

CHECKLIST FOR CREATING PARENTING PLANS THAT REDUCE CONFLICT

Parents who are experiencing moderate to high conflict with each other are encouraged to consider the following ideas when creating a parenting plan. This checklist is not intended for use by parents who are able to negotiate parenting time schedules in a cooperative way. Keep in mind that not all of the ideas are appropriate for all parents. The parenting plan should take into consideration the unique circumstances of each family.

◆ **Parenting time provisions.**

- ✓ Specify the exact days and times the child will be with each parent.
- ✓ Consider how holidays, vacations, and special occasions will be treated.
- ✓ Draft the schedule in a way to minimize the number of transfers from parent to parent (for example, have the non-residential parent pick up the child from school or day care rather than from the residential parent's home).
- ✓ Eliminate mid-week parenting times and insignificant holidays and add an extra weekend overnight instead.
- ✓ Consider keeping the school year schedule in effect during the summer and have the child stay with the non-residential parent for a couple of weeks during the summer, and also for a week in October, February and May.

◆ **Pick up, drop off.**

- ✓ Specify the exact time and location for pick up and drop off, with a short grace period.
- ✓ Fashion the plan to avoid face to face contact between the parents during the exchange when possible.
- ✓ Face to face exchanges should occur in public places (restaurant, library, day care, etc.).

◆ **School and extracurricular events.**

- ✓ Parents should avoid attendance at these events at the same time, unless they are major life events.
- ✓ Specify in the plan which events each parent shall attend or a method for determining who will attend (for example, Mom attends on even numbered days and Dad attends on odd numbered days).
- ✓ Both parents should make it possible for the child to participate in regularly scheduled activities, such as sports and other extracurricular events, even if the activities occur during parenting time.

◆ **Anti-Move Provision.** The law requires each parent to give the other parent reasonable notice before moving more than 60 miles further distant from the other parent.

- ✓ Clearly define what "reasonable notice" is.
- ✓ Geographic distance may be shortened to something less than sixty miles.
- ✓ Create a restriction which prevents a parent from moving the child outside of the school district.
- ✓ Consider making the moving parent prove that the move is in the child's best interest.

◆ **Safety Considerations.**

- ✓ If drugs, alcohol and/or domestic violence are involved, consider using supervised visitation services, supervised pick up/drop off, drug and alcohol evaluations, testing, treatment, and/or batterers intervention. Ask for information about the court's Parental Access Program.

◆ **Communication.**

- ✓ Generally, the parents should not communicate about the child in the child's presence.
- ✓ Specify that the parents are not to communicate with each other through the child.
- ✓ Depending on the preferences and resources of the parents, e-mail or telephone contact between the parents may be appropriate.
- ✓ A method for the child to communicate with the parents may be specified.

◆ **Decision making.**

- ✓ Specify decision making responsibility. Generally, the less cooperation that is required, the less potential for conflict.
 - ✓ Discuss specific items (i.e., diet, religion, appearance, dating, etc.) that both parents have an interest in at the time the plan is drafted.

- ◆ **Flexibility:**
 - ✓ Specify the degree of flexibility that will be allowed. High conflict parents may need an inflexible, highly structured plan.
- ◆ **Child's Toys and Possessions.**
 - ✓ Each parent has a set of toys, clothing, car seats and other personal items for the child.
 - ✓ When the above is not possible, be specific about which items will be transferred and what shape they will be in when they are returned (i.e., washing most of the clothes being returned).
- ◆ **Child's refusal to spend time with a parent.**
 - ✓ Child should not be permitted to decide if s/he will be spending time with the non-residential parent.
 - ✓ Teenagers' social needs and busy schedules should be taken into consideration.
 - ✓ If child is extremely ill, make up time can be forwarded to the following week. Siblings should still go.
- ◆ **Dispute resolution.**
 - ✓ Parents should consider submitting future disputes about the parenting plan to a parenting referee.

Examples of Language to include:

◆ **Conflict reduction.**

When the marital relationship deteriorates, parents sometimes overlook the fact that the child loves each parent. It is stressful for the child when the parents disagree, particularly about parenting time and other parenting issues. The child wants the parents to agree on parenting time and wants the parents to be mutually supporting parents.

The child needs to have regular ongoing contact with both parents. The custodial parent needs to support the non-custodial parent's role in the child's life. Likewise, the non-custodial parent needs to maintain regular, ongoing contact with the child as specified in this parenting plan. The court expects the non-custodial parent to exercise all the parenting time provided for in this parenting plan.

The child needs to be able to express love for both parents. Each parent needs to create an atmosphere that allows the child to freely express their love for the other parent without making the child feel guilty. Parents often subconsciously or otherwise convey to the child dislike of the other parent. This causes conflict for the child and is detrimental to the child's relationship with both parents.

- ◆ **Calendaring the Schedule.** Many parents have difficulty reading the parenting plan. The following language forces the parents to sit down early in the process and work out a calendar. That way, issues such as who has the child on Christmas are not dealt with at the last minute. It also allows parents to visualize the yearly schedule in advance so they can plan vacations and other events without interfering with the other parent's time.

Mother shall prepare a calendar of the weekly and holiday schedule each year and shall send it to Father. The purpose of the calendar is to visually illustrate how the schedule described in this parenting plan is to be implemented during the upcoming year. Mother shall immediately prepare a calendar which covers the period through August 2001. Thereafter the calendar shall be provided on an annual basis covering the period of September 1 to the following August 31. The calendar must be consistent with this parenting plan. Father shall have two weeks within which to object to Mother's recitation of the schedule as set forth in the calendar. Once finalized, the calendar shall be binding upon both parties. Father's right to spend time with the children shall not be affected by Mother's failure to promptly prepare a calendar.