

Building the Right Parenting Plan for Your Family

A COMPREHENSIVE WORKBOOK FOR SEPARATING PARENTS

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01 What is a Parenting Plan?

A parenting plan is a written document that outlines an agreement by both parents as to how they will raise their children in two households. It is intended to establish the goals, values, principles and rules as to how parents will share the responsibilities and time with their children.

This is meant as a tool for parents who understand and know that their children's well-being and best interests will guide the creation of their new parenting structure — and that their wants as adults and parents will be set aside, focusing on creating a system where the well-being and best interests of the children guide each decision.

This tool has been designed for parents to critically think through what would be the best structure around parenting time and decision making for their family. If possible, it can be a working document for parents to work together. While not everyone is able to work with their ex, this tool can assist in bridging the divide between separated parents who want healthy outcomes for their children despite the status of the adult relationship.

The Foundational Approach

The foundational approach to this parenting planning tool comes from Heidi's approach to parenting: **unconditional love**, the maintenance of your children's emotional, psychological, physical, financial and spiritual safety, and a continued sense of belonging in the family unit as the family ecosystem shifts into the new normal.

As you navigate your separation, the plan you make with your co-parent to raise your children will be one of the most critical steps in your journey.

This Plan Covers

- **Parenting Time / Scheduling**
- **Decision Making**
- **Communication**
- **Other normal life issues** that arise: Social Media, New Partners, New Homes, New Siblings, Shared Expenses

Special Note

Working together with your co-parent is absolutely in the best interests of your children's well-being but in preparing this tool, we recognize that may not be possible due to concerns of family violence, coercive control, mental health issues or substance abuse. If this is a reality for you, it is imperative that you seek support from your community resources and the legal system to ensure that you are creating a plan that minimizes risk and/or harm to the children and you as a parent. Please reach out for help to find the right support for you and your children.

02 Your Children's Best Interests

You may have very strong feelings about what you want your parenting situation to look like. It is of critical importance to shift away from your 'wants' and focus on what is right for your children.

Everyone's family looks different and has different needs. You may hear stories of week-to-week being the 'best' option for kids, or that one parent has 'custody'. While talking to others who have been through it is always helpful, it doesn't necessarily mean that what they chose for their family is going to work for you. It is important to take the right steps forward for your family — not what others are saying or you have 'heard' works.

It is important to approach your parenting situation with curiosity and a willingness to make decisions centred around your children's well-being and best interests.

— HEIDI DINNING

What Does "Best Interests" Mean?

Best interests means looking at your child's holistic needs across five dimensions:

Holistic Well-Being

Emotional, psychological, physical, financial, and spiritual safety and development.

Child-Centred Factors

Your child's age, stage of development, attachment relationships, and need for stability and consistency.

Your children's age, stage, attachment, and what they are used to will begin the process of thinking through what is best for them. Your routines as individuals and your work schedules will also weigh into the parenting plan.

How to Separate Your Feelings from Your Children's

- Separate your own desires from what is right for your kids
- Recognize that your children's experience of this transition is very different from yours
- You are both the children's parents — you both bring strengths to the children's well-being
- When you look at your individual schedules, strengths, and what you bring to the children's lives, you can start to formulate a thought process as to how the schedule will work

03 Knowing Your Strengths

Understanding what each parent brings to the children's lives is an essential first step. Honest, child-focused reflection here will lay the foundation for a parenting plan that truly works.

When you look at your individual schedules, strengths and what you bring to the children's lives, you can start to formulate thoughts as to how the schedule will work. Try to approach this exercise with openness and generosity.

Your Strengths as a Parent

Reflect on what you uniquely bring to your children's lives — practically, emotionally, and relationally.

Strengths You Recognise in the Other Parent

Setting aside conflict, what positive qualities and contributions does the other parent bring to the children's lives?

Tip: *This is not a competition. Both parents contributing their strengths leads to better outcomes for children. If you find this difficult, consider working through it with a parenting coach or mediator.*

04 Schedule Development

Describe how the child or children would be best parented by both you and the other parent based on your individual and collective children's needs, age, stage, and attachment. Complete this section for each child.

