

# **Superior Court of California County of Sonoma**

## **Family Court Services**

### **Orientation Handbook for Positive Parenting**



October 2011

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# INTRODUCTION



## FAMILY COURT SERVICES



Family Court Services provides an opportunity for parents to meet with a trained professional to develop a parenting plan that is in the best interest of their children. The Family Code governs child custody recommending counseling and sets forth the purposes of said process: To reduce acrimony that may exist between parents, to develop an agreement assuring the children close and continuing contact with both parents and to effect a settlement that is in the *best interest of the children*. California's mandatory child custody recommending counseling law affords parents the opportunity to develop their own plans to raise their children after the decision to separate has been made, rather than to delegate that responsibility to others, such as mediators, psychologists, evaluators or judges. However, if parents are not able to agree on a parenting plan, the recommending counselor will make a recommendation to the Court that is deemed to be in the children's best interest.



## IMPORTANT TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

**Legal Custody:** The rights and responsibilities of parents to make decisions relating to the health, education and welfare of their children.

Joint Legal Custody: Both parents share in the right and responsibility to make decisions for their children.

Sole Legal Custody: One parent has the right and responsibility for making decisions for the children.

**Physical Custody:** How much time the children spend with each parent; where the children live; how day-to-day responsibilities are fulfilled.

Joint Physical Custody: Children spend a significant amount of time with each parent. This does not mean custodial time must be equally shared by the parents.

Sole Physical Custody: Children reside primarily with one parent, and may or may not have visitation with the other parent.

# DEVELOPING YOUR PARANTING PLAN

## IMPORTANT REMINDERS

When preparing your proposal for a parenting plan, keep in mind the following:

- Children need to be emotionally and physically safe from parental conflict.
  - Children need a healthy relationship with both parents.
  - A parenting plan must take into consideration the age and emotional stage of development of each child.
  - All children need consistency and stability from both parents.
  - Consider your children's special qualities and needs.
  - The parenting plan may change as the family's needs change.
  - Parents who make their own mutual decision regarding a parenting plan are less likely to need future court involvement and are generally happier with the outcome.
  - Holidays are extremely important as times of shared enjoyment, family tradition, and meaning. A schedule alleviates stress/conflict during these time periods.
  - Restructured families living near each other can usually work out ways for the children to spend part of each important holiday at both homes. Families separated by too many miles for this arrangement usually work out ways of alternating important holidays each year.
1. **Your parenting plan should be specific:** Write down a proposed parenting plan before attending the Family Court Services appointment. Children do better when they know and can rely on the plan. Parents argue less when the plan is specific. Specific times, locations and arrangements for who will provide the transportation for all exchanges should be included.
  2. **Transitions:** When thinking about your parenting plan, consider the number of transitions in a week and how your children will manage those times. Keep transition times conflict free.
  3. **Parental Communication:** Effective communication between parents is very important to the success of your plan. Your children need you to discuss with the other parent the changes in schedules and how they are doing (health, behavior, school/day care adjustments, etc.). Be specific about when you and the other parent will talk. Plan to talk briefly before every transition to keep each other updated, but not in front of the children. Stay focused on the children, keep a business-like tone and avoid talking about other subjects. For high conflict families, a co-parenting counselor or neutral third person may be necessary.

## AGE APPROPRIATE SCHEDULES

### INFANTS AND TODDLERS

[The following information on infants and toddlers are excerpts from the article by Joan B. Kelly and Michael E. Lamb entitled, "Using Child Development Research to Make Appropriate Custody and Access Decisions for Young Children" (Family and Conciliation Courts Review, Vol. 38 No. 3, July 2000 297-311)]

To be responsive to the infant's psychological needs, the parenting schedule adopted for children younger than 2-3 years of age must involve more transitions, rather than fewer, to ensure the continuity of both relationships and the child's security and comfort during a time of great change.

Infants and toddlers should have multiple contacts each week with both parents to minimize separation anxiety and maintain continuity in the children's attachments. Unfortunately, the concept of location-engendered stability (one home, one bed) has been incorrectly overemphasized for infants and toddlers, without due consideration for the greater significance to the child of the emotional, social and cognitive contributions of both parent-child relationships. Living in one location (geographic stability) ensures only one type of stability. Stability is also created for infants (and older children) by the predictable coming and going of both parents, regular feedings and sleeping schedules, consistent and appropriate care, and affection and acceptance.

