to effectively communicate
- Bond with the child
- Geographic proximity of parents' residences
- Living arrangements
- Prior history of caring for the child
- Ability to care for the child overnight

## Example Distributions of Parenting Time:

- One day of three-to-six-hour visits and two non-consecutive overnight visits each week
- Two days with one parent (including overnights) followed by three days (including overnights) with the other parent
- Three consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2
- Equal parenting time where the child is not away from one parent for more than two consecutive days
- Split each week and weekend

These schedules are SAMPLE parenting time schedules that serve as a starting point for your discussion with the other parent or caretaker. Each family will have its own unique schedule that best fits their own circumstances. However, parents should be guided first and foremost to create a schedule that is in the best interest of the child.

See page 28 for a sample completed schedule.

### Sample Schedule A

Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A
	Parent A				Parent A	
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A
	Parent A				Parent A	

### Sample Schedule B

Two consecutive overnights every other week and an additional 6-hour period during the middle of the week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
			Parent B			
			Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
Parent A			Parent B			
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
			Parent B			
			Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
Parent A			Parent B			
			Parent A			

## Sample Schedule C

Two consecutive overnights and alternate weekends.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B		Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B		Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			

## Sample Schedule D

Parents share time alternating 7-day periods with the other parent having half a day on their off week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent B			
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent B			

ADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES	DISADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each parent has solid blocks of time with the child.</li> <li>• There is consistency and predictability.</li> <li>• The residential parent gets self-care time throughout the week.</li> <li>• Minimal exchanges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may be confusing to follow and remember what days each parent has.</li> <li>• Little or no time for one parent if alternating weeks.</li> <li>• Transitioning may be hard for some younger children.</li> </ul>

### Sample Schedule A – Completed

Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
Parent B	Parent B Until School Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B Until School Parent A	Parent A
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
Parent B	Parent B Until School Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B Until School Parent A	Parent A

There are many considerations to developing a parenting time schedule. Parents’ work schedules, before and after school arrangements, and geographic proximity to one another are important factors. Adjust the days of the week to meet the needs of both parents.



## Children Age 13 to 18

The teenager is developing greater independence and beginning to separate from the family, including both parents. Teens start to feel like young adults who think they no longer need their parents, but also have times when they still want their parents to take care of them. Teenagers begin to plan for driving and dating, and they are thinking about college or work.

Teenage children are feeling the pressures of school, family, and friends, and they may not like a strict parenting time schedule. They may show their dissatisfaction by becoming irritable or moody or developing an attitude they never had before.

Many lack the skills to express the many strong but conflicting emotions that go along with growing up. When parents are establishing a parenting time schedule or considering making changes to an existing schedule, they should give thought to the needs and wishes of their teenager. Parents should let their teens express their views while making it clear that it is up to the parents to make the final decisions.

During this time of transition, parents often feel the need to pull their teen closer to them for reassurance that they are not losing their child to the other parent. Parents need to avoid putting the child in the middle of their conflict. Some teens want little or nothing to do with either parent and turn to friends or others who are not part of the conflict for support.

Teens are often confused and angry at the way their parents act and may feel their parents have not been concerned about how this situation affects them. The strong conflicting emotions they experience may cause them to act in new and unfamiliar ways as they struggle to deal with these changes. Parents should not assume that their child's mood swings or acting out are caused by the other parent.

### Understanding Developmental Needs

Early teens, ages 13 through 15, continue to use their family as a base of support and guidance. This is a time when the child strives for independence but still is tied to the parents. Teens, for many different reasons, begin to assert more independence at different ages. Decision-making abilities vary widely among teens.

Teens often have outside interests that compete with the scheduled parenting time. They frequently prefer to spend more time with their friends than their parents and may become resentful or angry if they cannot do what they want to do. Parents need to maintain the teen's accessibility to school, friends, extracurriculars, and community activities from both homes. Teens may feel they should have more independence and may resist a rigid parenting time schedule.

Older teens are preparing for the transition to adulthood, which can include getting a driver's license, working part-time jobs, and planning for college or other post-secondary school options or jobs. Parents can support this by encouraging independence while offering guidance and support.

Teenagers may benefit from a primary home base, with specific evenings, weekends, and activities at the other home scheduled on a regular and predictable basis. Teenagers expect to provide input into the parenting schedule. Parents should be clear that they are the ones making the decision.

Many teens prefer one primary home (close to their friends), and weekends or evenings with the other parent. Some will prefer a balanced, 50-50 schedule with their parents. Much of this will depend on the relationship history with each parent, the distance between parents, and the parents' availability to meet their child's needs and often busy schedules.

### Understanding Social, Emotional, & Mental Health Needs

Teenagers often experience significant physical and emotional changes. There are often academic and social pressures that can lead to mental health concerns. Parents need to provide a supportive environment to help them navigate these changes. If teens do not feel comfortable discussing their feelings with their parents, they should be encouraged to talk to a trusted adult for guidance and support.

There is a strong correlation between teenage mental health and technology, especially social media and online gaming. With the rise of online predators and cyberbullying, parents may choose to monitor their teens' online activities, including who they interact with online, social media accounts, chat rooms, and other online platforms to ensure their safety. Encourage open communication about any suspicious behavior they encounter online. Teenagers should also be taught not to share personal information online.

Parents should teach their teenagers how to safely and appropriately use social media and artificial intelligence applications.