Child Profile

Child's Name

Child's Birthday

School or Daycare

Transportation to/from School

Activities

Transportation to/from Activity

Child's Routine

Other Child-Specific Needs

(Repeat this section for each child)

Scheduling Considerations

Does it make sense for the children to spend more overnights with one parent? Why?

Is one of you more involved due to work or traditional setup? Should that continue or change?

If More Time in One Household

What does that look like to meet their needs and help them see both parents regularly?

If an Equally Shared Schedule

What schedule would make the most sense for your children?

Common Shared Schedule Options

Week-to-week | 2:2:3 | 2:2:5 | 4:3:4:3

Every other weekend and a weekday visit | Every other weekend and drive to/from activities

There are many different set-ups for the schedule. It is important for parents to think clearly through what would meet their children's needs and allow them to feel stable, safe, and well supported to succeed, minimizing chaos and maximizing ease of routines.

Tip: *It's better for younger children to not be away from their primary attached parent for too long, and not to be away from both parents for too long in any given period.*

Regular Schedule — Example

It makes sense to look at parenting time in a two week block, especially if the schedule isn't straight forward.

For example:

Week One	Week Two
Mon Mom	Mon Dad → Mom after school
Tue Mom	Tue Mom
Wed Mom → Dad after school	Wed Mom → Dad after school
Thu Dad	Thu Dad
Fri Dad	Fri Dad → Mom after school
Sat Dad	Sat Mom
Sun Dad	Sun Mom

This example is a **2:2:5 schedule**. It shows you what it looks like for both parents in a two week period.

05 Holidays & Special Dates

How does your family traditionally spend holiday time? The following will supersede the regular schedule.

Summer

Sometimes families stick to their regular schedule and add in a holiday for each parent that is a week long. Sometimes parents switch to a week to week schedule in the Summer and add in a 2-week vacation. How does your family typically spend the summer?

Winter Break

The regular parenting schedule will be suspended during Winter School Break. Winter Break will be divided as follows:

School Breaks

November / Fall Break

Spring Break / Easter Break

Other Important Dates

Children's Birthdays

Parent's Birthdays

Mother's Day / Father's Day

06 Parenting Principles

Your Guide to Healthy Co-Parenting and Parent/Child Relationships. The following principles form the foundation of your parenting plan and should be read and agreed to by both parents.

This plan recognizes that the Children's needs and best interests will guide parenting. The Parents are encouraged to step away from their own 'wants' and focus on what is best for the children — meeting their emotional, psychological, and physical needs.

The Parents recognize that all possible changes in the circumstances of the Children and Parents cannot be foreseen. The Children will mature and change, as will their needs. This plan should be respected, but remain flexible as needs and circumstances change.

The Parents will use their best efforts to parent cooperatively, keeping the Children's best interests at the forefront. The Parents will not lead with self-serving decisions and actions, but rather child-centric decisions and actions.

The Parents agree not to speak with the Children directly or indirectly about any adult topics and/or topics related to the separation, including child or spousal support, property, and financial issues.

Neither Parent will denigrate or disparage the other Parent or members of their extended family, either overtly or covertly, in any communication with the Children or in their presence.

The Parents will not ask the Children to relay information between them but rather the Parents will communicate directly with one another about adult matters, outside of the presence of the Children.

All communications, written or otherwise, will be child-focused, cordial, and to the point about the Children. The Parents will remain courteous and polite at all times.

Additional Principles

The Parents will not interfere directly or indirectly into the lives, activities, or routines of the Children when they are with the other Parent. Without the consent of the other party, neither Parent will schedule activities during the Children's time with the other Parent.

The Parents will respect each other's privacy and will refrain from initiating discussion or questioning the Children about the other Parent's personal lives and activities.

The Children will reap benefits from knowing that both of the Parents are involved in their significant life events. In an effort to foster consistency, predictability, stability, and continuity of care, the Parents will communicate reasonably regarding the children's routines, activities, and experiences.

The Parents will each commit to establishing and providing a safe, stable environment for the Children when in their care.

In the event there is a disagreement between the Parents with respect to parenting arrangements, or a future change in the parenting plan, the Parents will determine protocols and follow procedures for resolving disputes as outlined in this plan.

