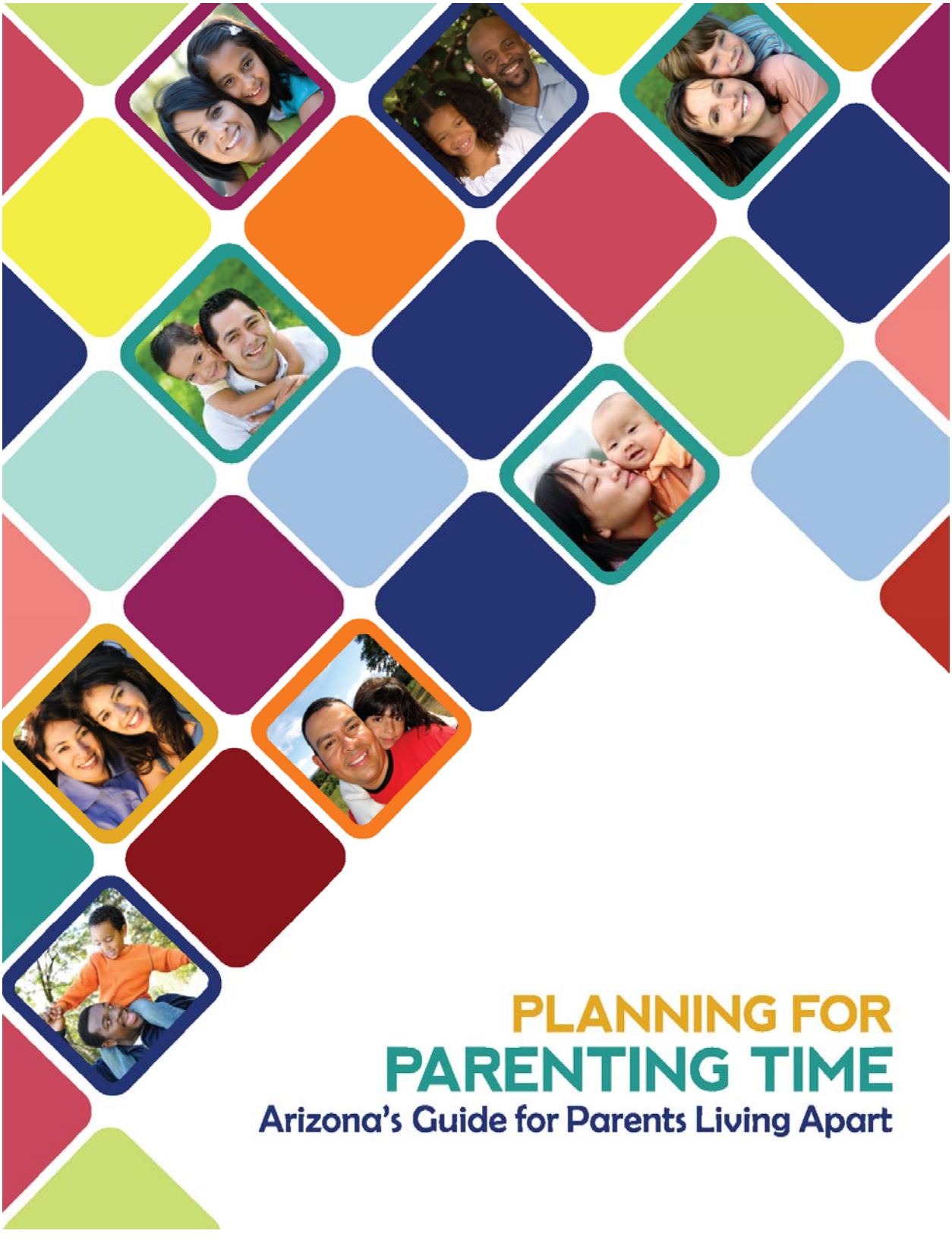

PLANNING FOR PARENTING TIME

Arizona's Guide for Parents Living Apart

IMPORTANT WARNING ON THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS GUIDE

WARNING TO READERS: This guide does not provide legal opinions or legal advice and is not intended to serve as a substitute for the advice of licensed, legal professionals. Neither the Arizona Supreme Court, the Administrative Office of the Courts, nor the authors are engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services through this guide.