As children reach age two, their ability to tolerate longer separation increases, so most toddlers can manage two consecutive overnights with each parent without stress. Schedules involving alternating longer blocks of time, such as 5 to 7 days, should be avoided, as children this age still become fretful and uncomfortable when separated from either parent too long.

The evening and overnight periods (like extended days with nap times) with nonresidential parents are especially important psychologically not only for infants but for toddlers and young children as well. Evening and overnight periods provide opportunities for crucial social interactions and nurturing activities, including bathing, soothing hurts and anxieties, bedtime rituals, comforting in the middle of the night, and the reassurance and security of snuggling in the morning after awakening, that 1 to 2-hour visits cannot provide. These everyday activities promote and maintain trust and confidence in the parents while deepening and strengthening child-parent attachments.

Aside from maintaining and deepening attachments, overnights provide children with a diversity of social, emotional, and cognitively stimulating experiences that promote adaptability and healthy development.

When mothers are breast-feeding, there is considerable hesitation, indecision, and perhaps strong maternal resistance regarding extended overnight or full-day separations. Breast-feeding is an important context in which attachments are promoted, although it is by no means an essential context. Indeed, there is no evidence that breast-fed babies form closer or more secure relationships to their parents than do bottle-fed babies. A father can feed an infant with the mother's expressed milk, particularly after nursing routines are well established.

The extent to which infants and toddlers can tolerate separation from significant attachment figures is related to their age, temperament, cognitive development, social experience, and the presence of older siblings. Aside from their very immature cognitive capacities, infants have no sense of time to help them understand separations, although their ability to tolerate longer separations from attachment figures increases with age. The goal of any access schedule should be to avoid long separations from both parents to minimize separation anxiety and to have sufficiently frequent and broad contact with each parent to keep the infant secure, trusting, and comfortable in each relationship.

Research and experience with infant day care, early preschool, and other stable caretaking arrangements indicate that infants and toddlers readily adapt to transitions and also sleep well, once familiarized with the setting. A child will thrive socially, emotionally, and cognitively if the caretaking arrangements are predictable and if parents are both sensitive to the child's physical and developmental needs and if they are emotionally available. The empirical literature also shows that infants and toddlers need regular interaction with both of their parents to foster and maintain their attachments.

There is ample evidence that infants and toddlers get used to regular transitions, such as those associated with enrollment in alternative care facilities, without there being adverse effects on the quality of the attachments to their parents. The same should be true of separation in the context of parental separation or divorce.

**NOTE:** Judgment about overnight placements must always be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the characteristics of the individual child and the child's social environment; especially as related to the child's relationship with each parent, the quality of care each parent is able to provide the child, and the parents' ability to co-parent.

### **PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN (3-5)**

Preschool children can tolerate lengthier separations than toddlers can, and many are comfortable with extended weekends in each parent's home as well as overnights during the week. When planning the amount of time and the number of consecutive overnights the child will spend with each parent, parents should consider the following:

- The amount of childcare each of the parents provided prior to separation.
- The child's temperament.
- The level of conflict between parents.
- Familiarity with the other parent's home.

In general, most preschool children become stressed and unnecessarily overburdened by separations from either parent that last more than 3 or 4 days. So that some parents find that an every-other weekend schedule with midweek contact works well. As the child moves through this developmental stage, weekends may be extended to include either Friday or Sunday night or both.

When both parents have been actively involved in the child's daily routine, depending on the child's temperament and adjustment, ease of transitions and effectiveness of parental

communication, reasonably equal time may be considered. This being the case, it would be important for the child's time with each parent to be arranged so that the child would be with one parent for no more than 4 consecutive days at a time.

The exception might be planned vacations, in which parents and siblings are fully available to engage preschool children in novel, stimulating, and pleasurable activities. Even so, most parents would be advised to limit vacations at this age to 7 days and to schedule several vacations rather than one single lengthy vacation a year.

### **EARLY SCHOOL AGE (6-9)**

This period begins the long, usually more settled, middle years of childhood. Children have greater experience with multiple separations from parents (e.g., school, relatives, friends, sports). During this stage, children begin to:

- Develop peer and community relationships.
- Attain self-esteem as they develop personal and social skills.
- Develop empathy and a sense of right and wrong.

