

Mediation and Counseling Consultants

Personally Designs your Parenting Plan to fit your Family's Lifestyle

What is a Parenting Plan?

Chapter 61 of the Florida Statutes that governs family matters requires the court to order a parenting plan in proceedings involving children. A parenting plan is a document created to govern the relationship between the parties relating to decisions made regarding the minor children, and it must contain a detailed time-sharing schedule for the parents and the children. The parenting plan may include issues concerning the children such as the children's education, health care, social, physical, and emotional well-being.

However difficult it may be to work on a parenting plan, there is one undeniable **truth**:

You are the only people who know your children, their needs, and the ability of each parent to meet those particular needs.

The TIME SHARING section of your parenting plan spells out when the children will be with each parent. The court system has "model schedules" set out for specific types of visitation. Quite often, the model schedule issued by the court is not appropriate for your family.

As for time sharing with your children, think about how these items should work for your family:

Transitions - Pick up and Drop Off - If you use school as the transition point, what happens when school is not in session?

Holidays and Special Occasions - Will these days be treated differently than the usual time sharing and have a separate schedule? Are school holidays that are not public holidays included in this part? How will both parents receive notice of special school events?

Transfer of Belongings - Will toys, clothes, backpacks and other property of the children transfer between homes (if so, how and when) or will both parents have these items? What happens if a needed item is not transferred?

Right of First Refusal - If the other parent cannot personally attend to the children in that parent's designated time sharing period (due to illness, travel, etc), does the other parent have the right of first refusal? How long a period must it be before the right of first refusal applies - overnight, four hours, 24 hours?

Notice of Whereabouts - When does information have to be provided to the other parent if the children will not be at the usual location? When and how will the other parent be notified? This could include leaving the county, being out-of-county overnight, leaving the state, etc.

Experience has shown that children benefit greatly when their parents negotiate a mutually agreeable settlement. When Mom and Dad are seen to be comfortable with the terms of their separation agreement, especially those concerning custody and visitation rights, children are better able to adjust to the divorce.

By working together to make a plan that fits both your lives, you avoid being stamped with the court's standardized solutions to visitation and co-parenting.

Statistics show that parents who prepare and agree to a parenting plan together are more likely to comply with it than if a plan is imposed upon them by a Judge who doesn't know anything about the family.

Divorce affects the whole family and places considerable emotional strain on the children, who often experience fear and depression when learning that their parents are divorcing. If the parents are involved in a lengthy and combative courtroom battle, these negative emotional experiences can escalate into ongoing emotional problems that have a negative impact on the children.

Mediation helps couples set aside their differences, and focus on solutions that meet the interests and needs of all involved, both for the adults and the children.

The **strength of mediation** lies in the practical way it approaches the issues at hand. This is especially helpful for couples wishing to establish a positive co-parenting plan for the benefit and in the best interests of their children.