The Arizona Supreme Court, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the authors do not warrant that the information herein is complete or accurate and do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any person for any loss or damage caused by errors, inaccuracies, or omissions that may appear in this guide.

Laws and interpretations of laws change frequently, and the material contained in this guide carries with it important legal consequences. Users of this material are solely responsible for determining the applicability of any information contained in this guide to their situation and are strongly encouraged to seek professional legal and other expert assistance in resolving their parenting issues.

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USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is a tool for you to use to design a parenting plan that will work best for you and your children.

This guide for parenting time is intended to provide helpful ideas in making decisions about parenting time. A parenting plan is a document that states when the children will be with each parent (parenting time) and how major decisions will be made (legal custody). This guide provides sample plans for parents to use in reaching agreements or presenting proposals to the court. Attorneys, mental health professionals, mediators, and judges may also find the parenting time plans useful in resolving family court disputes.

Parents are encouraged to read this material and seek additional information and advice in order to make the best decisions for their children. This guide will help parents reduce conflict and reach agreements more easily.

Remember -- This Guide:

- IS a tool for parents;
- IS NOT "the law";
- DOES NOT prohibit or limit parents or judges from creating parenting plans that differ from the sample plans presented here;
- DOES NOT mandate a minimum or maximum amount of parenting time for either parent; and
- MAY NOT be helpful in all circumstances.

TO PARENTS

Raising children presents challenges. When parents live in separate homes, the challenges are greater because relationships become more complicated. Sometimes parents disagree about how much time children should spend with each parent.

A statewide committee of judicial officers, mental health providers, and attorneys created this planning guide after consulting with well-known experts on child development and after reviewing current research and guidelines from other communities. Decisions about parenting time depend on many things, particularly the age of the child. This guide offers information about what a child learns, feels, and needs at different ages. It also provides suggested plans for each age group.

Unless special circumstances exist, preserving a healthy and ongoing relationship between children and both parents after divorce or separation is of greatest importance. Positive involvement with both parents furthers the child's emotional and social development, academic achievement, and overall adjustment. Adult children of divorce describe the loss of contact with a parent and conflict between their parents as the most painful part of divorce or parental separation.

WHY PARENTING PLANS ARE NECESSARY

Written parenting plans provide children and parents with predictability and consistency and can prevent future conflict. This guide encourages open discussion and cooperation between parents. Courts prefer that parents reach agreements about parenting time. When parents reach agreements, they are more likely to cooperate as their children grow up. Children do best when their parents cooperate with each other. The reverse is also true. Children who experience ongoing conflict between parents are at high risk for suffering serious long-term emotional problems. If parents need help to work out the schedules, court-sponsored and private mediation services are available in most Arizona counties.

The parenting plan will also include a statement about legal custody. In Arizona, parents may have sole or joint legal custody. Parents may agree that one parent will have sole custody or that joint legal

custody is in their children's best interests. A parent who has sole custody has the right to make major decisions about the children's health, education, and religious upbringing. Parents who have joint legal custody make such decisions together, unless otherwise specified. Parents with joint legal custody do not necessarily have equal parenting time.

The key to successful co-parenting is a written parenting plan that states the agreements parents reach about legal custody, the sharing of rights and privileges, and the schedule for parenting time. In Arizona, joint legal custody requires a written parenting plan that must be reviewed periodically and provides a way to resolve conflicts about custody and parenting time. The parenting plan also must include a statement that joint custody does not necessarily mean equal parenting time.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- Read the plans for your child's age.
- Talk with the other parent about custody and parenting time that meets your family's needs.
- Use the blank calendar on page 9 of this guide to mark the days and times each parent will have parenting time. This guide includes sample calendars with sample language to include in court orders. *These are examples only.* You can choose any days or times you wish.
- Parenting plan forms are available at self-service centers, in courthouses, and on the Internet. Fill out the form and file it with the court.
- If you need help, contact your local Conciliation Services Department at the superior court or a private mediator. (See page 62 for more information.)

