

Planning for Parenting Time

Ohio's Guide for Parents Living Apart

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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 competent licensed professionals. The Supreme Court of Ohio, its employees, and the authors do not render legal advice or other professional advice or services through this Guide. Only a qualified attorney familiar with the relevant law and specific circumstances of a particular case may give legal advice.

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. The Supreme Court of Ohio, its employees, and the authors do not warrant that the information in this Guide is error-free, up-to-date, complete or accurate and do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any person for any loss or damage caused by errors, inaccuracies, or omissions that appear in this Guide. The content of this Guide is provided without representations or warranties of any kind, expressed or implied.

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 contained in this guide to their situation. No guarantee is made as to outcome or results obtained from the use of this information. You are strongly encouraged to seek professional legal and other expert assistance in resolving your parenting issues.

The Guide reflects the point of view and the opinions of the individual authors from Arizona and Ohio. It is not a legal publication of the Supreme Court of Ohio and does not represent the legal opinion of the court.

If a domestic violence protection order is in effect that prohibits contact between the parents or between one parent and the children, parents are cautioned that the parent who is subject of the protection order will violate the order if he/she meets and discusses a parenting time schedule with the other parent and makes agreements as suggested in this Guide without permission for contact of the court that issued the 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 that will decide parenting matters to consider. Read carefully information on “Safety” issues on [page 70](#).

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. You do not need a lawyer to ask for a protection order.



TO PARENTS



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

Raising children presents challenges. 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 (*See page 66 on “Special Issues.”*), preserving a healthy and ongoing relationship between children and both parents after 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.

This *Planning for Parenting Time – Ohio’s Guide for Parents Living Apart* provides helpful ideas to parents who live separately, when determining a **parenting time schedule**. A parenting time schedule establishes when the children will be with each parent. The Guide shows sample schedules that are appropriate for each age group and developmental stage. It also provides information on how to address special circumstances like relocation and long-distance parenting. The purpose of the Guide is to help parents reduce conflict and reach agreement on parenting time more easily.

Each child and each family is unique. The Guide neither endorses a “standard” parenting schedule, nor mandates a minimum or maximum amount of parenting time for either parent. There may be circumstances when the Guide may not be helpful, for example, when there has been child abuse, domestic violence, or substance abuse.

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

This Guide was created by a subcommittee of judicial officers, mental health providers and attorneys and is the “Ohio version” of an Arizona Supreme Court publication. The subcommittee consulted well-known experts on child development and reviewed current research and parenting guidelines from other communities. Decisions about parenting time depend on many things, particularly the age of the child. This Guide

offers information about what a child learns, feels and needs at different ages. The Guide also suggests parenting time schedules for each age group.

WHY PARENTING PLANS ARE NECESSARY



In Ohio, the court hearing your case must decide where the children will 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**.” Parents may be allocated “**sole residential**” (once known as “**legal custody**”) or “**shared parenting**” (once known as “**joint custody**”). A parent who is the **sole residential parent** has the right to make major decisions about the children’s health, education and religious upbringing. Parents who have **shared parenting** make such decisions together, unless otherwise specified in the order.

In both arrangements there must be a parenting time schedule (once known as “**visitation**”). Parents who have shared parenting do not necessarily have equal parenting time. Parents may decide and agree (with the court’s approval) which arrangement is in their **children’s best interests**. If the parents cannot agree, then the court decides.

Written parenting time schedules provide children and parents with predictability and consistency and can prevent future conflict. This Guide encourages open discussion and cooperation between parents. Courts prefer that parents reach agreements about parenting time. When parents reach agreements, they are more likely to cooperate as their children grow up. Children do best when their parents cooperate with each other. Parental cooperation creates a less stressful environment for children. The reverse also is true. Children who experience ongoing conflict between parents are at high risk for suffering serious long-term emotional problems. If parents need help working out the schedules, court-sponsored and private **mediation** and **parenting coordination** services are available in some Ohio counties.

A successful parenting time plan will clearly state how all decisions regarding the children will be made and will provide a fair and agreed upon schedule for parenting time.

The key to success is a written document that clearly states how decisions about the children will be made and provides a well-thought schedule for parenting time.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- Read the “To Parents” section and look at the sample schedules and Child Development Information for your child’s age.
- Talk with the other parent about what parenting time will meet your family’s needs.
- Use the blank calendar on [page 9](#) of this Guide to mark the days and times each parent will have parenting time.
- This Guide includes sample calendars with sample language to include in court orders. *These are examples only.* You may choose any days or times you wish.
- **Remember:** This Guide:
 - IS a TOOL with suggestions and tips
 - IS NOT mandatory
 - DOES NOT prohibit or limit parents or judges from creating parenting time schedules different from the samples. Each family has its own unique issues and concerns
 - DOES NOT mandate a minimum or maximum amount of parenting time for either parent
 - MAY NOT be helpful in all circumstances.

WHICH SCHEDULE SHOULD WE CHOOSE?



The following parenting time options allow parents or the judge, if necessary, to choose the proper schedule after considering the family's unique circumstances. 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. Each parent accepts the disruption of their own schedule to give the children a sense of security and well-being.

When choosing a schedule, parents should think about the child's relationship with each parent. It may benefit the child to change from one schedule to another 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.

If parents do not agree on decision-making and parenting time, the judge will evaluate the case, decide who will make major decisions for the children, and order a schedule the judge finds is in the children's best interests.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PARENTING SCHEDULE



- 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 or do the parents have any special needs?
- What are the child's relationships with siblings and friends?
- Are the parents' homes too far apart to maintain regular and frequent contact? (See page 57 on "*Long-Distance Parenting & Relocation.*")
- 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:**

- Help their child have regular contact with the other parent by phone, letter, audio and videotapes, e-mail, and other forms of communication
- Keep predictable schedules
- Are on time and have their child ready when it is time for the child to go with the other parent
- Exchange their child without arguing
- Support the child's relationship with the other parent
- Let their child carry "important" items, such as favorite clothes, toys, and security blankets with them between the parents' homes
- Follow similar routines for mealtime, bedtime, and homework time
- Handle rules and discipline in similar ways
- Support contact with grandparents, step-parents, and other extended family so their child does not lose these relationships
- Are flexible so their child can take part in special family celebrations and events
- Give as much advance notice as possible to the other parent about special occasions or necessary changes to the schedule
- Provide the other parent with travel dates, destinations, and places where their child and the parent can be reached when on vacation
- Establish workable and respectful communication with the other parent
- Plan vacations around their child's regularly scheduled activities
- Have good communication about doctors' appointments or school/social events.

**CHILDREN ARE *HARMED*
WHEN PARENTS:**

- Make their child choose between them
- Question their child about the other parent's activities or relationships
- Make promises they do not keep
- Drop in and out of their child's life
- Are inconsistent in using their parenting time
- Argue with or put down the other parent in front of their child or where their child can overhear
- Discuss personal problems with their child or where their child can overhear
- Use their child as a messenger, spy or mediator
- Stop or interfere with parenting time because child support has not been paid
- Do not show respect for each other
- Undermine their child's relationship with the other parent.

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULES

*The following schedules are **just ideas** that may or may not work for your children. Feel free to use one of the numbered schedules or design a schedule that works best for your children, based on work, school, activities and other considerations.*








Use a blank calendar to design the schedule that best meets your needs. See sample of completed schedules on pages 12 and 13.

For your convenience, a full-sized blank calendar is located on page 80.








