

## Parenting Plans

It's not separation that harms children the most – its ongoing arguments and lack of co-operation between parents about the things that affect the children's daily lives.

Having a Parenting Plan that both of you make, in the best interests of your children, can help them feel more secure and prevent arguments and misunderstandings.

### What is a Parenting Plan?

A Parenting Plan is a written agreement between separated parents about how their children will be cared for and supported. It can cover anything that parents need to agree on about their children and it can be changed at any time with the agreement of both parents.

Each plan is unique. The best Parenting Plans are simple, practical and concrete.

### Is a Parenting Plan legally binding?

No, a Parenting Plan is not a legally enforceable agreement. It is an agreement made between parents without legal involvement. It is different to a parenting order, which is made by a court. If both of you agree, you can submit your Parenting Plan to the Family Court and use it as the basis of a legally binding parenting order.

### What sort of things does a Parenting Plan cover?

The sorts of things that you need to think about including in your parenting plan are living arrangements, decision making, parenting style, ground rules for communication, education, religion, what to do in an emergency and financial arrangements for the children.

You will need to develop a list of issues that is relevant for your situation. We can help you do this. You may also need separate plans or options within the plan for each child.

A Parenting Plan does not cover how you intend to divide up your property or money. This is called property settlement.

### How do we make a Parenting Plan?

Many separated parents work out a Parenting Plan between themselves. This works well when both parents are likely to agree on most things. For other separated parents, it can be useful to have third party help. Our Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) practitioners have lots of experience negotiating the best outcomes for children and can help you reach agreements you are both happy with.

As Parenting Plans directly affect your children's day to day lives, it is worth considering asking your children for their opinions and insights. Again it is sometimes easier for children to talk to an independent person, such as an FDR practitioner or child counsellor.

When you have completed your Parenting Plan, both parents need to sign and date it. Both of you then keep a copy.

### Interpreters



You can ask us for an interpreter in your language.

### What do I do now?

If you feel that your situation would benefit from Family Dispute Resolution, or you would just like to know more about it, please call

**1800 639 523** or send an email to [enquiry@betterplace.com.au](mailto:enquiry@betterplace.com.au) with your contact details.

## Parenting Plan Checklist

The following checklist outlines possible things that you might want to consider when you are making your Parenting Plan. Not all things listed will be relevant to you and your family's circumstances.

### Child's Best Interest

How can we ensure that this Parenting Plan is in our child/ren's best interest?

### Equal Shared Parental Responsibility

Is equal shared parental responsibility appropriate in our circumstances?

### Living Arrangements

- Is it in the best interests of our child/ren and reasonably practicable for our child/ren to spend equal time with both parents?
- Is it in the best interests of our child/ren and reasonably practicable for our child/ren to spend substantial or significant time with each parent?
- Who else will live with our child/ren?
- What accommodation is available for our child/ren?
- How structured and/or flexible should these arrangements be?
- How will we make considerations for the age of our child/ren?
- If changes are needed, then how much notice is required?
- What about the times, places and methods for pickups and drop offs?
- How will our child/ren maintain communication with each other and one parent when they are with the other parent?

### Special Days

What arrangements do we make for the child/ren's special days, birthdays and family events?

### Other Family Members

- How will our child/ren maintain contact with significant others and members of their extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins)?
- How will they maintain those relationships?

- How will our child/ren be affected by separation from a grandparent with whom they have a relationship?

### Children's Activities

- How can we facilitate and maintain our child/ren's continued involvement in their sporting and other activities?
- How will the child/ren move between our houses and their various activities?

### Education

- What are our child/ren's present and future educational needs?
- What type of school do we want them to attend?
- How much will each of us be involved in school activities?
- What are the arrangements for each parent to have contact with the school?

### Resourcing the Children

- How will the cost of support our child/ren be shared?
- On what basis will we decide these costs?
- Will the Child Support Agency assessment be taken into account?
- How and when will payment be made?
- How will education and activities costs be met?
- How will health care costs be met?

### Housekeeping

- Will any of our child/ren's clothing or belonging be shared between households?
- Will we share responsibility for the washing of clothes?
- Will we share in the purchase of presents?

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