



# Parenting Plan Checklist: Information to help you get started

A parenting plan outlines how parents will raise their children after separation or divorce. It describes how parents not living together will care for and make important decisions about their children in both homes. You can agree to any type of parenting arrangement, but you should focus on what is in the best interests of your children.

In addition to this checklist, the Department of Justice Canada has free online resources to help you come up with workable parenting arrangements that are in your children's best interests:

- [Making plans: A guide to parenting arrangements after separation or divorce](#) contains helpful information about parenting after separation and divorce and how to decide on the best parenting arrangements for your children.
- The [Parenting Plan Tool](#) is an interactive tool that gives you some options to develop a personalized parenting plan.

NOTE: If there has been family violence or abuse in your relationship, some of the information contained in this resource may not be appropriate in your situation. In that instance, you may need legal advice and protection. For more information on family violence, consult the [Family Violence Fact Sheet](#) and the [Making Plans](#) guide. Consult the [Family Violence](#) webpage to learn more about how you can get help.

## Before you get started

It is important to know a few things before creating a parenting plan.

It is important to have your parenting plan in writing so that there's a record of the decisions you have made together about the future. Having it in writing can help you avoid conflict later on.

When writing your parenting plan, you do not have to use legal terminology. You may have heard of legal terms such as "parenting time," "decision-making responsibility," "contact," "custody" and "access" to describe different aspects of parenting arrangements. Legal terms like these do not have to be included in your plan, but the language you choose should clearly outline the arrangements that you and the other parent have agreed upon.

Before you sign a parenting plan, it is recommended that you consult with a lawyer or family law legal adviser to ensure that you understand your legal rights and responsibilities. In some provinces and territories, having both parents sign the plan will make it into a legally binding agreement. In other provinces, a witness or other procedures may be required.

If you have your parenting plan included in your order under the *Divorce Act*, it will be legally binding. If a parenting plan is submitted to the court, the court must include the plan in the parenting order or the contact order, as the case may be. If you're not making parenting arrangements under the *Divorce Act*, you may decide to have your parenting plan included in an order under provincial or territorial law.

You can find more information about making agreements and obtaining orders under provincial and territorial legislation on the [provincial and territorial family law websites](#).

For more information on family justice services in your province or territory, please consult the Department's [website](#).

This checklist identifies important issues for you to consider when creating your parenting plan. It will help you identify questions to discuss with the other parent, including:

- how you will make decisions about your children (for example, together or individually)
- when each of you will spend time with your children
- how you will share information and communicate with the other parent

A parenting plan should reflect the interests and the needs of your children. You should consider the age of your children and how the plan may change as your children grow. Your plan should have enough detail to provide clear expectations about the plan, yet have enough flexibility to be realistic. Consider how well you're able to work with the other parent when thinking about how specific your parenting plan should be.

You know your children best. Keep in mind that there may be some issues in the checklist that do not apply to your situation. There may be others not listed that do apply to your situation.

## What is not covered in the checklist: Financial issues

The Parenting Plan Checklist does not cover all financial issues you may need to deal with when separating or divorcing. For example, it does not address property division or spousal support, or how to make your parenting plan legally binding in your province. It also does not address child support, which is the amount one parent pays to another for the financial support of the child after a separation or divorce. For more information about child support, you can consult the Department [Federal Child Support Guidelines: Step-by-Step](#) guide.

Some of the items in this checklist involve paying expenses and may be related to child support, such as decisions related to payments for extra-curricular activities. You can address issues related to payment of expenses in a parenting plan or you can deal with them as part of a more complete settlement of property and support issues. Either way, it is important to remember that your parenting arrangements should be based on what is in the best interest of your children.

Decisions you make about parenting arrangements can have a financial impact, including consequences for child support, taxes, and benefits. You may wish to seek legal advice about these financial matters. For information about tax matters and child and family benefits, please consult the [Taxes](#) page on Canada.ca.

