

Parenting Plan

What needs to be done?

Family and friends

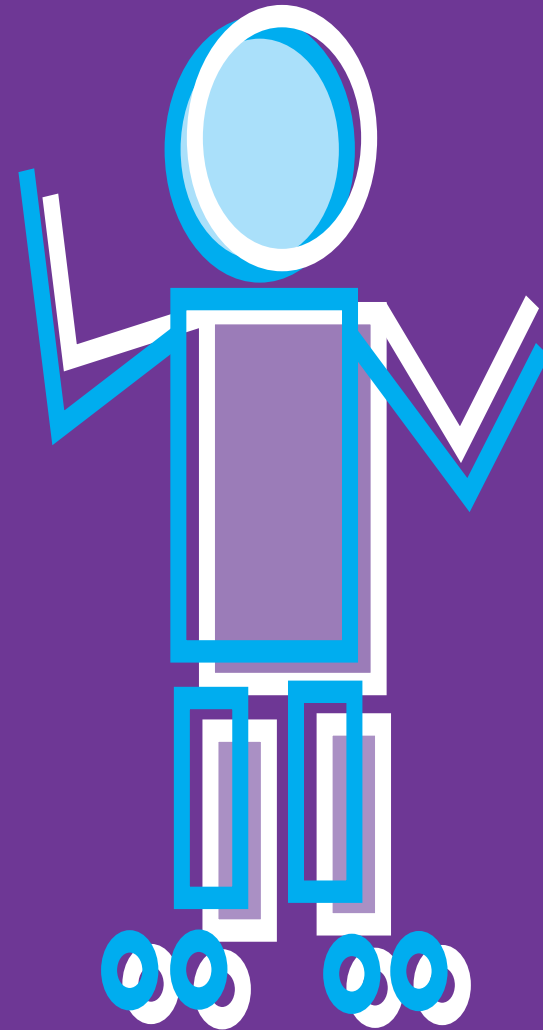
Home and school

Holidays and special days

Keeping in touch

Money checklist

Points about contact visits



PLANNING FOR YOUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE

Introduction

Although separation and divorce are adult answers to adult problems, children are affected. When a parent moves away from the family home, children may feel loss, anger, sadness and even guilt. Children may feel these things less if parents continue to co-operate.

Your responsibilities for your children remain although you are no longer living together. If it does not prove possible to work together to make arrangements, you can seek help from friends, family, a family mediator, a counsellor or a solicitor.

The Parenting Plan is designed to help you make arrangements for your children and to discuss these with them and others who may be involved. It contains information, guidance and ideas and sections you can fill in, if you wish. But every family and their circumstances are different and you will need to work out what suits you all best. You don't have to fill out the Plan. You may just wish to read the information or use it as a guide to the issues you need to talk about with your former partner and your children. The Plan is not designed to cover money matters. But there is a money checklist. You may need to seek advice about this – see the Getting help section.

If you do complete the Plan, you may want to make sure that you each have a copy of the completed Plan and think about who else should have a copy, for instance children or grandparents.

In some situations, for example if there has been domestic violence or risk of harm to a child, the Plan may not be appropriate. In this case you should seek advice from a solicitor.

If you fill in a Plan and sign it, it is a statement of your intentions as parents. It is not a legal document. It is not an order of the court, nor is it intended to be enforced by the court. If you feel there may be a need for a court order, you should discuss this with a solicitor. The Plan is simply designed to help you make your own arrangements. Children grow up and situations change so you will need to revise the Plan from time to time.

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Children:

- Need to feel involved in planning for their future.
- Should be helped to maintain the best possible relationship with both parents.
- In most cases, need to keep in regular contact with each parent.
- Need love and care given in a consistent and predictable way.
- Benefit from stability – in relationships with family and friends, in living environment, in school, in clubs and activities.
- Find change – even small changes – hard.
- Need clear and honest explanations, and information appropriate to their age, about what is happening and why.
- Need opportunities to express their views, and should be listened to. However, they should not be forced to express a view (for example which parent they prefer to live with) or made to feel that the responsibility for any decision rests with them.
- Need their views to be taken into account before any final decisions are made. If decisions are made against their wishes, this should be acknowledged and the reason for doing so explained to them.
- Need to know their family history, origins and relationships in order to have a clear sense of belonging.
- Usually want to keep in touch with their wider family (brothers and sisters, stepfamily, aunts, grandparents, etc) and family friends.
- Need to know how they can keep in touch with people they care about, for example by contact visits, letters, phone, e-mail, video/audio tapes.
- May feel insecure about their parents' new relationships, if and when they occur. It is important to introduce new long-term partners sensitively.