Teenagers also enjoy playing video games and using personal electronic devices like cell phones and tablets. It is also important to set limits and encourage teens to take breaks, play outside, and spend time with family. Parents should also make sure the games their teenagers play are appropriate for their age. Rules regarding the use of electronic devices and social media should be clear and, where possible, consistent in both households.

### Using Technology to Maintain Regular Contact

Teenagers are adept at communicating using technology. They should utilize phone calls, video chats, and text messages to maintain regular contact with the other parent, especially as the child spends longer periods of time at the other parent's house. Video chat applications (e.g., FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Facebook Messenger) can also be used when one parent may be out of town temporarily, in the military, or living away from the child, but not as a substitute for a parent's regular in-person parenting time.

If a parent withholds the use of an electronic device as a disciplinary strategy, the parent should provide a different way for the child to contact the other parent so that communication can continue.

### Tips for Effective Parental Communication

Parenting communication applications such as AppClose, Talking Parents, and Our Family Wizard can also assist in scheduling, communication, and sharing important information about the child's well-being. Effective communication between co-parents is vital for the child's well-being.

Parents should:

- Use co-parenting apps to manage schedules and share information.
- Attend co-parenting counseling sessions to learn effective communication strategies.
- Establish clear communication protocols to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Always prioritize the child's needs and well-being in discussions.

Parents may want to have a weekly “family meeting” where the teenager and both parents discuss their plans for the week. This keeps parents informed of important activities, events, deadlines, etc. that may be occurring. It also alerts parents to any changes to the schedule or special events that are coming up.

### Holidays, Days of Special Meaning, & Vacations

Parents should alternate, share, or split vacation holidays or other days of special meaning (e.g., birthdays, religious, cultural, national) for the child and family, and vacations. These days should be included in the parenting schedule. *See additional information on page 43.*

### Developing a Schedule

It is challenging to create parenting schedules for this age group because each family’s circumstances are unique and the teen’s activities play an important factor, especially when the teenager is not yet able to drive. Parents should think about the teenager’s schedule and commitments, the distance between the parents’ homes, each parent’s work schedule or other obligations, and a teen’s need for unstructured time. Their involvement with school, friends, clubs, sports, or other commitments can create an exhausting schedule. The result may be that the teen is home for little more than sleeping and eating, leaving no time for family or parents. Creating a schedule may require the help of professionals, such as counselors, mediators, or parenting coordinators, who create such schedules if the parents are unable to do so.

It is especially important for parents to be flexible. The amount of time a teenager spends at either parent’s house is often due to the teen’s interests and not a preference for one parent over the other. Having “no schedule” may be an acceptable alternative that does not favor one parent and yet still allows the teen to have a schedule that supports his or her life.

A teenager may prefer one parent’s home to be a “home base.” Both parents can increase contact through regular attendance at the child’s athletic, performance, academic, or other activities. This allows for a large amount of parental involvement in activities that are important in the teen’s life.

Parents should consider:

- Work schedule and other time commitments of the parents
- Child’s extracurricular activities and work schedule
- Child’s social activities and increased schoolwork
- Geographic proximity of parents’ residences
- Living arrangements

These schedules are SAMPLE parenting time schedules that serve as a starting point for your discussion with the other parent or caretaker. Each family will have its own unique schedule that best fits their own circumstances. However, parents should be guided first and foremost to create a schedule that is in the best interest of the child.

*See page 35 for a sample completed schedule.*

## Sample Schedule A

Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A
	Parent A				Parent A	
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A
	Parent A				Parent A	

## Sample Schedule B

Parents share time alternating 7-day periods with the other parent having half a day on their off week.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent B			
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent B			

## Sample Schedule C

Parents split the week evenly.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			

## Sample Schedule D

Two consecutive overnights and alternate weekends for the non-custodial parent.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B		Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
Parent A	Parent A	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent B
	Parent B		Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A

ADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES	DISADVANTAGES OF THESE SCHEDULES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each parent has solid blocks of time with the child.</li> <li>• Each parent has a weekend with the child.</li> <li>• The residential parent gets self-care time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may be confusing to follow and remember what days each parent has.</li> <li>• Little or no time for one parent if alternating weeks.</li> <li>• Transitioning may be hard for some children.</li> </ul>

### Sample Schedule D – Completed

Two consecutive overnights and alternate weekends for the non-custodial parent.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Parent A	Parent A until school	Parent B	Parent B until school	Parent A	Parent A until school	Parent B
	Parent B		Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B until school	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			
Parent A	Parent A until school	Parent B	Parent B until school	Parent A	Parent A until school	Parent B
	Parent B		Parent A		Parent B	
Parent B	Parent B	Parent B	Parent B until school	Parent A	Parent A	Parent A
			Parent A			



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

3

4

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2017

2017

2017

## Parenting Time Schedule Template

Use this blank calendar to design the parenting time schedule that best meets your needs. Make sure to include holidays, days of special meaning, and vacations (including days school is not in session). This can be attached to your Shared Parenting Plan submitted to the court.