## Temporary or Interim Plans

Parents should begin planning for their children as soon as they begin the process of separation. However, separation may be a particularly stressful and uncertain time for parents and children. It may take a while for the situation to be stable enough to make a long-term plan.

You may find this checklist useful for making a temporary written plan that can be followed until you are ready to make a longer-term plan. Even temporary plans should be made in writing, as you and the other parent may end up using your temporary plan for several years as you go through the process of divorce or separation. As with a long-term plan, it is important to have a written record of decisions to avoid and help resolve future conflicts.

## Getting Advice

You and the other parent can develop a parenting plan together if you are able to communicate with each other constructively. If you need help agreeing on matters related to your children, you may wish to seek the help of a professional, such as a mediator, lawyer, counsellor, therapist or social worker.

It is a good idea to seek independent legal advice about your parenting plan so that you understand your legal rights and responsibilities before finalizing your plan.

## Helping your children deal with separation or divorce

Children often become stressed or anxious when their parents are not getting along. Children adjust better to separation or divorce when their parents are able to shelter them from adult conflict and cooperate with each other. A parenting plan can help to reduce conflict by clearly setting out expectations and identifying parenting roles and responsibilities for each parent. Both you and the other parent need to avoid exposing your children to conflict in your relationship.

Once they are old enough, children usually want to have a say in decisions that affect them. You should be aware of your children's views and preferences and provide them with an opportunity to participate in discussions about parenting arrangements. However, you should not draw your children into your disputes or ask them to "choose sides."

The involvement of children requires sensitivity and balance. You may want to involve a professional, or another neutral person you all respect, to help determine your children's views if:

- there is conflict between you and the other parent
- there is conflict with your children
- your children are unable to express their own views and preferences (for example, due to age or disability)
- there is a pattern of child resistance to parental contact

The Public Health Agency of Canada has information about helping children deal with separation and divorce. The booklet "[Because life goes on...helping children and youth live with separation and divorce](#)" offers advice to parents about how to help their children based on their children's needs, their age and stages of development.

The Department of Justice Canada has a booklet for children who are dealing with separation and divorce called [What happens next? Information for kids about separation and divorce](#). You can use this booklet to explain the changes your family is going through or, if your children are old enough, you may want to suggest that they read it themselves.

# What to consider including in a Parenting Plan

The following list identifies topics for you to consider when creating your parenting plan, and can be used as a starting point to help guide your discussions. Keep in mind that there may be some issues in the checklist that do not apply to your situation. There may be others not listed that do apply to your situation.

## Communication

- **Information to be communicated:** What information will you need to communicate with each other? Will you need to communicate about medical information, school information, child care, new partners, contact information, travel plans?
- **Methods of communication:** Will you use face-to-face communication? Will you use other methods of communication such as phone, notebook, texting, video chat, or email?
- **Frequency of communication:** Will there be a set time during which you and the other parent will communicate about your children? How often will you and the other parent communicate about your children?
- **Emergency communication:** How will you contact one another in emergency situations that concern your children? How will your children contact you in case of an emergency?
- **Communication with the child while they are with the other parent:** Will communication be through phone, e-mail, text, social media, video chat? How often will each parent communicate with the children when they are with the other parent? Is a schedule needed?

## 1. Family violence

NOTE: If there has been family violence or abuse in your relationship, some of the information contained in this resource may not be appropriate in your situation. In that instance, you may need legal advice and protection. For more information on family violence, consult the [Family Violence Fact Sheet](#) and the [Making Plans](#) guide. Consult the [Family Violence webpage](#) to learn more about how you can get help.

- **Safety:** Has there been family violence or abuse in your family? Are you worried about your children's safety or your own safety with the other parent?
- **Parenting arrangements:** Do you have concerns about the other parent's ability to keep the children safe and maintain a child-focused approach after separation? Are you and the other parent able to [co-parent](#) your children? How does the family violence affect your ability to make decisions together? Do you need to put in place arrangements for your children to be supervised when spending time with the other parent? Should exchanges of the children take place under supervision or through a third party?