Early school-age children understand the concepts of time and routine. They can be more independent than their younger peers and more secure with the ideal of two residences. They usually can adjust to different parenting styles. This and the next age period are typically the most flexible years of development, which permits parents to be more creative in preparing parenting plans. Using a calendar to inform and remind children of the schedules outlined in the parenting plan, along with their other activities, is very helpful, as changes can be anticipated and talked about ahead of time, easing some of the stress of transitions.

At this age, it is important to maximize frequent contact with both parents. Depending upon each family's circumstances - for example, parenting responsibilities assumed by each parent prior to separation, geographical distance, parents' work commitments, child's activities, child's temperament and adjustment, and level of conflict between parents - the plan might include:

- One to three or sometimes four overnights a week with the non-residential parent with the understanding that some children still require a home base while others do well alternating or splitting weeks.
- Alternate weekends with an evening during the week. The weekend could include one, two or three overnights depending upon the level of involvement with pre-separation parenting.
- Weekday overnights so that the non-residential parent can fully participate in the child's schooling. Research shows that children with fathers involved in their schooling perform better in school.

### **LATER SCHOOL AGE (10-12)**

This later period is also known as the "pre-teen years," as these children are preparing to make the leap into puberty and adolescence. They have a greater capacity to understand time, to appreciate future plans and schedules, and to balance different values and parental practices that might exist in their two residences. Children this age tend to be rule-bound and may align

themselves with one parent. If a child refuses to see one of the parents, therapeutic assistance should be sought.

Ten to twelve year olds should be encouraged to engage in a variety of activities outside the home. Such participation helps children develop social and intellectual skills in preparation for the greater independence and demands of adolescence. Parents should allow their children to express feelings about the needs for greater control over their own time while making it clear that parents make the final decisions. Balancing time with parents, friends, and activities requires flexibility and commitment to maintaining a strong relationship with both parents. Parental support of increased independence will contribute to the child's self-esteem and self-confidence.

School-age children can do well with many different parenting plans as long as they provide for frequent contact with both parents. Some options include:

- Alternating weekends with three or four overnights, split weeks or alternating weeks.
- Children should be given the opportunity and privacy to call the other parent.
- Children's preferences should be considered and respected. However, remember that parents should still make the final decision.
- It is important to accommodate the child's social activities and commitments.

### **EARLY ADOLESCENTS (13-15)**

Children of this age should be encouraged to explore activities and develop social relationships outside the family. These outside interests often compete with the scheduled parenting plan. Teens will often prefer to spend time with peers over parents and can become resentful and angry if their wishes are not respected. This is also a time when children may articulate a desire for a home base because of the growing importance of their own network and outside activities. The challenge for parents of these early adolescents is to support their growing independence while maintaining some basic structure and close contact with both parents. Both parents can increase contact through regular attendance at the child's athletic, performance, academic or other activities. This allows for maximum parental involvement in activities important to the child's life.

It is appropriate for children of this age to begin to negotiate their time directly with each parent. It is of paramount importance for parents to speak directly with each other to be certain that the child is safe and accountable. Parents should support the relationship of the child with the other parent.

Parents of early adolescents should consider the child's schedule and commitments, distance between the parents' homes, each parent's work schedule or other obligations, the child's temperament and wishes, and recognition of a teen's need for unstructured time.

Although many different plans may work for children of this age, some options include:

- Alternating seven-day periods with or without mid-week time.
- Alternating long weekends with or without mid-week time.
- Providing a home base for the child with some time with the non-custodial parent during the week and on weekends.

## LATE ADOLESCENTS (16-18)

Parents of sixteen to eighteen year olds should encourage and support their child's:

- Gradual and healthy separation from both parents.
- Development of an individual identity.
- Establishing a sense of self with regard to rules and regulations of society, school and peer groups.

Children of this age do well with many different plan models. For these late adolescents, communication between parents remains essential, especially regarding curfews, driving, dating and overnights away from both homes. This is a time when children are particularly vulnerable to changes within the family and to pressure from outside the family. Maintaining stability and consistency can be challenging as an adolescent's feelings are often changeable and intense. Increased schoolwork, extracurricular activities, jobs, peer relationships, and sports are often more important than time with family or either parent. As they move through this stage, many teenagers become focused on future goals such as education, work or other post-high-school plans.