Week 1						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:

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Week 2						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:

Week 3						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:

Week 4						
SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
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Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:	Parent:

**Holidays & Days of Special Meaning** [add more as needed]

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years  
 Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years  
 Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years  
 Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years  
 Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years  
 Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Vacations [add more as needed]

Dates/Length: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Location if known: \_\_\_\_\_  In state  Out of state  Out of Country

Additional Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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Dates/Length: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Location if known: \_\_\_\_\_  In state  Out of state  Out of Country

Additional Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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Dates/Length: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Location if known: \_\_\_\_\_  In state  Out of state  Out of Country

Additional Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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Dates/Length: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent: \_\_\_\_\_

Location if known: \_\_\_\_\_  In state  Out of state  Out of Country

Additional Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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School Breaks/Days Off [add more as needed]

Winter Break Dates: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Spring Break Dates: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Teacher Conference: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Teacher Conference: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Make Up Day Date: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Make Up Day Date: \_\_\_\_\_  Every Year  Odd Years  Even Years

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Time with Child: \_\_\_\_\_

## Holidays, Days of Special Meaning, Vacations, & School Breaks

The schedule for holidays, vacations, and school breaks takes priority over the regularly scheduled parenting time. In deciding how to schedule these events, make sure to consider your child’s point of view. Children enjoy having the opportunity to have special time with each parent and extended family members. Each parent may need to encourage his or her extended family to adjust some of their schedules so the child can participate in celebrations during parenting time. Also, think about the child’s need to have contact with the other parent during extended vacation time. Scheduled video chats and phone calls during a vacation can help reduce anxiety for both the other parent and the child without disrupting the vacation. It is also important to determine how to handle conflicts between the regular parenting time schedule and a holiday, vacation, or school break. Is there a priority? These decisions should be included in the parenting time schedule.

### Holidays & Days of Special Meaning

The first step is to decide what holidays and days of special meaning both parents celebrate. There may be days that only one parent seeks to celebrate with the child and days that both parents want to spend time with the child. Parents may decide to alternate holidays and other special days annually, or they may want to divide these days. For example, both parents may want to share in their child’s birthday celebration; however, agree that Parent A gets to spend July 4<sup>th</sup> with the child and Parent B to have Memorial Day.

It is important that the parents communicate and compromise when necessary. Parents need to recognize that children remember the traditions they previously experienced when living with both parents. Parents need to consider how the parenting time schedule might affect these traditions and the child’s security. Children thrive on healthy traditions and celebrations, and respond more enthusiastically to a schedule when *both* parents work on it together and support it.

Sample language to include in your parenting time schedule:

<p><b>Divide the Day:</b> Share the day or weekend between both parents</p>	<p>The child will be with Parent A on Thanksgiving Day from 9:00am to 2:00pm and with Parent B from 2:00pm to 8:00pm.</p>
<p><b>Alternate Years:</b> Alternate specific days each year.</p>	<p>The child will be with Parent A on Thanksgiving in all even years from 9:00am to 5:00pm and with Parent B from 9:00am to 5:00pm in all odd years.</p>
<p><b>Allocate Days:</b> Specific days are allocated to each parent.</p>	<p>The child will spend Christmas Eve with Parent A each year. The child will spend Christmas with Parent B each year.</p>
<p><b>Follow Regular Schedule:</b> Regular parenting time schedule is followed.</p>	<p>The child will celebrate Thanksgiving as it falls on the regularly scheduled parenting time.</p>

## Vacations

Most parents agree to a set time for each parent to enjoy a vacation with the child. Whether you are traveling for vacation or staying home, your child will enjoy spending an uninterrupted period with you or the other parent.

A child may become anxious if away from a parent for much longer than usual. Scheduling video chats or a phone call midway through a weeklong vacation, for instance, may help the child handle the separation. Sometimes frequent calls from the “away” parent can cause the child to feel sadness and longing. When both parents are sensitive to the needs of their child, they can find a balance between contact and too much contact. If a long vacation period is going to be spent at home, or close to home, it might make sense to break it up with a short visit with the other parent. This is especially important for younger children.

Communication between parents is essential when it comes to vacations. Parents need to make all of these decisions ahead of time to reduce conflict and provide predictability for the child. It is also important to share travel information with the other parent. For example, information about where they will stay, how they can be contacted, and when they will return. If the vacationing parent provides a written schedule that includes this information, the non-vacationing parent will be assured of the ability to communicate in case of emergency. In that same way, the non-vacationing parent should provide contact information if he or she will not be at home during the child’s vacation.

Because transportation, weather, and other issues can cause problems during travel, the vacationing parent should provide the other parent with details about when and where travel will occur, including flight numbers and times, hotels, places where the child will be staying, and telephone numbers. The parent traveling with the child should have passports, travel documentation, including a notarized consent to travel form if traveling outside the United States, updated medical information, insurance cards, prescriptions, and any other special supplies the child needs. You can visit the U.S. Department of Homeland Security at [www.dhs.gov/how-do-i-for-travelers](http://www.dhs.gov/how-do-i-for-travelers) for more information on what is needed to travel internationally.

Communication about when each parent will use vacation time needs to take place well in advance of the vacation. Because of school and extracurricular schedules, most parents plan vacations in the summer and often set a deadline to communicate the dates of their vacations. For instance, if each parent has a two-week period, they may decide that in even years, Parent A will have the first chance to choose the vacation dates and must communicate those days in writing by April 1 and Parent B will then choose the vacation dates out of the remaining dates and communicate those days in writing by April 15. In this example, Parent B would have the first choice of dates in odd-numbered years.