Each child's needs are different, and arrangements for one child may not be appropriate for their brother or sister. Needs change as children grow up and as your circumstances change. Try to look ahead and discuss the impact of change together, and with your children, before difficulties occur.

- Contact arrangements should be discussed with your children and their needs and wishes taken into account.
- There is no right set of arrangements that will suit everyone.
- Contact visits are meant to be enjoyable, but they can be stressful at first, for all concerned. They are worth persevering with, because they can benefit you all.
- It is helpful for children to have a regular pattern of contact visits.
- The pattern for contact visits should be established as soon after separation as possible.
- The best pattern of visits will vary with the age of the child.
- Shorter, more frequent visits may work better for younger children.
- If visits are very short, or very infrequent, it may be difficult for a parent and child to feel relaxed together.
- Overnight stays, where possible, are important in allowing the parent and child to experience ordinary daily routines together.
- Failure by either parent to stick to the arrangements for contact may be distressing for a child and make them feel less secure.
- It is not always helpful to see arrangements after separation as a simple extension of what has gone before – you may want to do different activities together now, see each other at different times, etc.
- Because emotions are often raw following a separation, it may be difficult for parents to agree on contact arrangements. If there is no practical alternative a contact centre may be used temporarily.
- If a child does not want to go on a contact visit it is important to try to understand why and to discuss this with those involved.

Discussing changes in your family situation can benefit you and your children. It can help avoid misunderstandings and friction between you as parents. It will show your children that they continue to be important to you. Clear communication will also help make the changes run as smoothly as possible.

WHEN DISCUSSING CHANGES WITH EACH OTHER:

- Think about when, where and how often you are going to discuss things.
- Respect each other's views.
- Support each other as parents in, for example, discipline or the children's education.
- Think about your continuing responsibilities as parents, rather than the difficulties of your past relationship.
- Try not to row or criticise each other in front of your children.
- Remember that we all make mistakes, and just because one particular topic provokes a row, it does not mean that you should give up talking altogether.

WHEN DISCUSSING CHANGES WITH YOUR CHILDREN:

- Make time to talk to each child separately, as well as together.
- Show your children that you support each other as parents, even though you can no longer live together.
- Use words and ways of talking that don't show blame.
- Explain your plans clearly and what effects these will have, and listen carefully to your children's views.
- Reassure your children wherever possible.
- Remember that each child is different, and will react in their own way to your separation or divorce.

ABOVE ALL, DISCUSS ARRANGEMENTS WITH YOUR CHILDREN AND LISTEN TO THEIR VIEWS.

Mother _____ Father _____

In the spaces provided below, give the full names and date of birth of each child. If any of your children have a different parent, indicate this after their name below. The name by which a child is known should be changed only with the consent of both parents, or by court order.

First name	Family name	Date of birth
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Name of any other person with an interest in and relationship to child, eg grandparent, separated parent

There can be a variety of living arrangements when parents separate. Children usually spend more time with one parent than the other for practical reasons. In most cases children will live with one parent and see the other on visits, but this may not suit your children or your circumstances. You will need to discuss this carefully with each other and your children, if they are old enough and understand what is happening. Do not put pressure on your children to decide, but listen to their views. You also need to think carefully about issues concerning the day-to-day care of your children.

● Where will your children mostly live?

● How will they spend time with each of you?

● What travel arrangements will be made, and who will pay?

● If a visit needs to be postponed, who will explain this to your children, and how will another visit be organised?

● What will be the arrangements for phoning or receiving phone calls from one parent, while staying with the other parent?

● If your children are old enough, will they have a mobile phone? _____

● Who will pay for this? _____

● Who will have access to the number? _____

● Will your children have access to e-mail? _____

● How will you discuss rules for your children with each other and with them?

What are the three most important rules that you both agree are essential, eg on smoking, drugs, motorbikes, cycling to school, wearing helmets on bikes?

Are there issues you find it hard to agree on and will this be a problem, eg time for bed, staying out late, going to the shops alone?