While the sixteen to eighteen year old appears to be struggling to become independent, there is still a need for consistency, support and meaningful time with both parents. Parents should be aware of a teenager's need to be consulted, informed and involved when asking plans without giving up the adult/child relationship and the structure that can only be provided by both parents. Parents should remain flexible while maintaining age-appropriate controls.

NOTE: Please keep in mind that there is no single schedule that has been shown to be appropriate for all children of a given age.

Information on the preschool aged children through late adolescents was taken from *Planning for Shared Parenting: A Guide for Parents Living Apart*, sponsored by the Massachusetts Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC). The handbook is a collaborative effort of the legal and mental health communities. This guide combines recent developmental research about children and the impact of divorce on their lives, with the practical needs of parents and children living apart. <http://www.mass.gov/courts/courtsandjudges/courts/probateandfamilycourt/afccsharedparenting.pdf>

## CHILD-CENTERED CONSIDERATIONS

Knowledge of their child's temperament and development help parents individualize the placement schedule – frequency and duration of “visits,” inclusion of overnights, etc. – to meet their child's specific needs. Infants and toddlers with “easy” (flexible, secure) temperaments are less stressed by change and more adaptable to the departures and reunions of placement transitions.<sup>1</sup> These youngsters will not experience or readily show dramatic shifts of emotion or mood; even when troubled, they tend to go with the flow. During periods of placement away from the primary caregiver, children with easy temperaments are likely to manage any separation anxiety with less apparent distress than would be displayed by children with either “difficult” (active, feisty) or wary (cautious, slow-to-warm) temperaments. Easy children rely on the perceptiveness of caregivers to pick up on feelings lying below the surface, which less trained parental eyes might not see. In turn, regardless of temperament, young children are often alert and responsive to parents' relative receptivity, or reactivity, or unresponsiveness to their expressions of affect. The extents to which child and parent are reciprocally attuned and able to emotionally communicate (“mind-to-mind”) may help explain the discrepancy between some youngsters' positive mood and undisturbed behavior during overnights with a secondary placement parent, as compared to their overt show of distress upon returning home.

If contact with the secondary parent has been limited, the child may benefit from a planned period of transition. When infants and toddlers have had little prior opportunity to acquaint themselves with the non-primary parent, Solomon (2005) suggests “many briefer stays in the care of the alternate caregiver during a prolonged period of familiarization, lasting up to several weeks or even months, should precede the shift to an overnight schedule.”

Transitional objects (the child's “blankie,” favorite comfort toy or stuffed animal, photo of mom, etc.) may help bridge discontinuities between more and less familiar placement settings.

Establishing routines and rituals of separation and reunion for the child when he/she departs and re-enters each care setting, for example, planning an hour's undivided attention, can ease placement transitions.

Scheduling the child's return to his/her primary home well in advance of bedtime, so that reunion and readjustment to accustomed routines and expectations can be unhurried and reassuring, for parent and child alike.

Having a shared understanding of their child's individual needs will enable both parents to schedule overnight visits in ways that lessen the stress their child experiences, for example, by combining fewer transitions and longer stays or more frequent transitions and shorter stays with the alternate care provider.

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<sup>1</sup> Temperament is the natural or characteristic style of an individual's emotional responses and interactions with people, places, and things. Whether easy, difficult, or insecure, temperament is a normal feature of human biology, which is present from birth and for upwards of two-thirds of the population, broadly stable throughout life. Temperament is an enduring style of behavior and is most noticeable when children enter and adjust to a new interpersonal situation. See Donald T. Saposnek, *Mediating Child Custody Disputes*, Jossey-Bass, 1985.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



**What is abuse?** Abuse means to hit, kick, hurt, scare, throw things, pull hair, push, follow, harass, sexually assault, isolate, or threaten to do any of these things. Domestic violence is abuse that may be spoken, written, or physical.

Security and safety issues are given serious priority at Family Court Services. If you are protected by a restraining order due to past acts of domestic violence, or sign under penalty of perjury that you have a history of domestic violence (even if you have no restraining orders), you may request to meet separately with the child custody recommending counselor, and/or you can request to have a support person accompany you (Family Code sections 3181 and 6303). If this applies to you, you must fill out the FCS domestic violence form and submit at the time of your appointment. If the Court finds that one parent has perpetrated domestic violence against the other parent, physical and legal custody, as well as time with your children may be affected (Family Code § 3044).