**Co-parenting** means a relationship between parents who are separated or divorced, where the focus of the relationship is what is best for the children. There are many types of co-parenting relationships.

- **Communication:** Do you need to limit how and when you and the other parent contact each other? Will there be limits on how and when your children communicate with the other parent? Do you need to think about putting in place an arrangement that does not require face-to-face contact?

## 2. Parenting time arrangements

- **Parenting time:** Where will your children live? Will your children live only with one parent, mainly with one parent, or equally in both parents' homes? Will your children spend time with a parent when they are not living with that parent? Will they spend certain evenings or weekend days with one parent and then go back to the other parent's house?
- **Transportation:** Who will transport the children between homes? Who will pay for transportation expenses? How will pick-ups and drop-offs be coordinated?
- **Changes to the parenting time arrangement:** Can the parenting time schedule be changed for unforeseen events, such as illness? How much notice will be required if a change is needed for social events, special occasions or travel?
- **Childcare and babysitting:** What childcare arrangements will be needed for your children (for example full or part-time daycare, after-school care, school breaks) and how will costs be shared? Who will care for the children if your childcare provider is unavailable? If you require overnight or other childcare, will you offer the other parent the opportunity to care for the children?
- **Children's belongings:** Will belongings move between homes with your children? Will your children have two sets of some items? Who will purchase items for your children?
- **Children's social life:** How will the children spend time with friends? Who will take them to social events such as birthday parties, sleepovers, and extra-curricular activities and arrange for/pay for associated purchases (for example birthday presents for others)?

## 3. Siblings, grandparents and extended family

- **If each of your children has a different parenting arrangement:** How will you support their sibling relationship(s)? Will your parenting arrangements include time for the siblings to be together?
- **Grandparents and extended family:** Will your parenting plan address your children's relationships with grandparents and other members of their extended family? Will each parent be responsible for maintaining relationships with their side of the family while the children are in their care? What role will other family members play in your children's lives? Who will attend family events?

## 4. Vacations, holidays and special days

- **Holidays and vacations:** Who will care for the children during school breaks, statutory, civic and religious holidays? Will your children spend certain holidays with one parent every year? Will holidays alternate between households? Are changes to the scheduled arrangements acceptable? If so, how much advance notice do you need from the other parent?
- **Other significant days:** How will the children spend special days such as birthdays, Mother's Day or Father's Day, special events such as weddings, graduations, funerals, and any days that are especially important to your family?

## 5. Travel

- **Notice of travelling with the children:** Will you and the other parent notify each other about plans to travel with your children? If so, how far in advance? What type of travel information will you share (for example flight information, emergency contact information, location in destination)?
- **Travel outside of province/Canada:** Will there be restrictions on your children travelling to a specific province or country, including locations and length of stay? Do you have concerns about your children travelling with the other parent? Will you require written consent of the other parent for your children to travel out of the province/country? Remember that other countries may want proof that the other parent has consented to travel. See the [Global Affairs Canada](#) website for more information.
- **Medical considerations for travel:** If your children require additional medical coverage or immunizations/vaccines for travel, who will be responsible for making these decisions and for paying any related costs?
- **Children's passports:** Who may apply for your children's passports? Who will keep your children's passports? If your children have citizenship in more than one country, what passports will they use?

## 6. Education

- **Choice of or change in school or school program:** How will you make these decisions?
- **Decisions about special educational needs:** How will you make decisions about whether your child should be assessed for education-related needs? Who will pay for costs of tutoring or assessments?
- **School records:** How will you access or share this information? Who will receive copies of your children's report cards?
- **Parent-teacher conferences:** Who will attend? Will you attend jointly, or will you organize your own time with teachers?

