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Family Support Agency

# What is a parenting plan?

Family Mediation Service

**“As parents we have been given the greatest of all gifts...children. Their relationship with us is a lifelong commitment that only we can fulfill”**

With this quote from *“The Single Symphony”* by Susy Yehl Marta, founder of Rainbows, in mind, set out below are the answers to questions which may help separating parents continuing parenting effectively:

## **Why do we need a parenting plan?**

- To provide continuity for children in their relationship with each parent.
- So the children will know when they will be with each of you.
- To provide a structure so everyone is clear about future living arrangements.
- Clearly agreed plans help to reduce conflict.

## **What are the benefits for our children?**

- Children are reassured when they know their parents are in control and are making good decisions about them.
- When parents communicate constructively, they avoid the difficulties children experience when they feel caught between two parents they love.
- Children should not feel that they have to hide information or conceal feelings about the other parent.
- Children do need to be consulted and listened to when expressing their views and concerns but should not be asked to choose between parents.
- Firm, gentle structures provide security.

## **What are the benefits for us as parents?**

- A parenting plan helps separating parents to communicate. Times can be arranged for telephone calls, discussions around money or childrearing, strategies for dealing with grievances if they arise.
- Support in parenting allows a certain sense of freedom to help you rebuild your own life as a single person.
- Each parent gets time off.

- Children will be less likely to play you off against each other.
- Your children can love each of you without feeling disloyal.

## What if my child doesn't want to go to the other parent?

- Try to work together to understand what is upsetting your child.
- Don't take sides or blame each other.
- Don't over react.
- Part of your schedule may need to be re-negotiated.
- Counselling for the child and yourselves as parents may be helpful.

## What if we don't agree on how the other person is parenting?

All parents have their own individual styles of parenting. It is important to allow for different house rules, different parenting, and different ways of relating to the children.

If there are major differences, schedule time to discuss them when the children are not around.

## Shared parenting

### To do and not to do

#### DO

- Be positive
- Support the other parent
- Be flexible
- Be co-operative
- Have the children ready on time
- Consider the children's needs and wishes
- Allow for different house rules

#### DON'T

- Argue in front of the children
- Disappoint the children
- Be late
- Quiz the children
- Criticise the other parent
- Give the children too much power
- Allow the children to play you off against each other

Your child is entitled to the best relationship possible with each of you.

When you support your child's relationship with the other parent, you are promoting your child's healthy adjustment.

## Helping children cope with separation – useful hints

- Respect each family member's way of handling the separation.
- Hugs or a comforting arm give reassurance. Children wonder "Will we still be a family?" Try to create new rituals, develop new traditions.
- Give your children permission to get on with their lives, which may include people you're less enthusiastic about, like a new partner.
- Be ready to say no to the children when necessary. Children feel more secure when limits are set.

**Remember** – it is not separation but the emotional adjustment in the home that is the determining factor in the child's adjustment.

A two parent home is not the only emotional structure within which a child can be happy and healthy.

## What is a parenting plan?

A parenting plan is a carefully devised schedule which lays out how to share time with the children, how to manage responsibilities, and how to make decisions about the children. School arrangements, child care, holidays, pocket money can all be part of a parenting plan. It is a plan that is individual to each family and takes into account everyone's needs and interests.

The Family Mediation Service is a state run service staffed by professionally trained and accredited mediators. It was set up in 1986 and now operates under the auspices of the statutory Family Support Agency. There are 16 offices located around the country.

Full-time offices are located in the following cities:

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*For information on the location of other offices, please contact one of the above numbers or visit [www.fsa.ie/familymediation](http://www.fsa.ie/familymediation)*