



Co-Parenting Series Developmentally Appropriate Parenting Plans

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Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.

- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
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- It dispenses no funds to the public.
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- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
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- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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This fact sheet/work sheet for Co-Parenting classes helps parents think about how they want to structure their roles. Many parents can truly work cooperatively to write and revise their plan. Some parents adapt the plan as the children get older and their needs and situations change. Some families prefer a specific plan they can follow exactly. Some parents try working on this plan and find that cooperation is very difficult or impossible. They may decide to ask the court, a child development expert, or other professional to write a plan for them. In any case, this fact sheet will help parents get started. Families impacted by abuse and other dangers are encouraged to put safety first and get professional help before making or deciding not to begin a co-parenting plan.

1. Communication

Co-Parenting requires communication. Your communication pattern may change from the intimate and spontaneous style in marriage to the child focused and businesslike communication style of co-parenting. For example, school papers and calendars that were shared on the family refrigerator door may now be filed, copied, or initialed to insure that both parents get to see the child's work and schedule. Ask that schools, doctors, churches, and clubs send their reports and newsletters to both addresses.

Co-Parents need to schedule regular times and methods of communication to deal with issues before they become problems. Making the child relay messages is not acceptable. Pledge not to fight in front of the children. During the transfer of children, parents need to focus on the emotional and physical needs of the child. Since the children will need a parent's full attention and help in transferring themselves and their belongings to the other home, this is not a good time for a co-parenting conversation. It is important to refrain from fighting, especially in front of the children. It is important for children to see parents agreeing on issues.

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Consider which of the following might work and mark them. Also indicate which methods will not work. Add additional methods, such as, voice mail to plans.

Co-Parenting Communication

1. Mailed letters.
2. E-mail.
3. Notes delivered by someone other than the children.
4. Telephone calls as needed or by appointment. For example, Tuesdays at 11:00 a.m. In keeping with the businesslike approach, is often best to make these calls during working hours. Calling from home usually means that children will hear the conversation, even when they may be sleeping. If parents cannot receive personal phone calls while at work, consider talking when the children are away from home, for example when visiting at a friend's house.
5. Planned meetings such as having lunch together, counseling sessions, parent-teacher conferences, family meetings, or church events. Manage these meetings so that they do not become opportunities for fights that the children may see or hear.

2. Children's Ages

It is desirable for children of all ages to have daily contact with both parents and the security of a dependable routine. Though these are rarely attainable in any family, they are desirable goals to guide parenting plan. As children grow older, their schedules and activities change significantly. The chart below provides a long-term view of how a child's developmental needs and a parenting plan will change over time. Completing the chart below helps co-parents to see the long-term picture and realize the importance of their cooperation and focus on the children for many years to come.

Write ideas on how to handle paperwork:

Type of information

Plan/method for Sharing the information

1. Family Calendar _____
2. School Reports _____
3. Medical Reports _____
4. _____
5. _____

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Instructions for Completing the Chart. Write the children's names in the boxes corresponding to their ages each year. For example if Nat is now age 2, write her name in 2002's first box, age category Birth to age 3. In the column to the right, 2003, write her name in the second row because she will be 3 next year, and so on and so forth.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Birth - Age 3	Nat																	
Age 3 - 5		Nat	Nat	Nat														
Age 6 - 11					Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat								
Age 12 - 18											Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat	Nat	

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Birth - Age 3																		
Age 3 - 5																		
Age 6 - 11																		
Age 12 - 18																		

3. Children's needs and lifestyles at each age level.

Most parents like to complete the following sections of the worksheet as they think about their children's needs and interests for this year and possibly next year. It is difficult to know what activities may be important to your child in the future. However, it is a good idea to think about what role parents would like to play in a child's life. Plans made now can set the groundwork for those future roles. What will happen if parents cannot get along? Will they take turns attending school events and ball games? Could a neutral third party help keep peace? Some children do not like sharing their parents with the parent's new partner and his/her children. Try to include ample time alone with a child. Some co-parents agree not to bring dates to the child's events.

Children birth to age 3 have short attention spans and limited memory. Parents of infants and toddlers are often overly concerned about overnight visits for infants and toddlers. Actually, more frequent and brief visits are best. Very young children remember and enjoy seeing and interacting with both parents daily, not going more than two to three days without seeing either parent. Some ways to provide this interaction are: visit a baby at child care, take a child for a daily walk and read or look at a story book with a child. In some families, parents can visit the baby in the other parent's home. In some families, it is best to select a more comfortable environment such as the child-care program or a friend or relative's home. List plans for parenting during these years below:

Children ages 3 – 5 can spend a few days away from either parent, but they need time, friends, space, and materials for play, both outdoors and indoors. Some ways to meet these needs are: to have duplicate toys and equipment in both homes, to visit parks, and to attend local events such as nature days designed for preschool children. Transitions are especially difficult for most preschoolers and their parents. They need more time and preparation for each parenting shift change. Calm, relaxed, and cooperative parents can make this lifestyle easier for the child. Write plans for parenting during the preschool years on the lines below:

Children age 6 – 11 are involved in little league sports, scouts, lessons, school, and friends. Parents volunteer as coaches, scout leaders, and teachers. Parents also help with recitals, camps, fund raising, and transportation. This is when children value alone time with each parent and can become jealous of step-parents and their children. School-agers can manage longer periods of time away from either parent quite well, especially if they have opportunity to call or email the absent parent. List plans below.