### School Breaks

Schools will determine the break schedule and usually publish their yearly calendars well in advance. Most schools have websites that provide current schedules. As with holidays, the first step is to determine which breaks the school observes. Schools may have spring, summer, fall, and winter breaks, as well as early-release or other school-release days.

If the parents have a regular parenting time schedule with nearly equal time, many parents will not change the parenting time schedule during the school breaks. The regular schedule will continue. Other parents will decide to alternate breaks each year or share the break by splitting the time between each parent. Since the breaks sometimes occur at the same time as the holidays, such as Christmas, Passover, and Easter, it may be helpful to review the holiday schedule at the same time when planning the break schedule.

Make sure to consider the child's activities and the availability of one or both parents during the break. If the child needs daycare, the parents can consider a schedule that minimizes daycare during the break. If both parents must work, the child may enjoy a break from the regular schedule that allows him or her to spend more time with a parent than is usual.

## Long-Distance Parenting & Relocation

There are circumstances where parents do not live close to one another or where one parent decides to move. Parents must be aware of the impact relocation will have on their child and that relocation may require the permission of the court. If the parents cannot agree on long-distance parenting time and relocation, the court will decide. Unfortunately, a decision by a judge or magistrate may not please either party. Each relocation case is unique, and the court's decision is based on the unique circumstances of the family and what is in the best interest of the child.

Parents should make a serious effort to resolve a parenting time dispute themselves or with the help of a mediator, parenting coordinator, or an attorney. A reasonable agreement between the parents negotiated in good faith and proposed to the court by both parents usually is better than having a judge or magistrate decide the matter after the expense and stress of a court hearing.

A parent who wants to move a long distance, with or without a child, should think about many considerations before making that decision. Long distances often weaken the relationships between children and parents. If the move is necessary, parents might want to consider relocating both households to the same city. If it is not possible, parenting time for the distant parent must be at regular and frequent times during the year.

When approving relocation, the court considers many factors. Parents should think about these factors and “stand in the other parent’s and the child’s shoes.” What are their points of view? How would I feel if my child moved away to another city? Think about the facts, including the age and maturity of the child, the child’s developmental needs, sibling bonds, school and work schedules, transportation costs, the presence of supportive family and friends in each city, and the gains or loss of extended family.

For most children, a long-distance move may result in less regular contact with a parent. If both parents are within a reasonable distance of each other, the child benefits. When parents live far apart, a child’s daily and weekly contact is reduced and large gaps of time without physical contact between the child and parent develop. When both parents move to the same general area, it is less disruptive. Regardless of the distance, a child will benefit from as much regular and frequent physical contact with each parent as possible.

It is important to keep the parent who is away from the child for a significant length of time informed about the child’s school progress, awards, activities, and other important milestones.

Parents should utilize technology to maintain regular contact. Phone calls and video calls should be built into the parenting schedule. The distant parent should find creative ways to stay involved in the child’s life. It is important that the parent the child resides with ensures regular communication with the child and the other parent and keeps the other parent informed of important events occurring in the child’s life.

### Considerations for Long Distance Parenting Time

- Ideally, a child younger than eight should not travel alone. If a child must travel alone, select direct flights when at all possible. Contact the airline for details on how and when an unaccompanied minor may fly. When a child travels in the United States alone or with only one parent or another adult, a court order or certified consent letter proving that both parents permit the trip should be carried.
- Communication is never more important than when a long-distance exchange occurs. Keep your contact numbers current and notify each other of the safe arrival of your child. Also, be sure to keep each other informed of any unforeseen delays as soon as possible. Discuss in advance what a reasonable waiting time is for each means of transportation.
- Opportunities can occur for either parent to be in town when the child is in the care of the other parent. When such opportunities arise, parents should be flexible and set aside normal routines to allow parenting time on short notice.

### General Recommendations

- When parents live far apart, there should be a minimum of four blocks of parenting time between the child and parent each year. Blocks of time should occur over the summer, winter break, spring break, and at least one other block of time.
- When the parents live close enough to each other, parents can add once-a-month weekend time during the months not covered by the four parenting time blocks.
- When the driving distance is less than approximately 100 miles, the opportunity exists to add parenting time every other weekend or on long weekends.
- Holidays and special occasions are challenging for parents who live far apart. Parents must be flexible, cooperative, and allow the child to enjoy special times with each parent. New family traditions may develop for each household. Parents should arrange for the many religious, cultural, or national holidays that exist in each home.
- Long-distance parenting is expensive. The cost of travel is not covered in the child-support guidelines, but in some cases, may be a basis for modifying the amount. If the court does not specify who pays for the travel expenses, the parents should agree on who will pay for these costs before a move. A cost-saving idea is to have the distant parent do most of the traveling and not the children.
- Your local court may have a model (or sample) parenting time schedule that includes long-distance parenting and relocation. Parents should look to these models.