A Note on Conflict

Disrespect of the other parent does not hurt the other parent — it only hurts the child, and particularly hurts that half of them that is the other parent. It is crucial to remember that, always.

07 Parenting Time Provisions

The following terms are examples of parenting provisions used in a typical parenting plan.

School Pick-Ups & Drop-Offs

Example: The resident Parent will be responsible for taking the Children to school and bringing them home, arranging for after-school transport and activities as he/she thinks appropriate.

Transition Day Pick-Ups & Drop-Offs

Example A: The resident parent will drop the children off at the receiving parent's home after school.

Example B: The children will transition from one parent to another on a school day. The resident parent will drop the children off at school and drop belongings off at the receiving parent's home for a smooth transition.

Your agreed transition arrangements

If a Child Is Ill on a Transition Day

If a Child is ill in the morning and cannot attend school on a transition day, the resident Parent will contact the other party as soon as possible. Unless mutually agreed otherwise, the ill Child will remain in the care of the Parent who had care of the Child in the morning, and then be transferred to the other Parent at an appropriate time.

Schedule Changes

- Parents will canvas proposed changes with the other Parent first, and prior to mentioning anything to the Children.
- Neither Parent will make plans for the Children when they are scheduled to be with the other Parent, without first communicating the ask and having consent.
- Either Parent may make an urgent request for assistance from the other if he/she or the Children are ill, or if an urgent situation arises.

Right of First Refusal

If either parent requires childcare for more than _____ during their parenting time, they shall first offer the other parent the opportunity to care for the children before arranging third-party childcare.

Extra-Curricular Activities & Lessons

- The Children's preferences, age, and stage will be considered when choosing activities and lessons. Reasonable discussion between the Parents should occur when deciding on activities.
- The Parents will provide full information about all activities to the other Parent, within a reasonable time of the Children being enrolled.
- The resident Parent is responsible for transportation to and from activities. The resident Parent will decide when, from time to time, the Children will not attend because of illness or other special circumstances.
- Both parents and appropriate guests may attend "public events" related to extracurricular activities (games, recitals, performances, etc.). The Parents will remain cordial and not discuss child-related arrangements or any contentious issues at that time.

Children's Belongings

- The Parents will each have toiletries, sleepwear, and as many belongings as possible for the children in their homes, limiting the amount that requires transition between homes.
- The Parents will ensure that any clothing, electronic devices, or toys that move between the two homes rotate freely and are returned promptly.

Communication with the Children

- The Parents acknowledge that FaceTime and telephone communication are beneficial alternate forms of access for the Children.
- The Parents will agree upon when and how the Children will utilize cell phones, iPads, and other digital items, considering age, stage, and an educated understanding of appropriate rules of engagement on digital products.

Your agreed digital/phone rules for children

08 Decision Making

The Parents will jointly make decisions regarding the Children in accordance with the provisions of this parenting plan.

General Health & Medical Care

Family Doctor

Dentist

The Parents will provide each other with the names, addresses and phone numbers of any additional professionals providing health care to the Children (e.g., psychologists, social workers, counsellors, physicians, occupational therapists, orthodontists, etc.).

- Both Parents will sign any consent forms required for the Children to receive health care treatment in a reasonable and timely manner.
- Either parent may obtain health reports directly from any professionals associated with the Child. The Parents will sign all necessary consents for the other Parent to receive such information.
- Timely updates within 24 hours by e-mail or text will be provided regarding the outcome of all medical or healthcare appointments.

Parent who will arrange & attend medical/dental appointments

Parent who keeps health cards & vaccination records

The original health card will accompany the Children when they travel outside the City of Calgary.

General Safety

Parents will ensure they are able to parent coherently and act in the event of an emergency with the Children, and will limit consumption of alcohol, drugs, and cannabis during parenting time.

Medical Emergencies

Every effort will be made to notify the other Parent by email and telephone at the time of an emergency visit by a Child to a physician, specialist, or hospital, as soon as it is feasible. Both Parents will make emergency decisions together unless, after a concerted effort, one Parent cannot be reached, in which case the present Parent may make emergency decisions in consultation with medical professionals.