WHICH PLAN SHOULD WE CHOOSE?

The following parenting time options are designed to allow parents or the judge, if necessary, to choose the proper plan after considering the family's unique circumstances. Children differ in how long they are comfortable being away from each parent. Some children like spending more time at one home, while others move between homes easily. Parents may need to accept disruption of their own schedule and spend more or less time with their children than they prefer so they can give the children a sense of security and well-being.

When choosing a plan, parents should think about the child's relationship with each parent. It may benefit the child to change from one plan to another as the child gets older. If a parent has never been a part of a child's life or hasn't had contact with the child for an extended period, parenting time should start slowly and gradually increase as the child adjusts and feels comfortable.

If parents don't agree on custody and parenting time, the judge will evaluate the case, decide custody, and order a plan the judge finds is in the children's best interests.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PLAN

- How old is the child?
- How mature is the child?
- What is the child's personality?
- How strong is the child's attachment to each parent?
- Does the child or do the parents have any special needs?
- What are the child's relationships with siblings and friends?
- Are the parents' homes too far apart to maintain regular and frequent contact? (See page 49 on "Long–Distance Parenting and Relocation.")
- How flexible are the parents' and child's schedules?
- What childcare arrangements are needed?
- How and where will exchanges take place?
- How will transportation be provided?
- How well can the parents communicate and cooperate?
- What are the child's and the parents' cultural and religious practices?

- Are there any parental fitness concerns, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health problems?
- What is each parent's ability and availability to care for the child's needs?
- Will the parent be able to exercise the parenting time consistently?

CHILDREN *BENEFIT* WHEN PARENTS:

- Help the child have regular contact with the other parent by phone, letter, audio and videotapes, e-mail, and other forms of communication
- Keep predictable schedules
- Are on time and have the child ready when it's time for the child to go with the other parent
- Exchange the child without arguing
- Support the child's relationship with the other parent
- Let the child carry "important" items such as favorite clothes, toys, and security blankets with them between the parents' homes
- Follow similar routines for mealtime, bedtime, and homework time
- Handle rules and discipline in similar ways
- Support contact with grandparents, step-parents, and other extended family so the child doesn't lose these relationships
- Are flexible so the child can take part in special family celebrations and events
- Give as much advance notice as possible to the other parent about special occasions or necessary changes to the schedule
- Provide the other parent with travel dates, destinations, and places where the child and the parent can be reached when on vacation
- Establish workable and respectful communication with the other parent
- Plan their vacations around the child's regularly scheduled activities.

CHILDREN ARE *HARMED* WHEN PARENTS:

- Make their child choose between them
- Question their child about the other parent's activities or relationships
- Make promises they don't keep
- Drop in and out of the child's life
- Are inconsistent in using their parenting time
- Argue with or put down the other parent in front of the child or where the child can overhear
- Discuss their personal problems with the child or where the child can overhear
- Use the child as a messenger, spy, or mediator
- Stop or interfere with parenting time because child support hasn't been paid
- Don't show respect for each other
- Undermine the child's relationship with the other parent.

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULES

The following plans are just ideas that may or may not work for your children. Feel free to use one of the numbered plans or design a plan that works best for your children, based on work, school, activities, and other considerations.

Use this blank calendar to design the schedule that best meets your needs.

It's recommended that you read the Child Development section that applies to your child before deciding on a parenting time schedule.