### Age-Specific Recommendations

- **Birth to Preschool:** This is an important time for bonding between parents and children. Building a strong bond creates a sense of belonging, encourages active and committed parents, produces healthy adult relationships, and improves communication between parents and a growing child. If the long-distance move cannot be delayed during these formative years, the parenting time schedule should be designed to provide the most direct and frequent physical contact between the child and both parents that time and money permit.
- **School-Aged Children to 12 Years:** The parenting time schedule should be adjusted to follow the child’s regular school schedule. The school-year parent will give up parenting time during non-school times, such as the summer and holidays, while the non-school parent will not have regular parenting time while school is in session.
- **Teenagers:** The schedule should continue to follow closely the available times from the teen’s school schedule. The distant parent may need to accommodate the school schedule and extracurricular activities during his or her parenting time. Weekend parenting time may become more difficult during the school year because of the teen’s involvement with school activities, work, and friends. Flexibility by both parents is critical. Summer parenting time is even more important to ensure that the distant parent and teen have a continuing relationship. The distant parent should make every effort to provide matching activities, summer-school classes, or employment opportunities for a teen so that the teen remains enthusiastic about continuing the summer schedule.

This schedule is SAMPLE parenting time schedule that serves as a starting point for your discussion with the other parent or caretaker. Each family will have its own unique schedule that best fits their own circumstances. However, parents should be guided first and foremost to create a schedule that is in the best interest of the child.

The following schedules show which portion of each year the children would spend with Parent A or Parent B. Parent A is the parent that the child lives with, Parent B is the parent living a long distance from the child.

Parenting time with  
Parent A

Parenting time with  
Parent B

### Sample Long Distance Schedule

For parents traveling 90 miles one way

<b>Winter Break</b>	Parent B's Parenting Time: December 18 – Noon on December 26		Parent A's Parenting Time: Noon on December 26 – January 3	
<b>Spring Break</b>	Parent B's Parenting Time: March 17-23			
<b>Summer Break</b>	Parent A's Parenting Time: June 1 – July 10		Parent B's Parenting Time: July 11 – August 21	
<b>Weekends</b>	Weekend 1 Parent A	Weekend 2 Parent A	Weekend 3 Parent A	Weekend 4 Parent B

**Additional Provisions:**

- **Winter Break:** The child will spend the first half of winter break with Parent B. The second half will be spent with Parent A. This will alternate annually.
- **Spring Break:** The child will spend the entire break with Parent B.
- **Summer Break:** Each parent is entitled to one-half of the school summer vacation. Parent A shall notify Parent B by March 15<sup>th</sup> each year when the summer break begins and ends. Parents will alternate annually on who gets the first or second halves.

## Special Issues

The circumstances of each family are different. When planning for parenting time, besides the factors mentioned earlier in this Guide, it is also important to consider the following issues that may arise. Note, this list does not include all possible issues that may arise as every family's situation is unique.

### Absent Parent Reunification

Some children may have a parent who wants to become part of their lives after years or a lifetime of not being involved with them. Other children may have a parent who was in their lives at one time, but left, and then after many months or years, wants to be part of their lives again. The emotional issues for both children and the residential parent are often very complicated and difficult to understand. Most children and parents need professional help to build trust between the child and the absent parent. Family counseling would help the parent establish a relationship with the child. The time it takes for the counseling to be successful will depend in part on the child's age and personality. Counseling also can help parents learn to communicate and cooperate.

### Blended (Step) Families

A significant number of children are members of a blended family. When two families unite, new personalities, habits, rules, and memories become part of the household. Most blended families are able to work out their differences and live together successfully. It takes patience, open discussion of feelings, positive attitudes, mutual respect, and thoughtful planning by both parents (biological and step) to make the formation of a new family succeed. Parents also need to be sensitive to the children's needs (those of their children and those of the other parent) and understand that blended families are complex.

No matter how hard parents try, when two families come together under one roof, there will be conflicts. Children may be sad, fearful, or angry as these changes occur. It takes time for them to adjust to the new family dynamics.

Common challenges can occur within a blended family. One problem is discipline. The parents should agree and explain to the children if and how a stepparent is going to discipline stepchildren. Another possible problem is what name the children are to call the stepparent. In addition, some children want time alone with their biological parent and may become angry when the parent spends time with the new partner and his or her children. There are also children who resist developing a close bond with a stepparent because they fear this could upset their other biological parent.

Family counseling for all family members may be needed if a child continues to resent a stepparent, if a stepparent continues to resent a stepchild, if a stepparent continues openly to favor his or her children, or when a member of the family continues to avoid contact with the new family members.

The following are tips for parents and stepparents to create positive relationships for each member of the blended family:

- Be sensitive about introducing a new partner into your children's lives, especially before the parenting issues are resolved and before the new partner becomes a significant other;
- Set aside alone time with your own children so they do not feel overshadowed by the new family members;
- Discuss parenting problems with the other parent away from the children;
- Avoid any display of favoritism regarding your children;
- Let the children choose an appropriate name or title for the stepparent; and
- Plan regular family meetings to discuss all members' needs.

### Children Who Don't Want to Spend Time With a Parent

Some children find it hard to go from one parent's home to the other, and they express these feelings through their behavior. There are many reasons why some children say they do not want to spend time with the other parent, whether it is related to the child's age and personality or the relationship with the other parent.

How a parent reacts to a child not wanting to be with the other parent can also affect whether the child or teen is willing to be with the other parent. Toddlers, for example, may not understand what is happening to them during an exchange and may cry when they leave one parent. This is a natural reaction, and these children usually calm down once they are distracted and engaged in a fun activity. Sometimes children just do not want to stop doing what they are doing because they are having fun and react negatively to leaving a parent's home.