## ANGER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

These are some techniques that people often find helpful to break the anger cycle:

- Breathe deeply and relax.
- Write in a journal when you feel angry and need a release.
- Do something active to channel your anger such as walking, exercising, cleaning, gardening, waxing the car, painting, etc.
- Find someone (other than your child) to talk to when you need support (i.e., friend, family member, or therapist).
- Join a support group.
- Find a place where you are alone (such as when you are in your car) and scream. Try different loud sounds until you find one that gives you relief.
- Try having a good cry (when your child is not at home).
- Read books which help you manage and release your anger. You will find a list of resource books included in the manual.

**WARNING: DO NOT LET YOUR CHILD SEE THESE BEHAVIORS. THEY ARE INTENDED TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR ANGER. DO NOT BRING YOUR CHILD INTO YOUR ANGER, IT WILL ONLY FRIGHTEN OR CONFUSE YOUR CHILD.**

## DRUGS AND ALCOHOL



- What is a drug? A drug is a pleasure producing chemical. Drugs activate or imitate chemical pathways in the brain associated with feelings of wellbeing, pleasure and euphoria.
- Two types of drugs:
  - Legal: Prescription medications, alcohol, marijuana with a medical card
  - Illegal: Methamphetamines, speed, cocaine, heroin, marijuana (medical marijuana card permitted in the State of California), etc.

Just because someone is on drugs does not mean he or she will be a bad parent. But using drugs can negatively affect your ability to parent, and in some cases can also directly affect your child. When parental drug or alcohol use harms the child in some way, then it becomes a problem. Sometimes when parents take drugs, the effects can have lasting impacts on the child's development and behavior. Therefore, in order to ensure your children's best interest are maintained, the Court will take any allegations of drug and/or alcohol use/abuse very seriously.

### Legal Context

Family Code Section 3011(d) requires consideration of parent's "habitual or continual" use of illegal drugs in determining the best interest of the children. Abuse of legal drugs shall also be taken into consideration when ensuring that the children's best interests are secured.

Share any concerns regarding controlled or illicit substance use and/or abuse to the child custody recommending counselor at the time of your appointment.

## HELPING YOUR CHILDREN THROUGH DIVORCE

### **Children feel calmer when:**

1. You tell them, briefly and clearly, what is happening, where everyone will live, when they will see each parent, etc.
2. You tell them why divorce happens to some families. Explain that this is an adult decision because parents weren't getting along. Don't overburden the children with too many details. Explain that parents and children can't divorce.
3. You remind them that you will always love and take care of them.
4. You tell them that they did not cause the divorce and they can't change the decision.
5. You tell them it's all right to express their ideas and feelings and to ask questions. You create a very clear, reliable schedule and tell them ahead when things change. Children need predictability.
6. You speak respectfully about the other parent.
7. You keep consistent firm routines and limits at home.
8. They experience their separated parents being friendly and respectful to one another.

### **Children suffer when:**

1. They see or hear parents hurting each other physically.
2. They see or hear parents fight verbally with each other - especially about them.
3. They are put in the middle; carrying messages, dealing with money matters, spying on the other parent's life or choosing between parents.
4. You criticize the other parent in front of them.

### **Transitions between households:**

Transitioning between separated parents is a very stressful time for children. Ensure that it is a conflict-free time. Your children need your help to negotiate moving from one parent to the other. Keep the focus on the children. Help them say goodbye to one parent and be welcomed by the other parent. Help them transfer needed clothes, school work and/or special toys to the other parent. Be cordial. Limit conversation to helping the children. Don't argue.

## PAIN GAMES

Parents don't want their children to suffer from the disruption and anger of divorce, but sometimes parents may try to ease their own pain in ways that *unintentionally put* their children in the middle. A central task for parents is to separate out their feelings toward each other as romantic partners from what their children need from them as parents.