It is recommended that you read the Child Development section that applies to your child before deciding on a parenting time schedule.

Parenting Time Schedule						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

SUMMARY OF PARENTING TIME SCHEDULES

Schedule Number	Description	PAGE	BIRTH – 2 YEARS	2 – 3 YEARS	3 – 5 YEARS	6 – 9 YEARS	10 – 12 YEARS	TEENAGERS (13 – 18 YEARS)
	Three periods of 3-5 hours spaced throughout each week	14 25	✓					
	Two periods of 4-6 hours spaced throughout each week	14 25	✓					
	Two 3-5 hour periods and one 8-hour period spaced throughout each week	14 26 29	✓	✓	✓			
	Two periods of 3-6 hours and 1 overnight each week	15 27 29	✓	✓	✓			
	One period of three to six hours and two non-consecutive overnights each week	15 27 30	✓	✓	✓			
	An equal parenting time schedule where the child is not away from the other parent for more than two consecutive days *Caution – This schedule is designed <u>only</u> for those parents who can agree on this schedule.	16 27	✓*	✓*	✓*			
	One period of 3-6 hours and two consecutive overnights each week	17 31		✓	✓			

Parenting Time Schedules

Schedule Number	Description	PAGE	BIRTH – 2 YEARS	2 – 3 YEARS	3 – 5 YEARS	6 – 9 YEARS	10 – 12 YEARS	TEENAGERS (13 – 18 YEARS)
	Two days with one parent (including overnights) followed by 3 days with the other parent (including overnights) with this schedule continuing over time	17 31		✓	✓			
	Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week.	18 33 38 43 51			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional 4-6-hour period each week	18 33 38 43 51			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2	19 34 39 44 51			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Split each week and weekend	20 35 40 45 51			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Each parent has the same 2 consecutive weekday overnights each week and alternates the weekends	21 35 36 40 45 51			✓	✓	✓	✓
	The parents share time with the child during alternating 7-day periods. A midweek overnight period is optional with the parent who does not have parenting time that week.	22 40 41 45 46 52				✓	✓	✓


**SAMPLE A: COMPLETED SCHEDULE
FOR CHILDREN AGES 8-10**

Parenting Time Schedule						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad
		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		Dad 4:30 p.m. Overnight		
Dad	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom
Mom 6 p.m.		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		
Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad
		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		Dad 4:30 p.m. Overnight		
Dad	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom
Mom 6 p.m.		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		
Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad
		Dad 4:30-7:30 p.m.		Dad 4:30 p.m. Overnight		

**SAMPLE B: COMPLETED SCHEDULE
FOR CHILDREN AGES 8-10**

Parenting Time Schedule						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad	Dad
			Dad 6 p.m.			
Dad	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad	Mom
Mom 6 p.m.			Dad 6 p.m.		Mom 6 p.m.	
Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad	Dad
			Dad 6 p.m.			
Dad	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad	Mom
Mom 6 p.m.			Dad 6 p.m.		Mom 6 p.m.	
Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Dad	Dad	Dad
			Dad 6 p.m.			

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULES 1, 2 & 3


 Parenting Time: Schedule 1						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat


Advantages of Schedules 1, 2 & 3:

- The child has frequent, but short visits with the non-residential parent.
- Offers consistency and predictability.
- The residential parent gets a few “breaks” throughout the week.


Disadvantages of Schedules 1, 2 & 3:

- There are 6 exchanges each week, which might be difficult if the parents do not get along.
- The week may seem a bit “choppy” or broken up.

 Parenting Time: Schedule 2						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

 Parenting Time: Schedule 3						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULES 4 & 5

 Parenting Time: Schedule 4						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedule 4:

- The child has frequent, but short visits with the non-residential parent.
- The residential parent has a few “breaks” throughout the week.
- There is consistency and predictability.

Disadvantages of Schedule 4:


- There are 5-6 exchanges each week, which might be difficult if the parents do not get along.
- The week may seem a bit “choppy” or broken up.

Advantages of Schedule 5:

- The child has frequent, but short visits with the non-residential parent.
- The residential parent has almost daily “breaks.”

Disadvantages of Schedule 5:

- There are many (almost daily) exchanges, which might be difficult if the parents do not get along.
- The week may seem a bit “choppy” or broken up.

 Parenting Time: Schedule 5						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULE 6

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 2px solid black; padding: 2px; background-color: #800000; color: white; width: 20px; height: 20px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 5px;">6</div> Parenting Time: Schedule 6						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedule 6

- The child never goes more than two days without seeing a parent.
- Many parents like the longer blocks of time to better bond with the child.

Disadvantages of Schedule 6

- There is no consistency (what happens in one week does not happen again for four weeks), which may make it hard to make plans.
- Some young children may dislike not seeing a parent for two full days.
- The week may seem a bit “choppy” or broken up.
- Neither parent has a full weekend with or without the child.



Comment: The use of Schedule 6 requires a high degree of communication between the parents, a low level of conflict about how to parent, and work schedules and living arrangements that limit the stress on the child. Schedule 6 is designed only for those parents who can agree on this schedule.

Research clearly shows that children **are at risk of being harmed** if parents argue, act disrespectfully toward each other and cannot talk to each other about their child.

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULES 7 & 8

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 2px solid orange; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;">7</div> <div> Parenting Time: Schedule 7 </div> </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedule 7:

- The child sees the non-residential parent 3-5 days per week and the residential parent almost daily.

Disadvantages of Schedule 7:

- Only Mondays are consistent every week.
- May seem “choppy” or fragmented.
- There are 3-5 exchanges each week, which might be difficult if the parents do not get along.

Advantages of Schedule 8:

- Each parent has solid blocks of time (2-3 days) with the child.

Disadvantages of Schedule 8:

- Inconsistent from week to week (what happens on Monday in Week 1 does not occur in Week 2).
- It may be confusing for the parents to follow and remember which days they are to care for the child.
- Only rarely would a parent have a full weekend.
- It might be hard to arrange the child’s extracurricular activities, unless both parents agree. For example, if one parent wants to enroll the child in karate on Mondays and the other parent does not agree, the child may miss several lessons.

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 2px solid gray; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;">8</div> <div> Parenting Time: Schedule 8 </div> </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULES 9 & 10

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 2px solid blue; padding: 2px; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">9</div> Parenting Time: Schedule 9						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedules 9 & 10:

- Consistency/predictability throughout the school week.

Disadvantages of Schedules 9 & 10:

- Limited time for one parent.
- The child does not see one parent for six days in alternate weeks.

Optional Schedule 10 modification:

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 2px solid purple; padding: 2px; font-weight: bold; color: purple;">10</div> Parenting Time: Schedule 10						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat


Alternate Sundays can be overnights.

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 2px solid purple; padding: 2px; font-weight: bold; color: purple;">10</div> Parenting Time: Schedule 10						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Alternate Wednesdays (before other parent's weekend) can be overnight.

- *Every Wednesday can be overnight OR*
- *Both alternate Wednesdays and alternate Sundays are overnight.*

**PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULE 11
(ALTERNATING WEEKENDS)**

<div style="text-align: center;">  Parenting Time: Schedule 11 </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat


Advantages of Schedule 11:

- Minimal parental face-to-face contact (none if exchange is Monday morning at school and pick-up is every Thursday at school).
- Consistency and predictability most weekdays (school days).
- Alternate prolonged weekends (Thursday-Sunday) often appealing in the summer for short trips.