Month May

Mom's phone: **M** Mom's house

Dad's phone: **D** Dad's house

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		D 1	D 2 Piano	M 3	M 4 Field Trip Piano	M 5	M 6 Soccer Practice
	M 7 Church Picnic	D 8	D 9 Piano	D 10	M 11 Piano	M 12 Science Project Due	D 13 Soccer Practice
	D 14 Art Museum	D 15	D 16 Piano	M 17 Math Test	M 18 Piano	M 19	M 20 Kelly's Birthday Soccer Practice
	M 21 Mother's Day	D 22 Oral Book Report	D 23 Piano	D 24	M 25 Piano	M 26 Spelling Quiz	D 27 Soccer Practice
	D 28 Zoo with Dad	D 29 Make Kite with Mom	D 30 Piano	M 31 End of School!!			

Use the blank calendar below to begin working on family co-parenting plan.

Co-Parenting Calendar

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Once the parenting plan works out, help the child keep track of the schedule. Make copies for both households and for each child's backpack or school/child care locker.

Adolescents Age 12 – 18 tend to have their own lives, especially in the later years. It is part of their developmental stage to become independent of their parents. Most teenagers do not spend much time with their parents. Actually, parents tend to go where their teenagers are: ball games, band performances, graduation or achievement events, college visits, and work. Parents might: hire teenager to work in the business or home, visit prospective colleges, and attend a child's ball games and performances. Write plans for parenting during the teen years on the lines below:

4. Parenting Patterns and Scheduling

There are many ways to schedule parenting time. There are many factors to consider such as the level of cooperation or conflict between parents and the resources available to the family. Many families start with their school and work schedules. Maximize parent involvement and reduce child care costs by coordinating parenting time share with work schedules.

Below are two popular co-parenting patterns. Consider the features of each plan and how well they meet the needs that are important for parents and children. For example, some plans allow the parents to be free to work or take a class on the same night of every week. For some families, guaranteeing each parent one dependable night off a week can be very important.

There is also a blank calendar to use to develop a parenting plan. A mediator will help work on this plan. Present the plan to a judge. Remember that these plans will change depending upon the age of the child. Infants need more frequent contact with each parent. As children get older, parenting involves driving to and attending events in the child's schedule.

5. Living in the Same Town

Living in the same town makes it easier for children to see both parents frequently, for both, or at least one parent to attend special events, and for the children to be with their friends and activities. It also helps to avoid expensive, repeated travel and to reduce the burden on the children. Living in the same town makes it much more likely that parents will be available when needed. There are several ways to plan for this:

1. Parents may agree to live in the same town until the children reach a certain age such as 12 or 18.
2. The parents may agree that the parent who moves away will travel to be with the child in the child's home town or pay for the child to travel.
3. The parent who moves away agrees to pay the cost of the other parent to move to the same town.
4. Parents may agree to share the costs of travel.
5. Parents may agree to consider the economic, educational, and social advantages and disadvantages of one or both parents moving to another town.

Conclusion

Co-Parenting is one of the best gifts to give a child. Co-operative, involved parents make a difference in the child's self-esteem and school success. A positive relationship with both parents, contributes to a child's future happiness in friendships, marriage, and the parenting of grandchildren.

References

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Bray, J.H. (1998, Summer). The family schedule: Crafting custody and visitation arrangement that work. Family Advocate: A practical journal by the American Bar Association Family Law Section, 21:1, 31-35.

Major, A.J. (2000). Creating a successful parenting plan. Los Angeles: Breakthrough Parenting, Inc.

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For Further Information

Contact the OSU Cooperative Extension Office in your county to request any of the following fact sheets and video tapes.

- T-2234 Transitioning through Divorce: Six types of Divorce
- T-2236 Transitioning through Divorce: Five Steps to a Good Divorce
- T-2374 Helping Children Cope: Children and Divorce
- VT 946 Children in the Middle
- VT 954 Shelter from the Storm: Protecting Children of Divorce

Co-Parenting Calendar (1)

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week 1	MOM Dad takes to school/child care; Mom picks up.	MOM	DAD Mom takes to school/child care; Dad picks up.	DAD	DAD	MOM Dad takes to the morning event; Mom picks up.	MOM
Week 2	MOM	MOM	DAD Mom takes to school/child care; Dad picks up.	DAD	DAD	DAD	DAD
Week 3	MOM Dad takes to school/child care; Mom picks up.	MOM	DAD Mom takes to school/child care; Dad picks up.	DAD	MOM Dad takes to school/child care; Mom picks up.	MOM	MOM
Week 4	MOM	MOM	MOM	DAD Mom takes to school/child care; Dad picks up.	DAD	DAD	DAD

Features that might be important to a family: Equal number of overnights and weekends. Same two weekday nights are free each week for mom to work or to take classes. Dad has Thursdays free. On the days children transfer from one home to another, one parent takes the children to school and the other parent picks up the children after school allowing time to know the school and teachers and minimizing transitions with both parents present.

Co-Parenting Calendar (2)

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Week 1	MOM	MOM	MOM Dad picks up after work re- turns at 8pm	MOM	MOM	DAD	DAD
Week 2	MOM	MOM	MOM Dad picks up after work re- turns at 8pm	MOM	MOM	MOM	MOM
Week 3	MOM	MOM	MOM Dad picks up after work re- turns at 8pm	MOM	MOM	DAD	DAD
Week 4	MOM	MOM	MOM Dad picks up after work re- turns at 8pm	MOM	MOM	MOM	MOM

Features: This plan has the child in the same home base for school nights and alternating weekends. Dad's involvement can be increased by his taking the child to school/childcare each morning, picking up the child at school/childcare each evening, visiting the child at school/childcare, taking the child to appointments, sports practice, shopping, and lessons after school/childcare. This arrangement may work well for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers or when Dad lives in another town. Some school-age children and their parents find it difficult to organize school work, supplies, and equipment in two homes. In those cases, the Sunday overnights at Dad's shift to Fridays.