Other children may not have gotten used to a new environment or used to a new schedule, and they would rather stay in the home and a neighborhood that is familiar. Parents can help children adjust by acknowledging their feelings but insisting that they spend time with the other parent, just as the parent would do if the child did not want to go to school. It is important to be patient during this transition period.

Parents should also recognize that counseling may be needed to help resolve some problems. For example, some children may have serious problems getting used to a parent's new partner and the partner's children. There are also children who are caught in the middle of their parents' conflict, who may take sides with one parent and refuse to spend time with the other parent, even if the judge or magistrate tells them to do so. In situations like this, professional help is usually necessary. Family therapy may be beneficial. If there are concerns that the children do not want to go because they are being abused or neglected, contact your local children services agency.

## Contact With an Incarcerated Parent

An incarcerated parent is still a parent to a child. In many cases, a child has a legal right and an emotional need to remain in contact with the incarcerated parent. It is important to understand that the needs of the child may be different from the residential parent's needs regarding contact with the incarcerated parent. Before a child visits the parent in jail or prison, the residential parent should talk to the child about what to expect. After the visit, the child should be encouraged to talk openly about thoughts and feelings regarding the visit, and the residential parent should respond sensitively. Before visiting, complete the *Authorization for Minor Child Visitation Form* and review the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction's visitation policies at [www.drc.ohio.gov/visitation/visitation](http://www.drc.ohio.gov/visitation/visitation).

## High Conflict

Many parents work well together, but some do not. Some parents argue with each other when they exchange the children or talk to each other on the phone. They sometimes blame the other parent for the separation of their family, and, in extreme cases, speak negatively about the other parent to the children. As a result, children can develop emotional and behavioral problems. Children may blame themselves for the cause of their parents' fighting and feel like they have to choose between their parents. This can lead to a child developing low self-esteem.

For parents who cannot work cooperatively and effectively communicate with one another, parallel parenting is a way for them to raise their child by having minimal contact with each other. Each parent makes day-to-day decisions about the child when the child is with them. With parallel parenting, communication between the parents is limited, except in emergencies, and usually is in writing. A counselor, parent coordinator, or parenting coach often helps parents handle parallel parenting arrangements.

In some counties, parents can attend high-conflict resolution classes or cooperative parenting classes. These classes teach parents how to communicate better and enhance parenting skills. They also help parents learn that any continuing conflict between them likely will have a long-term negative effect on their children.

## Military

A reality for many military families is a change in locations. When parents are first divorced or separated, they may live in the same community. A parenting schedule that focuses on sharing the child when the parents live close to each other and allowing for temporary duty assignment (TDY) scenarios is recommended. Military families should consider including a long-distance parenting schedule in case parents are no longer living in the same area. Make sure to include detailed travel arrangements and what happens if the parent is deployed or given TDY, both in the United States and overseas.

Maintaining contact between the child and the military parent is important. The non-military parent can support the child's relationship with the military parent by having a plan for regular communication. It may seem to the non-military parent, he or she is

shouldering most of the responsibility for fostering the child's relationship with the military parent, but it is important to know that the child will benefit from this effort as the child gets older.

Parents should ask whether the children's school is a Purple Star School and offers support services for children of military (and veteran) parents. These designated schools have a staff member liaison who provides resources for military-connected children and their families. More information can be found at [www.ohiopurplestar.org](http://www.ohiopurplestar.org).

## Safety Issues

- **Protection Orders:** When a court-ordered protection order is in effect, the parenting schedule cannot include any contact that would violate it. Only the court can change a protection order. If there is a protection order between the parents, the parents may ask the court to change the protection order to allow parenting time exchanges in specific locations. Parents can also ask a third party to help transport the child for parenting time exchanges.
- **Domestic Violence:** When there is a history of domestic violence, the court may determine that it is not in the child's best interest to order shared parenting. The court order should name the person who will supervise the parenting time. Some courts have supervision programs. Your community may have a supervised parenting time center that is not affiliated with the court. Often, there is a cost for this service. If there is no court supervision program or center available, the individual named in the court order to supervise parenting time must be a responsible adult who can act calmly and maturely with the parent who is being supervised.
- **Alcohol or Drug Use or Abuse:** If there is a concern about a parent's alcohol or drug use, the court order may provide for drug testing or include other provisions limiting alcohol or drug use during parenting time for one or both parents if they find doing so is in the best interest of the child. If testing is ordered by the court, the parenting time order should state how often testing will happen, who will pay for it, and what will happen if there is a positive test.

## Schedules for Families with Children of Different Ages

When creating a parenting time schedule, it is recommended to keep siblings together. However, this is not always possible considering the unique needs and age of the children. For example, when there is a wide age difference between siblings, the parenting schedule might include some alone time with the parents for each child. Remember, the schedules in this Guide are only suggestions. Parents may decide that a certain schedule works best for all of their children, even though that schedule is not recommended for a child's age.

## Special Needs Children

Developing a parenting time schedule for a child with special needs presents additional challenges. A child's "health" includes physical health, mental health, and developmental delays (e.g., Autism, intellectual delays, genetic disorders, developmental disabilities). Also, adolescents may have drug and substance use issues.

It is important that both parents understand the child's medical history and physical and mental conditions. They must both agree to follow and *actually follow* the treatment that medical professionals recommend. In most cases, it is best when both parents attend medical appointments. The more serious the child's health problem, the more the parents need to talk to each other and keep each other informed.