Disadvantages of Schedule 11:

- Six-day block every other week when the child does not see the non-residential parent.
- Some children may have difficulty on Monday at school after being away from the primary parent for four days.

Optional Schedule 11 modifications:

<div style="text-align: center;">  Parenting Time: Schedule 11 </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

End weekend on Sunday evening.

<div style="text-align: center;">  Parenting Time: Schedule 11 </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Add Wednesday in alternate weeks.

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULE 12 (SPLIT WEEK)

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px 5px; margin-right: 5px;">12</div> Parenting Time : Schedule 12						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedule 12:

- The child never goes more than three days without seeing a parent.
- Consistency and predictability each week.
- The child can “settle in” at each household for a few days.
- Most children enjoy having a “stay-home” (weekend) day with each parent every week.

Disadvantages of Schedule 12:

- Neither parent has a full weekend (although this can be accommodated with flexibility and/or with holiday and vacation plans).

Optional Schedule 12 modifications:

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px 5px; margin-right: 5px;">12</div> Parenting Time: Schedule 12						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

The exchange can occur on Saturday evening.

<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px 5px; margin-right: 5px;">12</div> Parenting Time: Schedule 12						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

The exchange can alternate between Saturday evening one week and Sunday morning the next week.

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULE 13

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;">13</div> <div> <p>Parenting Time: Schedule 13</p> </div> </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedule 13:

- All exchanges can occur at school or day care, which is easier for most children to handle.
- No parental face-to-face contact, which makes this an ideal plan for high-conflict parents.
- Consistency and predictability on weekdays.
- Full weekends for each parent.
- Five-day blocks may be appealing to many parents (especially in the summer for “mini vacations”).

Disadvantages of Schedule 13:

- Five days may be too long to be away from one or both parents.
- Transitioning every 2-5 days may seem hard for some children (especially ensuring that their clothes, books, toys, etc., accompany them).

Optional Schedule 13 modification:

The Wednesday/Thursday parent’s time can end on Sunday evening.

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;">13</div> <div> <p>Parenting Time: Schedule 13</p> </div> </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: SCHEDULE 14 (ALTERNATING WEEKS)

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> 14 <div style="text-align: center;"> Parenting Time: Schedule 14 </div> </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Schedule 14:

- Limited transitions (none if transitions occur at school).
- The child is able to “settle in” at each parent’s home.
- By starting the alternate week on Friday, the child has the weekend to adjust to the upcoming family environment.

Disadvantages of Schedule 14:

- Requires effective parental communication and cooperation to arrange weekly activities (for example, soccer on Tuesdays would have to be agreed upon, flute lessons on Thursday, etc.).
- Seven days away from each parent may be unsettling for some children (particularly younger ones).
- Transitioning to the other parent’s household after being gone a week may be difficult.

Optional Schedule 14 modification:

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> 14 <div style="text-align: center;"> Parenting Time: Schedule 14 </div> </div>						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

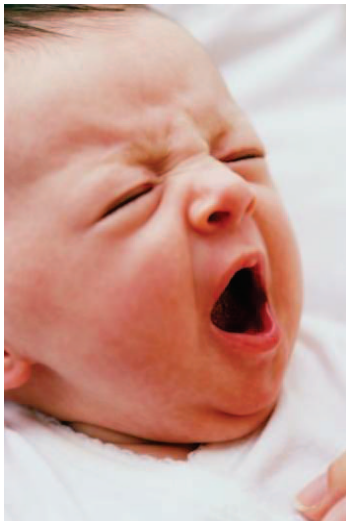
Add a mid-week visit (limited hours or overnight).

CHILD DEVELOPMENT & SUGGESTED PARENTING SCHEDULES



These schedules take into consideration different kinds of situations between parents and children. The bond between a parent and child will continue to grow as long as the parent remains actively involved with the child. However, some parents may not have had the opportunity to begin forming that bond. For example, when a schedule includes overnights, it is presumed that the parent with parenting time not only has care-giving experience, but also that the child has sufficiently bonded with, and is used to being in the care of that parent.

BIRTH TO 2 YEARS



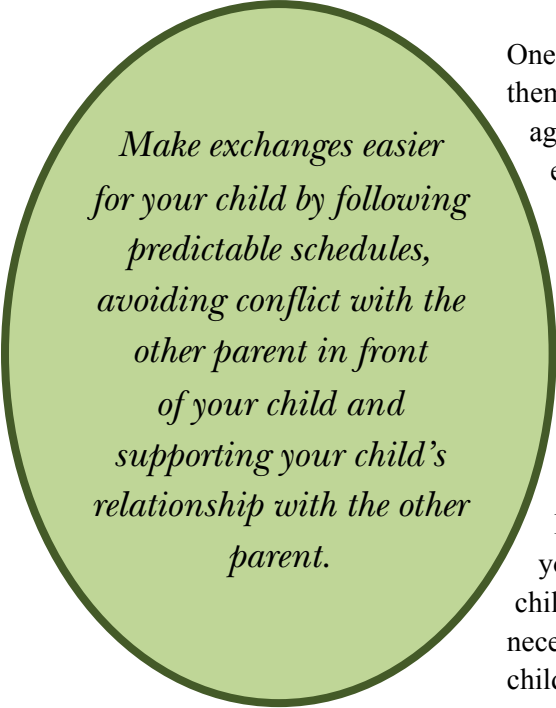
Babies learn quickly to love and trust familiar caregivers. Babies become attached to parents and others through consistent, loving responses, such as holding, playing, feeding, soothing, talking gently and lovingly, stimulating, creating bedtime and bath time routines, and prompt attention to their needs. Babies begin to respond to a range of different (but equally valuable) types of parenting styles that each parent provides.

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. 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.

Babies cannot remember things they experienced over time – in other words, “out of sight, out of mind.” Therefore, it is important that they 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 away from parents or significant caregivers, babies 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 ought to think about the special needs of breast-feeding babies. Nursing mothers may want to express milk and send bottles with the baby so the father can feed the baby during his parenting time. (See page 67 on "Breast-Feeding.")



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.

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 day care 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. They 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.

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.

DESIGNING A SCHEDULE FOR BIRTH TO 2 YEARS

Schedules 1 and 2 are for when:

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child previously spent the most time with one parent.*



Schedule 1: Three periods of three to five hours spaced throughout each week (*See a sample schedule on page 14.*)

Comment: Frequent contact helps the child bond with each parent, something that is important for the child's healthy development.



Schedule 2: Two periods of four to six hours spaced throughout each week (*See a sample schedule on page 14.*)

Comment: This schedule is more helpful than Schedule 1 when the parents' work schedules, living situations or levels of conflict with each other make frequent exchanges difficult. Because this schedule has only two visits each week, **bonding** between the parent and child may take a little more time, and the child may have difficulty going from one parent to the other.



Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule are not recommended unless the parents agree.



Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time. The "Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks" section on [page 53](#) offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on [page 9](#).**

Schedule 3 is meant for situations when:

- *Parents have been using Schedules 1 or 2 for some time, or*
- *Both parents have a bond with the child, or*
- *Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but one parent has less available time to devote to the child than the other.*



Schedule 3: Two periods of three to five hours and one period of eight hours spaced throughout each week (*See a sample schedule on page 14.*)



Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule are not recommended unless the parents agree.



Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time. The “Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks” section on [page 53](#) offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on [page 9](#).**

Schedules 4, 5, and 6 include overnights. These schedules are for parents who:

- Have cared for the child nearly equally, or
- Both know how to care for the child overnight, or
- Live close enough to each other that the child will not have long car trips between homes, or
- Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or
- Have successfully followed Schedule 3 for a while.



