



# Building Stepfamilies That Work<sup>©</sup>

## *Parenting Plans*

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### Part A – General Information\*

### Part B – Free Downloadable Resources

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#### Part A - General Information

by

**\*Separation & Divorce Resource Centre**

Box 20056, RPO Bow Valley

Calgary, AB T2P 4H3

[information@sdrc.ca](mailto:information@sdrc.ca)

Parenting plans are increasing in popularity as courts become more aware that if the focus is shifted toward a more "child centered" divorce, emphasizing and encouraging the ongoing involvement by both parents, everyone will benefit - children and parents alike. The secret of successful co-parenting is putting the needs of your child or children ahead of your own. When both parents focus on the needs and best interests of the children, an effective co-parenting relationship, surprisingly, emerges.

*When parents reach agreements and schedules on their own, they are more likely to remain cooperative as their children grow up (a definite benefit for the children).*

#### What is a Parenting Plan?

- A parenting plan is a formal statement (the degree or formality will depend on the parents and their ability to work together) that establishes how parents will spend time with their child or children; how they will share information; how they will make decisions regarding their child or children and how they will resolve other parenting issues.
- Parenting plans place less emphasis on legal labels (sole custody, joint custody, etc.) and focus instead on the divorcing parents own plan for parenting.
- Parenting plans may be created by the parents themselves, with their attorney or with a mediator.

Creating a co-parenting relationship and sharing decision making powers with a former spouse is not easy, but by taking one step at a time it is possible and as you reduce conflict and encourage communication, your children will feel more secure and less afraid.

## **Are Parenting Plans Necessary?**

The quick answer is no. Written plans, however, provide children **and** parents with some assurances of maintaining meaningful contact and can help prevent future conflict. Simply put, children do best when their parents cooperate - when parental conflict is kept to a minimum and the children are able to experience loving and meaningful relationships with **both** parents.

Children who experience ongoing conflict between parents, are at high risk for suffering serious long-term emotional problems.

In certain circumstances there may be a need for a safety focused parenting plan. The safety focused parenting plan will require more work and potential negotiation than a standard parenting plan.

### **Parenting Plan details:**

Your parenting plan may be either general or detailed. Of course, the more detailed your parenting plan is the more difficult it will be to put together. At a minimum the plan should state the time the children will be with each parent.

### **What does a Parenting Plan cover?**

In general terms a parenting plan will cover:

- The amount of time the child or children will spend with each parent and extended family,
- Education and religion,
- Residential and child-care arrangements/responsibilities,
- Recreation and holiday arrangements,
- How the parents will make major decisions about the child or children,
- Empowering either parent to make emergency medical decisions when the child is in their physical custody. That parent is then required to notify the other parent.

### **More specifically, a Parenting Plan will cover:**

- Who the child or children will live with (days of the week, time of pick-up and drop-off) by day, including after-school time and weekends,
- Education,
- Religious upbringing,
- Non-emergency health care,
- Day-to-day decision making,
- How major decision are made,
- How disputes are resolved, including who will be involved and who will pay,
- Vacation schedule for winter, spring, and summer vacations.
- Holiday schedule for:
  - New Year's eve and New Year's day,
  - Easter,

- Victoria Day,
  - Canada Day,
  - August 1st civic holiday,
  - Thanksgiving,
  - Remembrance Day,
  - Christmas eve and Christmas day (or other appropriate time depending on your culture and/or religion),
  - Religious holidays,
  - Professional development days.
- Schedule for special occasions:
    - Mother's Day,
    - Father's Day,
    - Mother's birthday,
    - Father's birthday,
    - Paternal family days (grandparents' birthdays, etc.),
    - Maternal family days (grandparents' birthdays, etc.),
    - Children's birthdays.

## Part B – Free Downloadable Resources

Description	Publisher/Download Site (copy and paste their URL into your browser)
A free booklet/workbook that provides much more specific information and guidance. Available in several different languages from the publisher.	<a href="http://reenasommerassociates.mb.ca/">http://reenasommerassociates.mb.ca/</a>
a free "template" and information about a course that provides a more detailed template and guidance on using it.	<a href="http://www.dfes.gov.uk/childrensneeds/">http://www.dfes.gov.uk/childrensneeds/</a>
An excellent and comprehensive resource for high conflict situations.	<a href="http://www.albertacourts.ab.ca/familylaw/parentingplanissues.pdf">http://www.albertacourts.ab.ca/familylaw/parentingplanissues.pdf</a>

Parenting\_plans.rtf Feb 2008

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