Parents also must learn to organize medication, medical equipment, and treatments. For example, parents may create a folder that contains the child's medical information, including the name and contact information of the child's medical professionals, name of and time any medication is to be taken, to be exchanged as the child moves between the parents' houses.

When the parents have shared parenting, they both need to be involved in major decisions about medical treatment, unless their court order says otherwise. The parenting time schedule should fit the child's medical needs.

## Third-Party Involvement

A parent may be tempted to involve a third party (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, grandparents, or friends) in parenting time exchanges or discussions with the other parent. This could backfire and make the situation worse. A neutral third party, such as a mediator, parenting coordinator, or lawyer, may be able to assist parents in resolving their disputes.

## Professional Services For Parents & Children

Given the differing circumstances of each family, courts use a variety of community professionals to help. A non-exhaustive list is found below. The use of such professionals does not mean a family member suffers from mental illness. Professionals help identify and work through issues affecting you, your children, or the other parent. Getting the right person to help starts when you know the different types of services, including the advantages and disadvantages of the process, and can request the ones best suited to your family.

### Dispute Resolution: Problem-Solving Without a Judge or Magistrate

- **Collaborative Divorce Coaching & Consulting:** Team approach to divorce involving the parents, their attorneys, financial analysts, consultants, and others who provide information and education to help resolve parental disputes without court involvement.
- **Mediation:** Uses a variety of negotiation tools and strategies to assist parents in reaching an agreement about all aspects of child decision-making and parenting time schedules.
- **Neutral Evaluation:** A process in which the parties present their claims and defenses and describe their principal evidence to support the claims or defenses to neutral third-party evaluators. The evaluators then share their impressions about the strengths and weaknesses of the positions, and the probable outcome of the matter to help both parents reach an agreement.
- **Parenting Coordinator:** Case management, dispute resolution process using mediation and arbitration concepts to help implement parenting court orders. Ask your local court to see if these services are available.
- **Parent Coaching:** A collaborative process that supports parents to increase awareness and build skills to manage the challenges of raising children with confidence and clarity. Coaching helps parents set and achieve individual goals related to age-appropriate expectations, effective parenting strategies, communication, and stress management, empowering them to create a nurturing environment with a flexible structure for their children.
- **Co-Parent Coaching:** A process that focuses on guiding parents through the complexities of raising children after separation or divorce. Using personalized inquiry and feedback, coaching helps parents, individually and jointly, to discover ways to take responsibility for reducing conflict and fostering a stable, supportive environment for their children. Parents may also create agreements around communication, schedules, and important decisions.



### Assessment: Providing Information to the Judge or Magistrate

- **Brief Child Custody Evaluation:** Less comprehensive evaluation focused on addressing specific issues or updating an already-existing parenting court order.
- **Child Custody Evaluation:** Comprehensive fact-finding process resulting in extensive decision-making and parenting time recommendations. This is especially helpful where there are high-conflict parental relationships, relocation issues, or allegations of sexual abuse, child abuse, or domestic violence.
- **Child Forensic Interview:** Specialized interview of a child to answer specific questions for the court without involving the child directly in the legal system.
- **Neuropsychological Evaluation:** A process by a medical professional to determine if a person has a physical brain injury that significantly disrupts the person's life, typically manifested by "short fuse" violence and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **Psychological Evaluation:** A process using psychological tests, interviews, and observations to evaluate mental status and functioning or treatment needs.
- **Psychosexual Risk:** A process using psychological tests, polygraphs, interviews, and observations to evaluate the potential risk for physical and/or sexual abuse of children.

### Guided Support: Therapy to Foster Cooperative Co-Parenting

- **Parental Therapy:** Joint parental therapy intended to increase positive coordination by parents and reduce conflicts.
- **Family Therapy:** Treatment provided when two or more members of the family need treatment to normalize and stabilize functioning.
- **Forensic Therapy:** Non-confidential treatment provided by a therapist ordered by the court. It is common for a forensically informed therapist to write a report for the court.
- **Therapeutic Intervention:** Treatment and case management often used in therapeutically complex cases or in reunification cases where intervention focuses on supporting the renewal of a relationship between a parent and a child.
- **Therapeutic Supervision:** Supervision of parent-child contacts provided by a therapist.

## Words You May Need to Know

This is not a list of legal definitions. These definitions were prepared to provide you with a basic understanding of what the term means in the context of cases involving parenting time. Legal definitions can be found in the Ohio Revised Code.

**Access, Visitation, Parenting Time:** Words used to describe the schedule of time a child has with each parent.

**Allocation of Parental Rights & Responsibilities:** The determination made by a court as to where the children will live and the rights and responsibilities of the parents to the children. Also known as an “allocation order.”

**Dispute Resolution:** Ways to solve legal problems without a trial (e.g., mediation, collaborative law, neutral evaluation, or other settlement methods.)

**Attachment:** Positive feelings of the child toward parents and other parent figures.

**“Best Interests of the Child”:** When parenting issues are decided, the judge determines what is best for the child based on all the information.

**Bonding:** Close relationship that develops between a young child and a parent or a parent figure.

**Confidentiality:** Private information that cannot be shared with anyone else, except as required by law.

**Co-Parenting:** Parents working together to raise a child, even when they are not married and do not live together. This is not a legal term and not to be confused with shared parenting.