Schedule 4: Two periods of three to six hours and one overnight each week. (See a sample schedule on page 15.)



Schedule 5: One period of three to six hours and two non-consecutive overnights each week. (See a sample schedule on page 15.)



Schedule 6: An equal parenting time schedule where the child is not away from the other parent for more than two consecutive days. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Comment: The use of Schedule 6 requires a high degree of communication between the parents, a low level of conflict about how to parent, and work schedules and living arrangements that limit the difficulties on the child. Schedule 6 is designed only for parents who agree on this schedule.

Caution: Research clearly shows that children **are at risk of being harmed** if parents argue, act disrespectfully toward each other, and cannot talk to each other about their child.



Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule are not recommended unless the parents agree.



Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time. The “Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

2 TO 3 YEARS



Ages two to three are an important time for children to develop independent skills. Although children this age are learning to be independent, they still may cling to their caregiver and resist separation, even from one parent to the other. They may say “NO!” to parents’ requests and demands just to express their independence. They also may be fearful about unfamiliar activities and objects.

Predictable, regularly scheduled routines help children manage their fears and help them 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. Parents must continue to ensure that the transitions between the two parents’ homes are free of parental arguing and tension.

DESIGNING A SCHEDULE FOR 2 TO 3 YEARS

Schedules 3 and 4 are for when:

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child previously spent most of his or her time with one parent.*



Schedule 3: Two periods of three to five hours and one period of eight hours spaced throughout each week. (See a sample schedule on page 14.)



Schedule 3 Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule are not recommended unless the parents agree.



Schedule 4: Two periods of three to six hours and one overnight each week (See a sample schedule on page 15.)



Schedule 4 Vacation: Parents may have two one-week periods separated by at least four weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time. The “Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Parents may start with **Schedule 5** when:

- Both parents have a bond with the child, or
- Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but one parent has less available time than the other to devote to the child, or
- Parents have been using Schedules 3 and 4 for some time.



Schedule 5: One period of three to six hours and two non-consecutive overnights each week. (See a sample schedule on page 15.)

Comment: Ideally, a child this age should not be separated on a regular schedule from either parent for longer than three days. For legitimate reasons, however, such as vacation and other such reasons, children can be separated from either parent for somewhat longer periods of time, up to a week if needed.



Vacation: Parents may have two one-week periods separated by at least four weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time. The “Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Schedules 7 and 8 include overnights. Schedules 7 and 8 are for parents who:

- *Have cared for the child about equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child will not have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Have been successfully using schedule 5 for some time.*



Schedule 7: One period of three to six hours and two consecutive overnights each week. *(See a sample schedule on page 17.)*



Schedule 8: Two days with one parent (including overnights) followed by three days with the other parent (including overnights) with this schedule continuing over time. This schedule requires both parents to live near enough to one another, manage conflicts away from their child and communicate well about their child. This schedule also may be appropriate when there is an older child who spends considerable time with both parents. *(See a sample schedule on page 17.)*



Vacation: Parents may have two one-week periods separated by at least four weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time. The “Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

3 TO 5 YEARS



Three- to five-year-olds are attached to their regular caregivers, and separation may make them uncomfortable and anxious. They also may be fearful about unfamiliar activities and objects and may experience night fears like “monsters” under the bed.

Three- to five-year-olds may show increased emotional discomfort when moving between parents’ homes. Some of these children may become very upset at these times. 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. Parents can make exchanges easier for children by following predictable schedules and making sure the child is not exposed to conflict between the parents.

Children are more likely to resist going to the other parent if the parents are tense, hostile or argue with each other at the exchange. If tension is present, the child might become difficult to manage or might act out negative feelings. If parents cannot be nice to each other, or at least civil, they should avoid talking to each other at these exchanges. Parents must not use the child as a messenger to communicate with the other parent. Children also may feel more secure if they can take favorite stuffed toys, family photos or other objects that will remind them of the other parent.

After age three, children become more aware of holiday celebrations. Parents should schedule holidays, which may be religious, cultural, or national, that are meaningful to the child and the family. Parents should also include birthdays, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day in the parenting schedule.

Three- to five-year-olds may benefit from structured time with children their own age, away from parents. This time helps them develop social skills and learn that they can be safe and happy away from both parents.

DESIGNING A SCHEDULE FOR 3 TO 5 YEARS

The schedules suggested for the 2- to 3-year age group also are appropriate for this age child.

Schedules 9 and 10 are for when:

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child previously spent most of his or her time with one parent.*



Schedule 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)



Schedule 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)



Vacation: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.



Holidays: The “Holidays, Vacation, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Parents may start with **Schedule 11** when:

- Both parents have a bond with the child, or
- Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but when one parent has less available time to devote to the child, or
- Parents have successfully used Schedules 9 and 10 for some time.



Schedule 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2 (*See a sample schedule on page 19.*)



Vacation: Each parent may have up to 10 days in town or out of town each year or two one-week periods separated by at least three weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on [page 53](#) offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Schedules 12 and 13

include overnights.

Schedules 12 and 13 are for parents who:

- *Have cared for the child nearly equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child will not have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Have successfully followed Schedule 11 for a while.*



Schedule 12: Split each week and weekend. (*See a sample schedule on page 20.*)

Comment: This schedule provides a consistent routine and accommodates a young child's ability to be apart from either parent for three to four days. It also allows the child to have a "stay-home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week, which is helpful to many young children. If parents dislike not having full-weekend parenting time, the schedule may be modified to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. If desired, parents may alternate exchanges so one week one parent has three overnights and the other has four overnights and the next week the number of overnights is reversed.



Schedule 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive weekday overnights each week and alternates the weekends. (*See a sample schedule on page 21.*)

Comment: This schedule provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The children are away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days, which may be difficult for some children this age. This is commonly referred to as a 5-2-2-5 schedule. This schedule is ideal when older siblings would benefit from this schedule. This schedule is helpful when the parents' level of conflict makes exchanges difficult, because all exchanges can take place at day care.



Vacation: Each parent may have up to 10 days in town or out of town each year or two one-week periods separated by at least three weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on [page 53](#) offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on [page 9](#).**

6 TO 9 YEARS



Six- to nine-year-old children may worry that one parent does not love them or that they will lose one parent. They may miss the absent parent and feel sad, confused and angry about their parents' divorce. They also may try to get their parents back together.

Some six- to nine-year-old children benefit from spending more time at one home, while others move back and forth on a regular basis with ease. Children differ in how long they are comfortable being away from each parent. Some may be comfortable being away from their primary residential parent on a regular basis for two or more days. If the child has spent considerable quality time with the parent who has parenting time, the child may cope better with a long separation from the other parent. As a child matures, longer periods of parenting time with fewer exchanges between parents may be preferred.

In making a parenting time schedule, parents should keep their work schedules in mind and try to use their time off from work to spend as much time as possible with the child. If a parent's work schedule changes from week to week, the parenting schedule may let that parent spend time with the child on the parent's days off from work after giving plenty of advance notice to the other parent.

DESIGNING A SCHEDULE FOR 6 TO 9 YEARS

Schedules 9 and 10 are for when:

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child previously spent most of his or her time with one parent.*



Schedule 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)



Schedule 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)



Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacating parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Parents may start with **Schedule 11** when:

- Both parents have a bond with the child, or
- Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but one parent has less available time than the other to devote to the child, or
- Parents have used Schedules 9 and 10 for some time.