**Pain Games are interactions** that put children in the middle of parental battles. Most parents don't engage in such interactions on purpose but, nonetheless, the children are hurt. Some common "Pain Games" follow:

- 1. Put Down:** A parent poisons the child's feelings and ideas about the other parent by negative comments. Parents may do this to relieve pent-up anger, or because they feel they can only win the child's affection by alienating the child from the other parent. Because children experience themselves as made up of both their parents, they feel a hostile remark as an attack on a part of themselves. A missile fired at the other parent hits the child as well, causing pain and lowered self-esteem.
- 2. Messenger:** When parents feel they can't or don't want to talk directly to each other, they may ask their children to carry messages to the other parent. Parents lose control of the content of the message as children may change or distort the information and fuel the fires between angry parents. When this happens, they feel responsible for the parent's anger. Making children messengers gives children too much power. Being a messenger is a painful burden for them. Parents need to communicate directly with each other.
- 3. I Spy:** Out of curiosity and difficulty letting go of the spousal relationship, parents seek information about their former spouse by questioning the children. Getting this information feeds parental anger, and puts children in the middle. Children do not like being used, being asked to violate the trust of a parent, or bearing the anger of a parent upset with the information.
- 4. Disneyland Daddy or Merry Mommy:** As parents struggle with how to treat their children after divorce, they may, out of guilt and insecurity, try to give the children anything and everything. They may do this to try to make up for the divorce, or they may be trying to ensure the children want to return to them. The children may come to expect special gifts, treats, and privileges on a continual basis. They may not develop a realistic relationship with the parent or a realistic view of family life.
- 5. Call for Loyalty:** Parents may feel so hurt and angry at their former spouse that they conceptualize the divorce as a war and the other parent as the enemy. They demand loyalty from their children by expecting them to view and feel about the other parent as they do. The child's positive feelings about the other parent are seen as a betrayal. The child, fearing rejection by one or both parents, must walk between enemy camps.

## CREATING TWO HOMES

It is important to create a home environment that provides your child with a sense of belonging. Remember your child has two homes no matter how much time they spend in each.

### **1. Build predictability and security in both households:**

- a. Establish and maintain consistent routines and structure. Share routines that work with the other parent. As much as possible agree on bedtime, chores, morning rituals and homework. It will help both families.
- b. Establish and maintain consistent rules and procedures for discipline. Although children can adapt to different rules and procedures in several settings, adhering to the same procedures eases their adjustment. Work together as a team whenever possible.
- c. Establish and maintain responsibilities for your child. Children achieve a sense of belonging and build self-confidence by contributing to the family. Chores suited to your child's developmental level and interests can help her gain a sense of place in the family.
- d. Make time with your child as natural as possible. Sometimes the non-custodial parent tries to make up for time lost by filling weekends with "special events." What your child will remember most is the accumulation of experiences. Being there for bedtime, homework and pleasurable activities such as playing catch and reading books is important.
- e. Spend one-on-one time with each of your children. Plan an activity that your child finds enjoyable. Remember it can be as simple as coloring, reciting nursery rhymes or putting puzzles together. This is especially important if you have a significant other.
- f. Encourage your child to make friends in both neighborhoods and invite friends over.

### **2. Build continuity in both households:**

- a. Make a personal place for your child. It is important for her to have her own bed or at least a sleeping bag at each house. If she is unable to have her own room, provide a dresser drawer for her to store personal belongings.
- b. Provide toilet articles and adequate changes of clothes including shoes, socks, pajamas and undergarments at each house.
- c. Honor your child's preference if he wants to carry favorite items back and forth between homes.
- d. Allow your child to contact the other parent by telephone each day. Establish a regularly scheduled time for telephone contact. Assure your child privacy. Avoid calling right before bedtime or during your child's favorite television show.
- e. Allow your child to have a picture of the other parent in both homes. Allow your child to choose where the photograph will be located.
- f. Post a calendar, illustrating the days your child will be living with each parent.
- g. Share important information with your child's other parent. Keep them informed of medical and dental visits and recommendations. Provide copies of report cards, school pictures and photographs of special events. Also, notify the other parent of important events in your child's life, such as performances, sports activities and dance recitals, as soon as possible.

## TIPS FOR EASY TRANSITION

Traveling between homes may be difficult for your children. Each transition requires your children to make several adjustments. Although they may be anticipating being with their other parent, they may also experience some sadness about leaving you. When they leave the other parent, they may experience the same emotions once again. Comings and goings require your child to say hello and good-bye several times within a brief period of time.