- **School events and volunteering:** How will notification of classroom or school events be shared? Who can volunteer at the children's school and attend school events? Who will sign permission forms and pay for special school activities?
- **School absences:** Who can take the children out of school and under what circumstances?
- **Travel to and from school:** How will your children get to and from school? Who will be authorized to drop off and pick up your children from school?
- **Homework:** Are there special arrangements that need to be made for homework to be completed when parenting time falls during the school week?
- **Communication with school:** Who will be the emergency contact for the school? Who will be on the school's distribution lists?

## 7. Extra-curricular activities

- **Extra-curricular activities:** How will you make decisions about these activities? What types of activities will your children be involved in? Who will pay for these activities? Who will transport your children and attend activities?
- **Schedule:** How will you schedule activities for the children? Can one parent schedule activities that will take place during the children's time with the other parent?
- **Parental participation/involvement:** How will you share information about activity-related events, trips, games, recitals, etc.? How will you make decisions about each parent's participation/involvement/attendance?

## 8. Religion, culture, Indigenous heritage

- **Religious upbringing:** How will you make decisions related to your children's religious upbringing, if applicable? How will each of you support your children's religious or spiritual practices? How will the religion of each parent be respected?
- **Cultural activities:** How will you make decisions about cultural activities? Who will be responsible for the children participating in these activities? Who will attend cultural or community events with the children? How will the cultural customs of each parent be respected and supported?
- **Language:** What language(s) will your children speak in each home?
- **Indigenous heritage:** Is it important to address issues related to Indigenous heritage in the parenting plan? If possible, will you make efforts to expose your children to their Indigenous languages? If your children are living on a reserve, are there restrictions about access to the reserve that may affect the ability of you or the other parent to visit, drop-off or pick-up the children? Will you consult with an Elder, community leader, Indigenous governing body or another Indigenous family resource when developing your parenting plan?

## 9. Health care

- **Decisions about medical or dental care:** How will you make decisions about medical or dental treatment? Who will make decisions about vaccinations or other preventative treatments?
- **Medication and other care needs:** How will medication and other care needs for your children be managed as they travel between homes? How will you make arrangements for things like orthodontic treatment, counselling, physiotherapy, speech therapy, diet, glasses, prescription drugs, medical and dental check-ups? How will costs be shared?
- **Emergency medical treatment:** Who will make medical decisions in an emergency situation? How will parents notify each other? Who will notify the children's school and others about an emergency?
- **Care of children when ill:** Who will take care of the children when they are ill?
- **Health cards:** Who will hold the children's health cards? Will the cards move between homes with the children?
- **Access to medical records and information:** How will you access or share medical information?
- **Medical insurance and expense arrangements:** Will there be medical insurance for the children? Who will submit claims for insurance? Who will pay any extra costs?

## 10. Children with special needs

- **Special testing or assessments:** How will you make decisions about physical, psychological or any other testing for your children? How will you and the other parent follow through on any recommendations outlined in assessment reports?
- **Decisions on your children's behalf:** If you and the other parent do not agree on a treatment plan, how will you make medical decisions on your children's behalf? Will you use a third party such as a family doctor, a specialist or a counsellor to assist in making these decisions?
- **Parenting arrangements:** Can your children with special needs go between two homes, or will one home be the only residence for the children? Do you and the other parent both have the ability to manage the child's symptoms, behaviour, medication, appointments, emergencies, etc.? Who is available to meet your children's daily needs?
- **Specialized care:** If your children need ongoing physical, occupational or other therapy or counselling, who will make the arrangements? How will the therapist or counsellor be chosen? Who will attend and/or participate? If in-home care is needed, will it be provided in both homes? Who will be responsible for getting any assistive devices, mobility equipment or medication for the children?
- **Diet and medication:** How will you and the other parent follow through on what your children need, such as special diets, medications, supplements or vitamins?