11



Schedule 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. (See a sample schedule on page 19.)

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacating parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers ideas of what to consider and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Schedules 12, 13 and 14 include overnights. These schedules are for parents who:

- *Have cared for the child nearly equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child will not have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Have successfully followed Schedule 11 for a while.*

12

Schedule 12: Split each week and weekend. (*See a sample schedule on page 20.*)

Comment: This schedule lets the parents take part nearly equally in the child's school life. It provides a consistent routine, accommodates a child's ability to be apart from either parent for three or four days, and allows the child to have a "stay-home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week, which is helpful to many young children. Parents who want full weekends with or without the child may not like this schedule, but it can be written to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. Also, the schedule can be written so that in Week 1, Parent A has three overnights and Parent B has four, and in Week 2, Parent B has three overnights and Parent A has four.

13

Schedule 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternates the weekends. This is commonly referred to as the 5-2-2-5 schedule. Each week, the child spends Monday and Tuesday nights with Parent A and Wednesday and Thursday nights with Parent B. In Week 1, the child spends the weekend with Parent A. In Week 2, the child spends the weekend with Parent B. (*See the sample schedule on page 21.*)

Comment: This schedule provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The children are away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days, which may be difficult for some children. This schedule is helpful when the parents' level of conflict makes exchanges difficult, because all exchanges can take place at school or day care.

14

Schedule 14: The parents share time with the child during alternating seven-day periods. A midweek overnight period is optional with the parent who does not have parenting time that week. The best exchange time in most cases is Friday after school or work. (*See a sample schedule on page 22.*)

Comment: The more consistent the child's life is from week to week, the easier it is for the child. Parents who cannot communicate and work well with each other

will find it hard to make this schedule succeed for the child. For example, if one parent wants to enroll the child in karate lessons on Tuesday evenings, the other parent should take the child to karate when the child is with that parent. As another example, the child may have a hard time in school if Parent A handles homework differently than Parent B. All exchanges for this schedule can take place at school or day care if desired.



Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacating parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on [page 53](#) offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on [page 9](#).**

10 TO 12 YEARS



Ten- to 12-year-old children often want to be independent from their parents and become more attached to their friends. They may blame one parent for the divorce, may be angry and embarrassed by the breakup of the family, and may side with one parent.

Children of this age often want input in where they live. Parents should let them express their views, while making it clear it is up to the parents to make the final decisions. As children begin middle school, parents should make sure the parenting schedule considers the child's school and extracurricular activities. The parents also should consider the child's desire for an occasional overnight with friends away from both homes. Parents should be flexible while at the same time making sure that each parent has parenting time regularly.

DESIGNING A SCHEDULE FOR 10 TO 12 YEARS

Schedules 9 and 10 are for when:

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child previously spent most of his or her time with one parent.*



Schedule 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)



Schedule 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)



Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Parents may start with **Schedule 11** when:

- Both parents have a bond with the child, or
- Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but when one parent has less available time to devote to the child, or
- Parents have used Schedules 9 and 10 for some time.



Schedule 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. (See a sample schedule on page 19.)



Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacating parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

Schedules 12, 13 and 14 include overnights. These schedules are for parents who:

- *Have cared for the child nearly equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child will not have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Have successfully followed Schedule 11 for a while.*

12

Schedule 12: Split each week and weekend. (*See a sample schedule on page 20.*)

Comment: This schedule lets the parents take part nearly equally in the child's school life. It also provides a consistent routine, accommodates a child's ability to be apart from either parent for three or four days, and allows the child to have a "stay-home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week, which is helpful to many young children. Parents who want full weekends with or without the child may not like this schedule, but it can be written to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. Also, the schedule can be written so that in Week 1, Parent A has three overnights and Parent B has four, and in Week 2, Parent B has three overnights and Parent A has four.

13

Schedule 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternates the weekends. This is commonly referred to as the 5-2-2-5 schedule. Each week, the child spends Monday and Tuesday nights with Parent A and Wednesday and Thursday nights with Parent B. In Week 1, the child spends the weekend with Parent A. In Week 2, the child spends the weekend with Parent B. (*See the sample schedule on page 21.*)

Comment: This schedule provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The children are away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days, which may be difficult for some children. This schedule is helpful when the parents' level of conflict makes exchanges difficult, because all exchanges can take place at school or day care.

14

Schedule 14: The parents share time with the child during alternating seven-day periods. A midweek overnight period is optional with the parent who does not have parenting time that week. The best exchange time in most cases is Friday after school or work. (*See a sample schedule on page 22.*)

Comment: The more consistent the child's life is from week to week, the easier it is for the child. Parents who cannot communicate and work well with each other

will find it hard to make this schedule succeed for the child. For example, if one parent wants to enroll the child in karate lessons on Tuesday evenings, the other parent should take the child to karate when the child is with that parent. As another example, the child may have a hard time in school if Parent A handles homework differently than Parent B. All exchanges for this schedule can take place at school or day care if desired.



Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacating parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on [page 53](#) offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on [page 9](#).**

TEENAGERS (13 TO 18 YEARS)

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. They begin to plan for driving and dating, and they are thinking about college or work.

Parents should let their teen express his or her views, while making it clear it is up to the parents to make the final parenting time decisions.

They 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 in an existing schedule, they should give thought to the needs and wishes of their teenager.

Parents should let them express their views, while making it clear it is up to the parents to make the final decisions.

During a separation or divorce, parents often feel the need to pull their teen closer to them to reassure themselves they are not losing their child to the other parent. Sometimes parents are tempted to get their child on their side. A teen may avoid both parents or reject one parent and cling to the other, especially if the parents are putting them in the middle of their conflict. Some teens want little or nothing to do with either parent and turn to friends or others to talk to who are not part of the conflict. Teens often are confused and angry at the way their parents act and may feel their parents have not been concerned about how the divorce or separation 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. Therefore, parents should not assume that their child's mood swings or acting out are caused by the other parent.



13 TO 15 YEARS - EARLY TEENS

Children between ages 13 and 15 continue to use the 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 in this age group, as well as from one situation to another.

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.

Teens may try to reach a deal with one or both parents to get what they want, which may affect either parent's parenting time. It is important for parents to talk with each other to decide when their parenting schedule should be more flexible.



16 TO 18 YEARS - LATE TEENS

It is important for parents of teenagers of this age to maintain the child's accessibility to school, friends, extracurricular and community activities from both homes.

Teens may feel they should have more independence and may resist a rigid parenting time schedule. Parents must add greater flexibility to the parenting schedule by considering the child's wishes and deciding parenting time issues with the child. That way, teenagers will not feel forced to comply with a parenting schedule in which they had no say, but instead will feel they are doing something they want to do.

It is important for parents to be flexible when creating a parenting schedule with a teenager.

Your teen may benefit from a primary home base, with specific evenings, weekends and activities at the other home scheduled on a regular and predictable basis. More than anything, your teenager will usually want a say in the parenting schedule, but the teen should not get to choose. Regardless of your teen's needs, the parenting schedule should include the considerations listed below:

- work
- extracurricular activities
- social life
- increased schoolwork
- jobs
- peer relationships
- sports.

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 other, the distance between parents and the parents' availability to meet their child's needs.

DESIGNING A SCHEDULE FOR TEENS

Parents of teens should think about 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 a teen's need for unstructured time.

Parents may need to think about many circumstances when making schedules for teenagers. 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.