### 1. Prepare for departure:

- a. Talk to your child about what will happen while he is visiting with his other parent. Tell the other parent the reason you are asking for this information. Do the same for the other parent so she may be able to prepare your child in the same fashion. Say to your child, "Mommy is going to take you to the library."
- b. Establish and maintain a routine. Before your child leaves for the other home, read a book, play a game or watch a short video together.
- c. Establish and maintain a "good-bye" ritual. For example, give your child three kisses and a hug at each departure and say, "See you soon. Love you forever."
- d. Pack a "comfort bag." Your child may want to transport favorite items such as a stuffed animal, a blanket, a book or an item that reminds him of the absent parent. Place a note or card in the bag for your child to discover at a later time.

### 2. During the transition:

- a. Have your child adequately prepared and ready to leave on time. If you are transporting your child, be on time for dropping off and picking up.
- b. Be courteous to the child's other parent. Avoid arguments and exchanging extraneous information. Do not send messages to the other parent through your child.
- c. If your child is taking medication, be sure to transfer this medication and provide adequate instructions for how it is to be administered.
- d. Consider a neutral exchange site if you or the other parent -have difficulty refraining from arguing or trading insults in front of your child.
- e. Your child may have difficulty separating from one or both parents. Establishing rituals for departure and arrival will ease some of the anxiety.

### 3. Prepare for return:

- a. Recognize that your child may need some time to be alone after returning home. Allow them to spend quiet time alone if they choose.
- b. Establish and maintain a "hello" ritual. Once your child has unwound from his arrival, play a game, read a book, watch a favorite video or bake cookies.
- c. Recognize that your child may not want to talk about the time spent with their other parent. Honor this preference.
- d. During the transition process, acknowledge your child's feelings. Encourage her to talk about her feelings, but do not pressure her to talk.

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# CO-PARENTING

## PSYCHOLOGICAL TASKS

1. Accept the idea that while your romantic relationship is ending, you will be parents forever. The family is not ending, it is being reorganized.
2. While you no longer share a life together as partners, you do share love and mutual concern for your children. This is the new basis of your relationship - concern for your children.
3. You need to separate the children's needs and concerns from your own. Your child does not experience your former partner the way you do. You need to focus on the strength in your relationship- what you've done well together as parents - and build on those strengths.
4. You need to create new boundaries in the relationship with the other parent:
  - a. Build from the ground up. Don't assume old patterns, build new ones.
  - b. Clarify new expectations.
  - c. Remember you need to think of and behave toward the other parent as your business associate in raising the children, rather than your former partner.

## COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIORAL SKILLS

1. Limit the communication to child- related issues.
2. Don't let old issues into the discussions. If your former partner can't keep old disagreements out of the conversations, suggest resuming the discussion later.
3. Don't blame the other parent.
4. Speak in "I messages" e.g., "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ happens."
5. Be courteous and respectful, even if you don't feel he or she deserves it.
6. Don't expect appreciation or praise from the other parent.
7. Act like a guest in the other parent's house.
8. Be explicit and detailed about child-related issues when speaking with the other parent.
9. Spend as much time as possible with the child(ren) during your time.
10. Carefully avoid scheduling or arranging activities for the child(ren) which are likely to conflict with any time period allocated to the other parent.
11. Arrange ahead of time for both parents to be authorized in writing in case of emergency to take any and all actions necessary to protect the health and welfare of the child(ren).
12. Keep the other parent advised at all times of your current address, telephone number at home and work and your children's school and daycare facility.

**This information is not to be used for harassing or annoying each other.**

**IN FAMILIES WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THESE RULES HAVE TO BE ADJUSTED FOR THE SAFETY OF THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS.**

## **SUMMARY OF BASIC GROUND RULES FOR SUCCESSFUL CO-PARENTING**

1. Respect each other's privacy, and don't interfere in the other parent's household unless there is a real problem.
2. Extend common courtesy and manners as you would to a colleague or acquaintance, and make appointments to discuss things.
3. Give the other parent the benefit of the doubt; don't make assumptions based on what the kids say but check things out with your ex.
4. When there are conflicts, search for solutions, not fault.
5. Be businesslike and keep your feelings in check, evaluate the other parent's behavior not by how you feel but by how businesslike it is.
6. Be trustworthy; follow through on your agreements.
7. Concentrate on your own relationship with the children, and let the other parent in his or her own way.
8. Put things in writing. Make sure agreements and plans are explicit and detailed as to time, place, cost, and so on.
9. Keep the baggage from the relationship in the baggage compartment; don't keep bringing up the past.