● How will you discuss the suitability of other people for sometimes looking after your children, eg new partners, childminders, babysitters, neighbours, relatives?

● How will the school(s) be informed of your children's changed circumstances?

● How will the parent not living with the children:

- keep in touch with the school? _____
- receive school reports? _____
- receive information about school events? _____

● Will you attend school functions together or separately? _____

- Parents' evenings _____
- Sports events _____
- Other school events _____

If there needs to be a change in your children's schooling, how will you discuss this?

● How will a choice of school for each of your children be made?

● How will other important choices for your children be made, such as:

- selection of GCSE courses? _____

- participation in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)? _____

- careers advice? _____

- others that arise? _____

Will you both allow your children to go on school trips abroad and, if so, how will these be paid for?

● Do any of your children have out-of-school classes or activities?

● Who will make the arrangements for these?

● How do out-of-school activities or a Saturday job fit in with contact visits?

● Can either of you take your children away on holiday? _____

● How will you agree plans for holidays? _____

● Can you each take them abroad? _____

● Who will obtain and hold their passports? _____

● How will you decide what your children do in their school holiday time?

● How will you divide the time between each of you?
How much time will your children spend with: grandparents (his parents);
grandparents (her parents); other family members and friends?

● What travel arrangements will need to be made, and who will pay?

● What will happen on days when the school may be closed, eg election or Inset days?

● Who will be responsible for arranging:

- routine medical and dental checks, vaccinations? _____
- any regular medication? _____
- any routine equipment, eg inhaler? _____
- home-based therapy or educational programmes? _____
- any speech/language therapy or hospital appointments? _____
- any special needs, eg special diet? _____

● Will you each have a note of these arrangements? _____

- How often will they be updated? _____
- Who will do this? _____

● If one of your children suffers from a chronic or permanent condition or illness, how will you make sure they get the treatment they need, whoever they are staying with?

● If one of your children requires emergency or urgent medical attention, how will you let each other know what is happening?

● If one of you is ill and unable to continue looking after your children, either all the time or during a visit, how will you handle this?

● Will the ill parent make the arrangements and inform the other or will you discuss this first?

● Who can you call on in an emergency to help with childcare?

● If you are living far apart from each other, or in different countries, how will you ensure that you are both aware of any health issues that might affect your children's well-being?

These might include family pets, sports, school journeys, learning to drive the car, the suitability of friends, or any other of the many issues raised for parents and children while the children are growing up. For example:

● Who will be responsible for family pets?

● Will your children be able to continue with any special arrangements for sport, drama, music, groups or other special interests?

● How will your children learn to drive? Who will pay?

● Who will help them get a Saturday job?

● Anything else?

Moving house, new job, new school, new partners, new babies. Not only do children's needs change, but adults' needs change too. New circumstances may mean that the arrangements for your children need to be changed. You need to decide how you will go about changing the plans. Some parents arrange to meet at regular intervals to assess how things are going. Others review their arrangements as and when circumstances change.

● What changes do you consider important, and how and when will you tell each other when the need for change arises?

● How are you going to review the arrangements for your children when changes do occur? How will you involve the children?

This Plan has been read and discussed by us as parents and with our children, and we sign to indicate our commitment to it. As things change over the years we will hope to discuss matters in a similar way, discussing any changes with our children as appropriate.

Mother _____ Father _____

Signature _____ Signature _____

Date _____ Date _____

The Plan can also be signed by other people if you think it will help everyone to feel committed to what has been discussed – your children, a step-parent, grandparent etc.

Name _____ Name _____

Signature _____ Signature _____

Relationship to family _____ Relationship to family _____

Date _____ Date _____

Name _____ Name _____

Signature _____ Signature _____

Relationship to family _____ Relationship to family _____

Date _____ Date _____

We acknowledge that each of us remains a parent and we are jointly responsible for the welfare and development of each child. We are responsible for the day-to-day care, control and discipline of each of our children while they are in our immediate care.

Who will look after this Plan? _____

Who will have a copy of this Plan? _____

When do you plan to consider revisions? _____

You may also be making arrangements for the financial support of your children. If your plan for your children is going to succeed, you need to be clear with each other what can be afforded and who is going to pay for what. These are some of the things that you will need to consider:

Are there regular payments already being made by either of you?

Who will pay for clothes, shoes and trainers for the children?