Parents may lose a lot of time with their teens because activities or friends take even more of the teen's time. Planning the schedule of a teen that can balance all of these areas 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 challenging to create parenting schedules for this age group because each family's circumstances are unique. It is especially important for parents to be flexible when creating a parenting schedule with a teenager. When parents agree, a flexible schedule may work best for a teen, as long as the parents are able to work together with little conflict and the teen spends time with each parent. In this case, teens can plan their schedule based on their activities and social lives. The amount of time they spend at either parent's house is due to the teen's interests, 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. The fact that there is no schedule should not undermine the parent-child relationship.

This also is when children may talk about a desire for a home base because of the growing importance of their own friends and activities. 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 important in the child's life.

Although many different schedules may work for teens, here are general options that can be a framework for developing a schedule.



Schedule 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)

Comment: Provides a home base for the child with time with the non-residential parent during the week and on weekends.



Schedule 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)

Comment: This may or not occur, depending on the teen.



Schedule 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. (See a sample schedule on page 19.)



Schedule 12: Split each week and weekend. (See a sample schedule on page 20.)

Comment: This schedule lets the parents take part about equally in the child's school life. It also provides a consistent routine, accommodates a child's ability to be apart from either parent for three or four days and allows the child to have a "stay home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week. Parents who want full weekends with or without the child may not like this schedule, but it can be written to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. Also, the schedule can be written so that in Week 1, Parent A has three overnights and Parent B has four, and in Week 2, Parent B has three overnights and Parent A has four.



Schedule 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternates the weekends. This is commonly referred to as the 5-2-2-5 schedule. Each week, the child spends Monday and Tuesday nights with Parent A and Wednesday and Thursday nights with Parent B. In Week 1, the child spends the weekend with Parent A.

In Week 2, the child spends the weekend with Parent B. (See the sample schedule on page 21.)

Comment: This schedule provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The children are away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days.

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Schedule 14: Alternating seven-day periods with or without mid-week time. Mid-week time may add more scheduling challenges. (See a sample schedule on page 22.)



Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they will be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation. Keep in mind your teen’s work schedules and extracurricular activities.



Holidays: Parents may alternate, share or split the holidays for children of this age. The “Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks” section on page 53 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.



✓ **Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.**

HOLIDAYS, 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, think about it from 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 phone calls during a vacation can help reduce anxiety for both the parent and the child without disrupting the vacation.

Whenever the child travels to a different place, it is important for the parents to share 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.

In determining what to do about school breaks, consider the child's activities and the availability of one or both parents during the break. If the child needs day care, the parents can consider a schedule that minimizes day care 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.

HOLIDAYS



The first step is to decide what holidays both parents celebrate. Keep in mind the traditions the child experienced through his or her life and how the holiday parenting time 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.

Here is a list of typical holidays. Choose the ones that apply to your family and add others, such as faith-based holidays, that should be included in the parenting time schedule.

New Year's Day	Yom Kippur
Martin Luther King, Jr./Civil Rights Day	Halloween
Presidents' Day	Veterans' Day
Passover	Thanksgiving
Easter	Hanukah
Mother's Day	Christmas Eve
Memorial Day	Christmas Day
Father's Day	New Year's Eve
Independence Day/4th of July	Child's birthday
Labor Day	Parents' birthdays
Rosh Hashanah	

After you decide which holidays apply, think about whether all holidays should be handled the same way or whether it makes more sense to divide some and alternate some. Many parents agree that the children will be with the mother for every Mother's Day and the father every Father's Day. Many parents divide most of the holidays, but split the time on days that are special for both parents, such as Christmas Eve, Christmas or the child's birthday.

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 just staying home, your child will enjoy spending any time you can take away from work. Whether parents have the ability to take time off from work, vacation parenting time is intended to allow parents the chance to either travel or stay home and spend an uninterrupted period of time with their child.

A child may become anxious if away from a parent for much longer than usual. Scheduling 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. If 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. Parents need

to make all of these decisions ahead of time to reduce conflict and provide predictability for the child.

Because transportation, weather and other issues can cause problems during travel, it is important to provide the other parent with details about when and where travel will occur. Details include flight numbers and times, hotels, places where the child will be staying, and telephone numbers. If an emergency arises, a parent should be able to contact the other parent or the child. 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.

Communication about when each parent will use vacation time needs to take place well in advance of the vacation. Because of school 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; 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 first choice 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 look at the [holiday schedule](#) at the same time when planning the break schedule.

Here are some ideas on how to share the holidays and language you can use when you create your parenting schedule.

Divide Split the day or weekend (not necessarily equally) between both parents.

Sample parenting schedule language: *The children will be with Parent A on _____ (name the specific holiday, such as Thanksgiving) from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and with Parent B from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m.*

Alternate The children are with one parent on specified holidays in even years and with the other parent in odd years.

Sample parenting schedule language: *The children will be with Parent A on _____ (specific holiday, such as Thanksgiving) in all even years from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and with Parent B in all odd-numbered years from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.*

Substitute The children always spend a specific holiday with one parent (for example, Halloween) in exchange for a different holiday with the other parent (for example, Fourth of July).

Sample parenting schedule language: *The children will spend _____ (specific holiday, such as Fourth of July) each year with Parent A and _____ (specific holiday, such as Halloween) with Parent B each year.*

Follow regular Schedule The children follow their regular schedule and celebrate the holiday with the assigned parent who has parenting time on that day or time.

Sample parenting schedule language: *The children will celebrate _____ (specific holiday, such as Fourth of July) as it falls on the regularly scheduled parenting time.*

LONG-DISTANCE PARENTING & RELOCATION



Long-distance parenting means sacrifice – in time and money. It requires a strong commitment by each parent to ensure involvement by both parents with their child.

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 may not please either party. Each relocation case is unique, and the right decision is based on the facts for each family. Parents should make a serious effort to resolve a parenting time dispute themselves or with the help of a mediator 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 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 things before making a 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. The court considers many factors and parents should think about these factors. Each parent should take a moment to “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 both parents. 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.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Children generally are resilient following their parents' divorce, and those who have healthy relationships with both parents can thrive.

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 every-other-weekend contact or long weekends into the schedule.

Holidays and special occasions are challenging for parents who live far apart. As children reach age three, they become aware of holidays. 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, including family birthdays, Mother's Day and Father's Day.

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 say who pays for the travel expenses, the parents should agree on how to share these costs before a move. A cost-saving idea is to have the distant parent do most of the traveling and not the children.

The county of your residence may have a model parenting time schedule that includes long-distance parenting and relocation. Parents should look to these models, as well as anything stated in this Guide.