## SCHEDULE EXAMPLES

### 2-2-3 Schedule

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<b>WEEK ONE</b>	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 1
<b>WEEK TWO</b>	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2
<b>WEEK THREE</b>	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 1
<b>WEEK FOUR</b>	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2

The parties alternate weekends and each parent has the children two days in the week.

### 2-2-5-5 Schedule

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<b>WEEK ONE</b>	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 1
<b>WEEK TWO</b>	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2
<b>WEEK THREE</b>	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 1
<b>WEEK FOUR</b>	Parent 1	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2	Parent 2

The parties alternate two and five day periods with the children. Each parent has two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternate the weekends.

**MONTH-AT-A-GLANCE CALENDAR**

MONTH \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>

MONTH \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>

# PARENTING PLAN WORKSHEET

The following worksheet will assist you in developing a specific parenting plan. Before completing this worksheet we suggest you take a separate sheet of paper and write out your reasons why the schedule should be as you propose. We encourage you to keep the best interest of your children in mind. You should also consider your work schedule and the work schedule of the other parent.

**1. WEEKLY PARENTING PLAN:** According to you, the children should spend time with each parent as follows:

MOTHER:

- a. Weekends, every or alternate, specify days and times:  
From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Weekdays, specify days and times:  
From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

FATHER:

- a. Weekends, every or alternate, specify days and times:  
From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Weekdays, specify days and times:  
From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**2. HOLIDAYS AND VACATIONS** (Holiday and vacation plans supersede the weekly parenting plan):

- a. The following holidays and birthdays are important to me:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. What is your proposal for dividing these times? Should they be divided each year, alternated each year, or given to one parent each year? Specify days from and to, and times for each holiday:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. How many weeks of vacation, including summertime, should each parent have with the children per year?  
Mother \_\_\_\_\_  
Father \_\_\_\_\_

**3. TRANSPORTATION**

- What is your proposal for sharing transportation?
- a. Each parent is responsible for one-half \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Mother (when) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Father (when) \_\_\_\_\_

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### **CALIFORNIA PARENTING INSTITUTE**

365 Standish Avenue  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

**(707) 585-6108**

### **FAMILY COURT SERVICES**

600 Administration Drive, Suite 218-J  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

**(707) 521-6800**

### **FAMILY LAW DEPARTMENT**

Civil and Family Courthouse  
3055 Cleveland Avenue  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

**(707) 521-6500**

### **FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR**

Civil and Family Courthouse  
3055 Cleveland Avenue  
Santa Rosa, California 95403

**(707) 521-6545**

### **RECOURSE MEDIATION SERVICES**

520 Mendocino Ave # 225  
Santa Rosa, CA 95401  
[www.recoursemediation.com](http://www.recoursemediation.com)  
Low cost mediation services

**(707) 525-8545**

### **SONOMA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION**

37 Old Courthouse Square, Suite 100  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

**(707) 546-5297**

### **SONOMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES**

3725 Westwind Boulevard, Suite 200  
Santa Rosa, California 95404  
<http://www.sonoma-county.org/dscc/contact.htm>

**(800) 901-3212**

### **SONOMA COUNTY LEGAL AID**

1105 N. Dutton Avenue, Suite B  
Santa Rosa, CA 95401  
Email contact: [info@legalaidsc.com](mailto:info@legalaidsc.com)

**(707) 542-1290**

### **SONOMA COUNTY LEGAL SERVICES FOUNDATION**

1212 4th Street, Suite I  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

**(707) 546-2924**

**SONOMA COUNTY PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY**

2604 Ventura Avenue  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

**(707) 565-2668**

**SONOMA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT**

Sonoma County Hall of Justice  
600 Administration Drive  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

**(707) 521-6500**

**YWCA CLINIC**

1421 Guerneville Road, Suite 200  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

[ywcaweb@sonic.net](mailto:ywcaweb@sonic.net)

Hotline provides assistance to victims of domestic violence

**(707) 546-1234**