- **Communication:** If urgent information must be communicated to the other parent, how will this be done? If someone else is caring for your children, who will be contacted in emergency situations?
- **Costs:** Is insurance coverage available for assessments and diagnosis, treatment, therapy, medication, supplements, equipment, supplies, respite care, etc.? If some costs are not covered by insurance, who will be responsible for those costs? Is there government funding available to the children for help relating to special needs? Who will apply for and receive the funding?

## 11. Relocation

- **Moves by a parent:** How will you deal with proposed moves by you or the other parent with or without the children? How much notice about a move will be required? Will you provide at least 60 days' notice as required by the *Divorce Act* or more? How will you deal with parenting arrangements that may be affected by a move? How will you each support your children's relationships with the other parent after the move?

## 12. New partners and blended families

- **Involvement of new partners and family:** When and how will you introduce new partners and their children to your children? How will time be spent with new partners and stepsiblings or half-siblings? How will you manage discussions about living with a new partner?

## 13. Parents whose work requires long absences (military parents, diplomats, international aid workers, etc.)

- **Impact of long absences:** How will your children communicate with a parent who is away for a long period? Will the children visit the temporary work location? How will arrangements for the children be adjusted when the parent comes home temporarily or permanently?

## 14. Mental health/substance abuse

- **Impacts on parenting:** Are you or the other parent dealing with mental health problems or substance abuse issues that may affect parenting? Is there a need to consider alternative parenting arrangements, including supervised parenting time or otherwise limited parenting time until the concerns have been addressed? Are there treatment/therapy needs that should be included in the parenting plan? Should monitoring requirements be included in the plan?

## 15. Dealing with conflict

- **Resolving conflicts:** Will you agree to use a mediator, lawyer or other family justice professional, or a respected member of your community to help resolve disagreements about the parenting plan? Who will pay for family dispute resolution services?

## 16. Making changes to the parenting plan

- **Making changes:** Will your plan include a process for reviewing parenting arrangements? Will reviews happen at regular intervals (for example, when one parent makes a request to change something, when your children reach developmental milestones, or whenever your circumstances or those of your children change)? Will you use a mediation service or other family dispute resolution process to make changes if appropriate?

## Other parenting issues

These issues may not apply to your family's situation, and some will depend on the age of your children. You may choose to discuss these issues on an ongoing basis rather than dealing with them in the parenting plan.

- **Basic safety requirements:** Consider the use of helmets, car seats, drugs or alcohol, hunting equipment, and the age at which your children can stay home alone.
- **Discipline and lifestyle expectations:** Consider bedtime routines, homework, allowance, dating, part-time employment, personal appearance (for example piercing, tattoos), etc. You do not need to have exactly the same routines in each home, but it may help your children if rules are similar between homes, or if you are aware of differences in approach.
- **Children's use of technology:** Consider rules around children's use of internet, social media, phones, video games, including what they can use and at what age.
- **Diet and nutrition:** Consider any rules around food that you want your children to follow.
- **Gifts:** Should gifts to your child be coordinated? Who will purchase gifts for your children to give to others? Should there be monetary limits on gifts?
- **Photographs:** Do you agree that your children's photos may be posted on social networking sites? Can your children have photos of each parent in both homes? Will you share photos of your children with each other?
- **Family pets:** Where is the pet going to live? Can the pet move between homes with the children? Who will be responsible for the care of the pet? Who will pay for costs associated with the pet (medical needs, food, etc.)?
- **Serious disability or illness of a parent:** Will you address how and when you will review your parenting plan if one parent develops a serious disability or illness?

# Information in your province or territory

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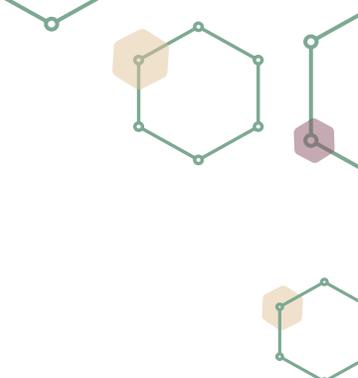
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