**Court Order:** A written order made by a judge that must be followed.

**Custody:** The right of a parent to make major decisions for the children. Courts use the term “allocation of parental rights and responsibilities.”

**Dissolution of Marriage:** The legal process of ending a marriage by mutual agreement of the couple. Both spouses agree on all aspects of property division, child and spousal support, and parenting issues.

**Divorce:** The legal process of ending a marriage when the couple does not agree on property division, child and spousal support, and parenting issues before one spouse files a complaint.

**Domestic Violence:** A pattern of abusive behavior used by an adult or adolescent to maintain power and control over a family or household member. Also known as domestic abuse or intimate partner violence. It has different meanings for purposes of obtaining a civil or criminal protection order.

**Exchange:** Pick-up and drop-off of a child between parents or other caregivers.

**Family Law:** The laws relating to family relationships. They include laws about divorce, paternity, parenting, property and debt division, child support, spousal support (formerly “alimony”) and other topics. The laws are based on statutes, rules, and reported court decisions.

**Filing:** Submitting your legal papers to the Clerk of the Court.

**“Frequent and Continuing Contact”:** How the law refers to children having regular and ongoing contact with parents.

**Hearing:** A scheduled appearance in court.

**Holiday Schedule:** A part of the parenting schedule that specifies how children will spend holidays with each parent and defines each holiday so both parents know when the holiday begins and ends.

**In Camera Interview:** The judge or magistrate speaks with a child in chambers regarding the child’s wishes and concerns. The record of the interview can be sealed by the court.

**Joint Custody:** A term no longer used in Ohio. See Residential Parent, Shared Parenting, and Sole Residential Parent.

**Mediation:** A process to help parents resolve disputes cooperatively. Mediation is confidential. The parents meet with the mediator outside of court. The mediator does not give the parents legal advice, tell them what to do, or make a recommendation to the judge.

**Mediator:** A trained, neutral third party who helps the parents try to solve problems cooperatively through mediation.

**Modification of Parenting Order:** Changes to an existing parenting court order. Changes can be enforced only if they are stated in a court order.

**Order of Protection:** See “Protection Order.”

**Parallel Parenting:** See “High Conflict” in the Special Issues section on page 52.

**Parental Rights & Responsibilities:** The rights and responsibilities of a parent to determine and control matters affecting a child’s welfare and upbringing, as well as contact with a child. Parental rights and responsibilities can be allocated in the following ways: shared parenting or sole residential parenting.

**Parenting Coordination:** A non-confidential, child-focused dispute resolution process. A mental health or legal professional with mediation training or experience assists high-conflict parents by facilitating resolution of their disputes in a timely manner, educating parents about children’s needs, and, with the prior approval of the parties and/or the court, making decisions within the scope of the court order or employment contract.

**Parenting Order:** A court order that states when the child will be with each parent and who will make decisions. The parenting order may be developed by the parents on their own or with the help of a professional, such as a mediator, an attorney, or a judge.

**Parenting Time:** The time a child spends with a parent according to the parenting time schedule.

**Paternity or Parentage:** A legal action that results in a court order naming the child's father.

**Protection Order:** An order issued by the court to protect the person receiving the order and named children or other household members from physical violence.

**Residential Parent:** The parent with whom the child physically lives according to a court order. In a shared parenting plan "residential parent for school purposes" or "school placement parent" is the parent in whose school district the child can attend school.

**Rules of Court:** A set of rules that control court procedures. The Ohio Rules of Civil Procedure apply to divorces and dissolutions. Individual courts may have local rules of practice.

**Service:** When you file paperwork with the court requesting it to take action, you must inform all parties of your request through an official court process. This is what it means to have them "served."

**Shared Parenting:** Both parents share making major decisions for the children, unless stated otherwise in the Shared Parenting Plan. It does not necessarily mean equal time with each parent.

**Shared Parenting Plan:** The document that states how the parents will make decisions for their children and the parenting time schedule.

**Sole Residential Parent:** The parent who has the right, by way of a court order or law, to make major decisions for the children and with whom the children live when there is not shared parenting. Major decisions may include those concerning medical care, religion, extracurricular activities, or education.

**Statute:** A law of the state of Ohio passed by the legislature. Most statutes relating to family law are in Ohio Revised Code Chapter 31. They are available in libraries or online.

**Stipulation:** A formal agreement of the parties. When written and signed by both parties, it may become a court order if approved by a judge or magistrate.

**Supervised Exchanges:** Pick up and drop off of the child in the presence of another specified adult.

**Supervised Parenting Time:** Parenting time during which the parent and child must be in the presence of another specified adult.

**Therapeutic Supervision:** Supervision of parent-child contacts provided by a therapist.

**Transition:** The adjustment time for parents and the child immediately before, during, and after the exchange of the child between the parents or other caregivers.

**Trial:** A formal hearing with witnesses and evidence. (See Hearing.)

**Virtual Parenting:** Parenting time facilitated by electronic means to supplement, not replace, in-person parenting time. Examples include telephone calls, webcam, videoconferencing, instant messaging, online chatting, telephone texting, etc.

**Visitation:** A term for parenting time that is not preferred. Instead, see Access, Parenting Plan or Parenting Time. It is often used to refer to time spent with grandparents and other relatives who ask a court to provide them with children.







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