Example: *Jaime and Pat move from Florida to Ohio in 2005 because of Pat's job. They have a two-year-old daughter and a son, who is five. Both parents work. Jaime has two weeks of vacation each year and Pat has four weeks. During the marriage, Jaime was the primary caregiver and Pat was an active secondary caregiver. This year they file for divorce. Jaime is an only child whose elderly parents live in Florida. Jaime wants to move back to Florida to have more income and to be closer to them. Pat's job requires travel out of state for a week each quarter. Pat wants to remain a vital and active parent in the children's lives.*

Possible solutions:

- 1) *Pat asks at work about a hardship move back to Florida.*
- 2) *The parents price the cost for a joint move or a delayed move by Pat with reimbursement.*
- 3) *The parents think about sharing the cost of moving Jaime's parents to Ohio.*
- 4) *Jaime uses job services in both locations to compare the incomes (while keeping in mind the added costs Jaime could face for transportation of the children).*
- 5) *Jaime considers staying in Ohio until the children are both school age.*
- 6) *The parents sacrifice their vacation time to always vacation in the same location as the other parent until the children are old enough to travel unaccompanied by a parent.*
- 7) *The parents meet in mediation to explore more options.*
- 8) *The parents continue to discuss solutions between themselves or through their attorneys.*

AGE-SPECIFIC RECOMENDATIONS

BIRTH TO PRE-SCHOOL

This is an important time for bonding between parents and children. For most children, the loss of a strong bond is a lifelong issue. In contrast, building a strong bond creates a sense of belonging, encourages active and committed parents, causes healthy adult relationships with both genders and improves communication between parents and a growing child. If possible, the long-distance separation should be delayed so both parents and children can make the best use of their time together during these formative years. If the move cannot be delayed, the schedule should be designed to provide the most direct and frequent physical contact between the child and both parents that time and money permit.

KINDERGARTEN TO 12 YEARS

The parties should continue to make the most of the time each parent has with the child. The schedule should be adjusted to follow the child's regular school schedule. The school-year parent must sacrifice frequent physical contact during non-school times, such as the summer and holidays, while the non-school parent must sacrifice frequent physical contact during the school semesters. Some schools have year-round or modified year-round schedules that provide for more frequent or longer breaks with the distant parent. It would assist children if parents can find a school with such a schedule.

13 TO 15 YEARS

The parties should continue to take full advantage of the time each parent has with the teen. 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. The school parent may need to sacrifice holiday time to offset the parenting time lost by the distant parent. 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. Parents can expect the teen to try to negotiate time with both parents. Consider your teenager's ideas in your decision-making. Expect that some teens may want to switch hometowns for the opportunity to get to know the other parent better. As with any schedule, parents must make the final decision about schedules. 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.

16 TO 18 YEARS

Teens at this age normally think of themselves as young adults preparing for the world ahead of them. Parents can guide their teenager by permitting greater responsibility and independence. One opportunity to make them good decision-makers is with the parenting time schedule. Ask their opinion, listen to what they have to say and give them choices. Teens want their parents to be available, but also want to control their own day-to-day activities. Communication and compromise will lead to the desired flexible schedule.

Example: *Chris and Terry have been divorced for four years in Ohio and both remarried. Each parent has a new toddler. The parties have teenaged twins, a daughter and a son. The twins primarily live with Chris and spend substantial time with Terry. Chris and Terry have continuing conflicts. The twins are entering their sophomore year of high school. This year, Chris gave Terry timely notice of an intent to move to California at the end of the school semester because Chris's new spouse is being transferred to Sacramento. Terry objects and files a request to prohibit the relocation of the twins. Chris says Terry is opposing the move out of spite. Terry says Chris is using the move to damage further Terry's relationship with the kids.*

Possible solutions:

- 1) *The parents put aside their conflict and consider the impacts, good and bad, of the move on the teens.*
- 2) *The parents consider child interviews.*
- 3) *Chris's new spouse asks at work about a hardship move back to Ohio.*
- 4) *The parents price the cost for transportation to and from California.*
- 5) *The parents seek advice from educational professionals on the impact of a change in high schools.*
- 6) *The parents meet in mediation to explore more options.*
- 7) *The parents continue to discuss solutions between themselves or through their attorneys.*

GENERAL TIPS

AIR TRAVEL

Ideally, a child younger than eight should not travel alone. If it is necessary for a child to travel by air, direct flights between major cities are preferred over multiple stops or plane changes. To save costs, tickets should be priced at a 30-day advance notice, economy class and using major carriers. Consult each airline for how and when unaccompanied or monitored minors may fly. Remember that if a person younger than 18 is traveling 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.

DELAYS AT EXCHANGE POINTS

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.

DROP-IN VISITS

Opportunities can occur for either parent to be in town when the children are in the care of the other parent. When such opportunities arise, parents should be flexible and set aside normal routines to allow contact on short notice. A lot of good faith can arise from such cooperation. Remember, the shoe may be on the other foot someday.

FREQUENT MOVES

Families benefit from financial stability in their lives. It also is a fact that the average U.S. family moves every five years. Typical reasons include jobs, health, education, marriage and family emergencies. However, when either parent moves frequently and without good reason, that parent can expect to bear the burden of the move and pay more for the costs and travel time of parenting.

INTERNATIONAL PARENTING TIME & BORDER TRAVEL

International parenting time and travel have unique challenges. Children may leave the country without restriction, but cannot return without proof of citizenship. Passports and visas are required. The primary residential parent should safeguard these documents and make them easily available to the other parent at the scheduled times and places of exchange. Likewise, the documents should be returned promptly at the conclusion of parenting time. The non-residential parent should keep copies of important travel documents. For the latest requirements, review the Crossing Borders section of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security found on its Web page at <http://www.dhs.gov/crossing-us-borders/>. For long-term planning, review the information from the Office of Children's Issues, U.S. Department of State, found on its Web page at http://travel.state.gov/abduction/about/about_605.html.

MILESTONES & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The parent who is away from the children for a significant length of time may be out of the loop on the children's general welfare. It is important for each parent exercising parenting time with the children to keep the other informed about school progress, awards, special recognition, report cards, sports performance, physical and emotional health concerns, extracurricular activities and other important milestones and developments in the child's life. Likewise, the child should know the significant, age-appropriate events in each parent's life during his or her absence. All are equally important. Traveling or shared journals are a useful tool for such purposes.

TIME LOSS FOR TRAVEL

In a long-distance parenting schedule, anticipate the loss of time with children by both parents because of travel over great distances. Building parenting time into travel may be a possible solution. Travel time activities can be a chance for parents and children to transition and enhance their relationship. Thus, when possible, the receiving parent should be the accompanying travel parent.

“VIRTUAL PARENTING”

Maintaining contact by phone, letter, text messaging, e-mail, Web cam and other technological means may be helpful and worthwhile for long-distance parenting. However, virtual parenting is not an ideal substitute for regular in-person contact, and should not be used as an alternative that decreases the parenting time of a parent.

WILD CARDS

Parents can expect pre-teens and teens, at a certain age and level of maturity, to negotiate with both parents about their living arrangements. One solution is to build into the schedule some “wild card” days for the child to choose to expand or contract time inside an otherwise fixed schedule.

SPECIAL ISSUES

The circumstances of each family are different. When planning for parenting time, besides taking into account the children's age and stage of development, it is important to consider other aspects to make parenting time successful. These circumstances often present a challenge. While no publication can adequately address everything, the following information may assist parents in special situations.

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. This kind of help is called reunification counseling. 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

Today, at least one-third of all children in the U.S. are expected to live in a stepfamily before they reach age 18. When two families unite, new personalities, habits, rules and memories become part of the household. Most blended families are capable of working out their differences or conflicts and living 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 can be sad or fearful as these changes occur, and it takes time for them to adjust to the new family. Several common problems 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 also are children who resist developing a close bond with a stepparent because they fear this could anger their biological parent of the same gender. 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
- Spend some 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
- Plan regular family meetings to discuss all members' needs.

BREAST-FEEDING

Pediatricians agree that breast-feeding is best for most babies. There is no proof, though, that breast-fed babies form closer relationships with their parents than do bottle-fed babies. 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.