Who will pay for school or club uniforms, sports kit or equipment?

Who will pay for travel – visits to parent, grandparents, other people?

Who will pay for school trips?

Who will pay for large items such as bicycle, computer, musical instrument, driving lessons?

How will you give your children pocket money?

How will you support your children through college, university or other training courses?

You may want to contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau for money advice.

There is a growing number of organisations providing information, advice and help for families where parents have separated or divorced: help for children, parents, grandparents, friends and relatives. Use one of the helplines listed here if you would like to talk to someone. These can provide information. There are also a great many books, some for parents, some for children, some for parents to read to children, as well as lots of storybooks and novels. We suggest you contact one of the organisations or websites listed on the back cover for their book list or ask in your local bookshop. Your local library will probably have a special section on family matters and can also tell you of local groups in your area.

The law may change on some issues related to unmarried fathers and parental responsibility. A leaflet on family law issues, for divorced and separated couples, can be obtained from:
Community Legal Service Leaflet Line, 0845 3000343.

Leaflets for parents and children affected by divorce or separation are available from: Freepost, PO Box 2001, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 8BR.

[See the following pages for organisations' addresses, websites and helplines.](#)

Association for Shared Parenting
PO Box 2000,
Dudley,
West Midlands.
Tel: 01789 750891

ChildLine
Studd Street,
London N1 0QW.
Tel: 020 7239 1000

Children's Legal Centre
University of Essex,
Wivenhoe Park,
Colchester,
Essex CO4 3SQ.
Tel: 01206 873820

Families Need Fathers
134 Curtain Road,
London EC2A 3AR.
Tel: 020 7613 5060

Gingerbread
First Floor,
7 Sovereign Close,
Sovereign Court,
London E1W 3HW.
Tel: 020 7488 9300

Grandparents' Federation
Moot House,
The Stow,
Harlow,
Essex CM20 3AG.
Tel: 01279 428040

MATCH (Mothers Apart
from Their Children)
c/o BM Problems
London WC1N 3XX
e-mail:
enquiries@match1979.co.uk

National Association
of Child Contact Centres
Minerva House,
Spaniel Row,
Nottingham NG1 6EP.
Tel: 0870 770 3269

National Council for
One Parent Families
255 Kentish Town Road,
London NW5 2LX.
Tel: 0800 018 5026

National Family and
Parenting Institute
430 Highgate Studios,
53-79 Highgate Road,
London NW5 1TL.
Tel: 020 7424 3460

National Family Mediation
9 Tavistock Place,
London WC1H 9SN.
Tel: 020 7383 5993

National Youth Advocacy
Service
1 Downham Road,
South Heswall,
Wirral,
Merseyside CH60 5RG.
Tel: 0151 649 8700

Parentline Plus
520 Highgate Studios,
53-79 Highgate Road,
London NW5 1TL.
Tel: 020 7284 5500

Relate
Herbert Gray College,
Little Church Street,
Rugby CV21 3AP.
Tel: 01788 573241

Solicitors' Family
Law Association
PO Box 302,
Orpington,
Kent BR6 8QX.
Tel: 01689 850227

Getting help (cont'd)

Websites

www.childline.org.uk
for children in trouble or danger

www.e-parents.org
for parents

www.fnf.org.uk
for fathers

www.gingerbread.org.uk
for lone parents and their children

www.itsnotyourfault.org
for children and young people

www.justask.org.uk
for legal matters

www.match1979.co.uk
for mothers apart from their children

www.naccc.org.uk
for child contact centres

www.nfm.u-net.com
for family mediation

www.nyas.net
for children and young people

www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk
for lone parents

www.parentlineplus.org.uk
for all the family/stepfamily

www.sfla.org.uk
for legal matters

www.thesite.org.uk
for young people

Helplines

Childline 0800 1111

Children's Legal Centre 01206 873820

Cruse Bereavement Care 020 8332 7227

Get connected (young people) 0800 096 0096

Gingerbread 0800 018 4318

Grandparents' Federation 01279 444964

National Council for One Parent Families 0800 018 5026

National Youth Advocacy Service 0151 649 8700

NSPCC 0800 800 5000

Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222

Parentline text phone 0800 783 6783

Samaritans 08459 909090

Who Cares? Linkline 0500 564570

Youth Access 020 8772 9900