Religion

The Children will be raised

Education

The Children will continue to attend the following school(s)

- The Parents will each contact the school and provide their name and contact information. The school will have contact information for both Parents for emergencies.
- The Parents may attend parent-teacher meetings together or separately. If one Parent cannot attend, the other will provide a fulsome report.
- Both Parents have the right to make inquiries and be given information from the school about any issues. Both Parents are responsible for obtaining copies of report cards and other documents.
- The Parents will notify each other of any potential major educational decisions (e.g., program placement, psycho-educational testing, remedial assistance, enrichment, speech therapy, tutoring, etc.). Together or separately, the Parents will consult with educational professionals and use their best efforts to make mutually agreeable decisions.

Daily Health Decisions

The resident Parent will make day-to-day health decisions. The resident Parent will advise the other of the diagnosis and treatment plan when a child is ill.

When to Ask for Help

If parents cannot agree on a significant decision about the children's health, education, or well-being, consider engaging a mediator, parenting coach, or other appropriate professional before escalating to court proceedings.

09 Communication & Other Matters

Co-Parent Communication

- All communications will be child-focused, cordial, and to the point.
- Parents will remain courteous at all times, without personal opinions about the other parent.
- Children will not relay information between parents — communicate directly.

Agreed primary communication method (e.g., email, OurFamilyWizard, text)

Social Media

Agreed rules around posting images/information about the children

New Partners

Agreed protocols for introducing new partners to the children

New Homes

Agreed process for notifying the other parent of a new residence

New Siblings

Agreed approach for communicating with children about new siblings

Shared Expenses

Agreed approach to shared expenses beyond base support

10 Travel & Relocation

Travel

With notice in writing, the Parents may travel with the Children during their regular or holiday scheduled time. Proposed travel involving changes to the regular or holiday schedule, air travel, or out-of-country travel requires the consent of the other Parent.

- The Parents agree to sign a travel consent letter for the authorities. Both Parents will have a notarized copy.
- Full itinerary information (dates, location, accommodation, address, flight or train number) will be provided to the other Parent at least 30 days before departure.
- The travelling Parent will arrange for travel health insurance for the Children when travelling outside of Canada.

Parent keeping children's passports & birth certificates

Parent who will receive photocopies

Passports must have at least six (6) months remaining in the expiry period.

Residential Moves

A Parent planning to move residences will give at least 60 days written notice to the other Parent prior to any residential move.

Maximum distance from other parent's residence

City where children will reside

The Parents agree that the Children will not be relocated outside the City of _____ without the agreement of both Parents or a Court Order.

No Change of Name

Neither Parent will take any action to change the name of either Child without the written consent of the other Parent or a Court Order.

The foundational approach is unconditional love, the maintenance of your children's safety, and a continued sense of belonging in the family unit as it shifts into the new normal.

— HEIDI DINNING

11 Future Dispute Resolution

In the event of a dispute about the parenting plan and the Parents are unable to resolve it on their own, the Parents agree to participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution before resorting to the court.

Dispute Resolution Protocols

- 1 Direct Communication:** Parents will attempt to resolve disputes directly through respectful, child-focused conversation.
- 2 Parenting Coach / Mediator:** If direct communication fails, the Parents agree to engage a qualified parenting coach or mediator to assist in resolution.
- 3 Formal Mediation / Arbitration:** If parenting coaching is insufficient, the Parents will engage in formal mediation or arbitration before pursuing court proceedings.
- 4 Court Proceedings:** Court is the last resort, to be pursued only after all other dispute resolution avenues have been exhausted.

Preferred mediator or ADR professional (if agreed)


Other agreed dispute resolution protocols

Plan Review

This plan should be reviewed at appropriate milestones as the children grow and circumstances change. Changes to the plan should be agreed to in writing by both Parents.

Next review date

Trigger for early review



"As you navigate your separation, the plan you make with your co-parent to raise your children will be one of the most critical steps in your journey. You are not alone."

Heidi Dinning

CDC®CertifiedDivorceCoach | Communications Expert

Your Journey Continues...

This workbook is a powerful first step in creating a parenting plan that puts your children first. As your needs evolve, Heidi is here to walk with you through every stage of the process.

If you have questions or need a supportive thinking partner to talk through your specific situation, reach out for a complimentary consultation.

www.heididinning.com