

Parenting agreements

Many parents are able to make verbal arrangements that work very well but, equally, many parents find that a written agreement is helpful. A good written agreement offers the benefit of:

- a clearly defined structure to your post separation parenting
- something to refer back to if things go wrong
- a basis for collaboration after separation

Making a Parenting Agreement

A Parenting Agreement (sometimes referred to as a Parenting Plan) is a written statement that both parents sign up to as a way of establishing the ground rules around the way that they will parent apart. It can cover anything that you both feel is important. Most parents include things such as parenting time arrangements, their children's education and rules around new partners.

Parenting Agreements work best when they are not too proscriptive, are flexible and are varied to accommodate children's changing needs over time. Try to see it as a working document to help you manage your parenting relationship rather than a legal contract that should be monitored in minute detail.

You will have a model or template Parenting Agreement form which you can use as a guide. Don't forget, you can include any issues that you think are important and can reach agreement about. If you get stuck on any particular issue and aren't able to reach agreement, don't let that stop you reaching agreement on other issues; simply write 'to be agreed' and move on.

A note on parenting time arrangements...

The children who fare best after divorce or separation are those who are able to have meaningful, relaxed and flexible relationships with both of their parents. In other words, they will benefit significantly from spending time with both of their parents but in ways that take account of their changing needs over time.

What children need at different ages and different stages of development will vary. When you're trying to work out the best arrangements for your children, think about their ages and also the patterns of care before the separation. Take into account the distances that they might be required to travel between the two homes so that they're not having to travel long distances too often. And remember that what counts is the quality of time that your children have with each of you rather than necessarily the quantity.

There are no hard and fast rules about how much time your children should spend with each of you, but use the information provided below to give you an idea about the things to consider for children at different ages:

- Babies need to see familiar faces regularly, to have their needs met promptly and have firmly boundaried routines. They will benefit from spending the majority of their time with one parent but regular and frequent time with the other.
- Younger toddlers should, ideally, should see each parent at least every three days. Older toddlers may enjoy sleeping on two non-consecutive nights a week with the parent who is not providing the main day-to-day care plus an additional night every other week.
- Children beyond the age of 3 years old are much more comfortable with spending longer periods of time away from their main carer. This means that two or three consecutive nights a week with the other parent are usually fine. As children grow, longer periods with fewer changes will often work best.
- Teens will be able to work with most parenting time arrangements as long as they fit in with their busy social lives! Keep good boundaries but be prepared to be flexible.

Parenting Agreement

For

Name(s) of child(ren)

Agreed on

Date

By

Name of mother
(Mother)

and

Name of father
(Father)

“The aim of this agreement is to put in place an arrangement for parenting our child(ren) that will benefit them over their childhood and enable them to be close to each of us.”

PARENTING AND CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Our child(ren) will live with their mum as follows:

The times and days that your child(ren) will routinely spend with their mum.

Our child(ren) will live with their dad as follows:

The times and days that your child(ren) will routinely spend with their dad.

Within this arrangement we agree that there will be flexibility as follows:

Any flexibility that is agreed.

Other people who will look after our child(ren) are:

The names of others who will routinely look after your child(ren).

If a parent is ill and cannot care for our child(ren) we will:

The way you will deal with parental illness.

When our child(ren) are/is in our care, we will undertake to communicate as follows:

What you agree to be important information and how you will communicate it to each other.

When our child(ren) are/is in our care, they will communicate with their other parent as follows:

How and when your child(ren) will communicate with their other parent.

The rules around care for our child(ren) are:

The basic rules that you have agreed about issues such as bedtime, homework and behaviour etc.

HOLIDAYS AND OTHER SPECIAL TIMES

Holidays

How you will deal with holidays including issues such as not obstructing the other parent's wish to take your child(ren) on holiday, how much notice you will give, how you will amend the care pattern, whether your child(ren) will spend time with the parent that they are not holidaying with before and after the time away etc.

Special days

How you will deal with special days such as your child(ren)'s birthdays, your own birthdays, mothers' day, fathers' day etc.

Religious festivals

Your arrangements for religious festivals such as Christmas, Hanukkah, Gurburbs, Eid al-Fitr, Ganesh Chaturthi etc.

Passports

Who will be responsible for holding the child(ren)'s passport(s), agreement not to withhold etc.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Health Issues

Which GP and dentist the child(ren) will be registered with, who will take your child(ren) to medical appointments (eg the parent with whom the child is living when the appointment falls), how you will contact each other in cases of emergency etc.

Communicating with schools and Nurseries

How you will inform the child(ren)'s schools and nurseries that you are operating a shared parenting arrangement, how you will ensure that schools know who has Parental Responsibility and what that means in terms of their responsibility to communicate with each of you, whether you will attend parents evening or other special events together etc.

MONEY

General

Who will be responsible for purchasing items like school uniforms, weekend and holiday clothes, expensive items such as shoes and coats, the cost of expensive school trips etc.

Child Maintenance

Your child maintenance agreement including whether there will be a transfer of money, who will pay who, how much and when, the items of expenditure it is intended to cover etc.

NEW PARTNERS

In the event that either of us meets someone that we would like to form a relationship with we will follow these rules.

Telling each other

How and when you will tell each other.

Telling our child(ren)

How and when you will tell your child(ren).

Other

Additional agreements such as an undertaking to use non parenting time for relationships with new partners, working together to deal with your child(ren)'s reactions, agreements not to ask your child(ren) to call new partners 'mum' or 'dad' but to help them to understand that new people can be significant in their lives without replacing parental roles.

MANAGEMENT OF THIS AGREEMENT

We agree to review the effectiveness of this agreement on:

You may wish to agree a date, some time in the future, when you will review how well the agreement is working.

If either party believes that this agreement is breaking down, we will resolve the issues by:

How you will resolve disputes of the workings of the agreement.

If either party wishes to vary this agreement, we will:

How you will agree any variations either of you wishes to make.

Signed by: _____ Signed by: _____

Witnessed by (optional): _____

Date: _____