Parents who are not raising their child together must balance the baby's need to nurse with its need to bond with the father. The parents should talk often and openly with each other about the baby. Breast-feeding should not be used to stop the father from spending time with the child. Instead, mothers need to offer the father parenting time and fathers need to be flexible regarding the need of the baby to nurse. A father can feed an infant with the mother's expressed (pumped) milk, particularly after nursing routines are well established. If there are any questions about breast-feeding, parents should talk to the baby's pediatrician.

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. Some of the reasons have to do with a child's age and personality, while for others, it has to do with how their parents get along. How a parent reacts to a child not wanting to be with the other parent also can 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 at exchange time and they 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. Other children may not have gotten used a new environment, and they would rather stay in a home and a neighborhood they know. Parents can help children adjust by understanding their feelings, but insisting that they spend time with the other parent, just as a parent would do if the child does not want to go to school.

Parents also should understand that sometimes there are problems that need to be worked on through counseling. For example, some children may have serious problems getting used to a parent's new partner and his or her children. There also are children who are caught in the middle of their parents' conflict, who may take sides with one parent and refuse to do what any parent or judge tells them to do about spending time with the other parent. In situations like this, professional help usually is necessary. If there are concerns that the children do not want to go because they are being abused or neglected, Child Protective Services should be contacted.

CONTACT WITH AN INCARCERATED PARENT

An incarcerated parent still is a parent to a child. In many cases, a child has a legal right and an emotional need to remain in contact with the parent in prison. 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. For planning purposes, the residential parent should review the relevant policies for minor child visits of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction found on its Web page at <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/visiting.htm>.

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 their problems, and, in extreme cases, some parents tell the children how bad the other parent is.

When parents do these things, children can develop emotional and behavioral problems. They may become fearful, thinking that they are the cause of their parents' fighting, finding themselves having to choose between their parents or developing low self-esteem.

For parents who cannot work cooperatively, **parallel parenting** is a way for them to raise their child with little contact between each other. Each parent makes day-to-day decisions about the child while the child is with the parent. With parallel parenting, communication between the parents is limited, except in emergencies, and usually is in writing. A therapist or a parent coordinator often helps parents handle parallel parenting arrangements.

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

MILITARY

The reality for military families is movement. When parents are first divorced or separated, they may live in the same community. This will require a parenting schedule that focuses on sharing the child when the parents live close to each other and allowing for temporary duty assignment (TDY) possibilities. Military families should think about including a long-distance parenting schedule in case parents are no longer living in the same area. Detailed travel arrangements are an important part, as well as allowing for deployment and TDY issues.

Parents may consider how parenting time can be rearranged because of temporary duty assignments or overseas commitments. One idea is to extend summer or winter breaks to allow for such situations.

Maintaining contact between the child and the non-residential military parent is important. The residential parent can support the child's relationship with the other parent by having a consistent plan of communication with the other parent. It may seem at times (to the residential parent) that he or she is shouldering most of the responsibility for fostering the child's relationship with the absent parent. It is important to know that the child will benefit from this effort as the child gets older.

NEVER MARRIED

When parents are not married to each other when their child is born, the biological father has no legal right to custody or parenting time until **paternity** is legally established and the court orders custody and parenting time. The court also will not order child support until paternity is legally established.

When a parent has not had parenting time with the child before, the court may order limited parenting time at first and gradually increase it over time. The court may order **supervised parenting time** at first until the parent has gained parenting skills and the child feels comfortable with the parent.

Unmarried parents may not know each other very well and, as a result, cannot rely on previous experiences of working together as parents. If the parents never lived together or did so only for a short time, they need to develop a cooperative parenting relationship. The parents may find joint counseling helpful.

The extended family members should be supportive of each parent's relationship with the child. It is important for each parent to be responsible for his or her relatives and to ask them to support the child's relationship with the other parent.

A child who has little or no contact with the other parent may have developed an important relationship with someone he or she perceives as a parent. A child could have difficulty coping and adjusting to a parent who reappears after a long absence. See the section on page 66 concerning absent parent reunification.

SAFETY

Protection Orders – When a **protection order** is in effect, the parenting schedule cannot include contact that would violate it. Only the court can change a protection order. If there is a protection order between the other parents, the parents may ask the court to change the protection order to allow parenting time exchanges in specific locations. Parents also can ask a third person to help transport the child for parenting time exchanges.

Domestic Violence – When there is a history of **domestic violence**, the court is unlikely to order shared parenting. In cases of domestic violence, the court order may provide for supervised parenting time during which a specified adult must be present. The court order should name the person who will supervise the parenting time. Some courts have supervision programs, but many do not. Supervised parenting time centers that are not court-affiliated exist in some Ohio counties. Often, there is a cost for this service. If there is no court supervision program or center available, the supervisor named in the court order must be a responsible adult who has time to supervise during the parenting time and 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 abuse, 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 testing is required, 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

It is a good idea to keep siblings together. Sometimes, though, this is not possible. Consider the unique needs of your children when deciding how much time each parent will spend with each child. 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 based on ages 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

Almost one-third of all children under the age of 18 suffer from one form or another of on-going mental or physical health problems. It is important that both parents understand the health problems and agree to follow the treatment the doctor recommends. In most cases, it is best when both parents attend the doctor appointments. The more serious the child's health problem, the more the parents need to talk to each other and keep each other informed. The parents also must learn to organize medication, medical equipment and treatments. 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. If there is any chance of conflict with the other parent, letting a third person speak for you usually is not a good idea and can make matters worse. Instead, 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. Some of the services offered by mental health experts are outlined below. The use of such professionals does not mean a family member suffers from a mental disorder. Helping to identify problems that can affect your children and getting the right person to help starts when you know the different types of services and can request the ones best suited to your family.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION (DR): SOLVE IT WITHOUT A JUDGE

Collaborative Divorce Coaching and 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 to reach agreement about all aspects of child decision-making and parenting time schedules.
Parenting Coordinator	Case management, dispute resolution process using mediation and arbitration concepts to help implement parenting court orders. Inquire in your local court to see if these services are available.

ASSESSMENT: PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE JUDGE

Brief 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. 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 Process using psychological tests, interviews and observations to evaluate mental status and functioning or treatment needs.

Psychosexual Risk Process using psychological tests, polygraphs, interviews and observations to evaluate the potential risk for physical and/or sexual abuse of children.

THERAPEUTIC: GETTING HELP

Parenting 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. It was prepared for use by persons who are not lawyers.

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

Allocation of Parental Rights and 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 (DR) – Ways to solve legal problems without a trial. Examples include mediation, collaborative law 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. The preferred term is now *allocation of parental rights and responsibilities*. See *parental rights and responsibilities*, *sole residential parent* and *shared parenting*.

Dissolution of Marriage – The legal process of ending a marriage by mutual agreement of the couple. It requires agreement on all property division, child and spousal support and parenting issues.

Divorce – The legal process of ending a marriage when the couple does not agree on all aspects of 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, family abuse and intimate partner violence. This term has different meanings for purposes of obtaining a civil or criminal *protection order*. Consult Ohio statutes for a precise definition.

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 – Giving 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.

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 66.

Parental Rights and 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 – 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.

Shared Parenting – Both parents share making major decisions for their 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 Title 31 of the Ohio Revised Code. 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.

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, Web cam, 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***.

OHIO FAMILY LAW REFORM IMPLEMENTATION SUBCOMMITTEE

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**Designates Parenting Time Workgroup Members.*

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MOTHER'S NAME: _____ FATHER'S NAME: _____

NAME OF CHILD(REN): _____

DATE OF AGREEMENT: _____

Parenting Time Schedule						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

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