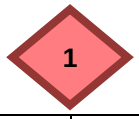
Parenting Time Schedule						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tues**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Fri**	**Sat**

SUMMARY OF PARENTING TIME SCHEDULES

Plan No.	Description	PAGE	BIRTH-24 MOS.	24 – 36 MOS.	3 – 5 YEARS	6 – 9 YEARS	10 -12 YEARS	TEENAGERS
	Three periods of 3-5 hours spaced throughout each week	12 23	✓					
	Two periods of 4-6 hours spaced throughout each week	12 23	✓					
	Two 3-5 hour periods and one 8-hour period spaced throughout each week	12 23 24 25	✓	✓	✓			
	Two periods of 3-6 hours and 1 overnight each week	13 23 24	✓	✓	✓			
	One period of three to six hours and two non-consecutive overnights each week	13 24 26	✓	✓	✓			
	An equal parenting time schedule where the child isn't away from the other parent for more than two consecutive days ***Caution** – This plan is designed **only** for those parents who can agree on this plan.	14 24	✓*	✓*	✓*			
	One period of 3-6 hours and two consecutive overnights each week	15 27		✓	✓			

Plan No.	Description	PAGE	BIRTH-2 YEARS	2 TO 3 YEARS	3 – 5 YEARS	6 – 9 YEARS	10 -12 YEARS	TEENAGERS
8	Two days with one parent (including overnights) followed by 3 days with the other parent (including overnights) with this schedule continuing over time	15 27		✓	✓			
9	Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week.	16 29 32 36 42			✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional 4-6-hour period each week	16 29 32 36 43			✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2	17 29 33 37 43			✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Split each week and weekend	18 30 33 37 43			✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Each parent has the same 2 consecutive weekday overnights each week and alternates the weekends	19 30 34 38 43			✓	✓	✓	✓
14	The parents share time with the child during alternating 7-day periods. A midweek overnight period is optional with the parent who doesn't have parenting time that week.	20 34 38 44				✓	✓	✓

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLANS 1, 2 AND 3



Parenting Time: Plan 1

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Plans 1, 2, and 3:

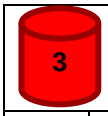
- The child has frequent but short visits with the non-custodial parent.
- Offers consistency and predictability
- The custodial parent gets a few "breaks" throughout the week.

Disadvantages of Plans 1, 2, and 3:

- There are 6 exchanges each week, which might be difficult if the parents don't get along.
- The week may seem a bit "choppy" or broken up.

Parenting Time: Plan 2

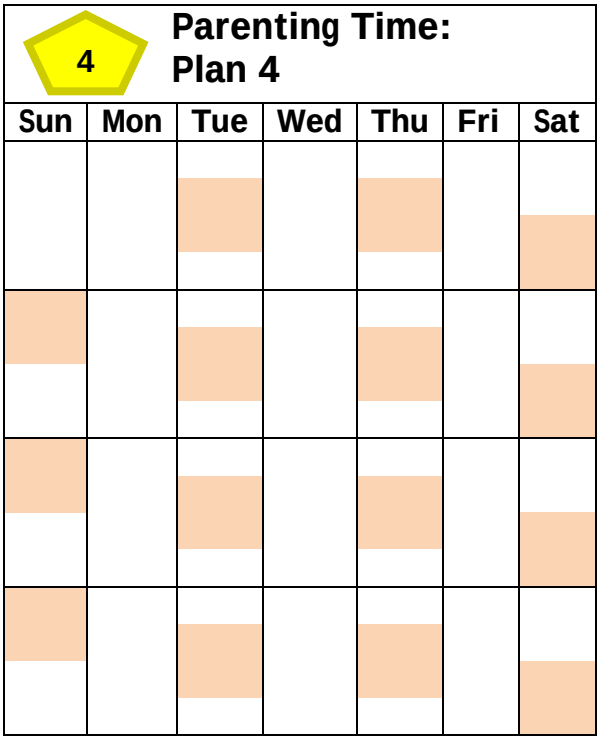
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat



Parenting Time: Plan 3

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLANS 4 AND 5



Advantages of Plan 4:

- The child has frequent but short visits with the non-custodial parent.
- The custodial parent has a few "breaks" throughout the week.
- There is consistency and predictability.

Disadvantages of Plan 4:

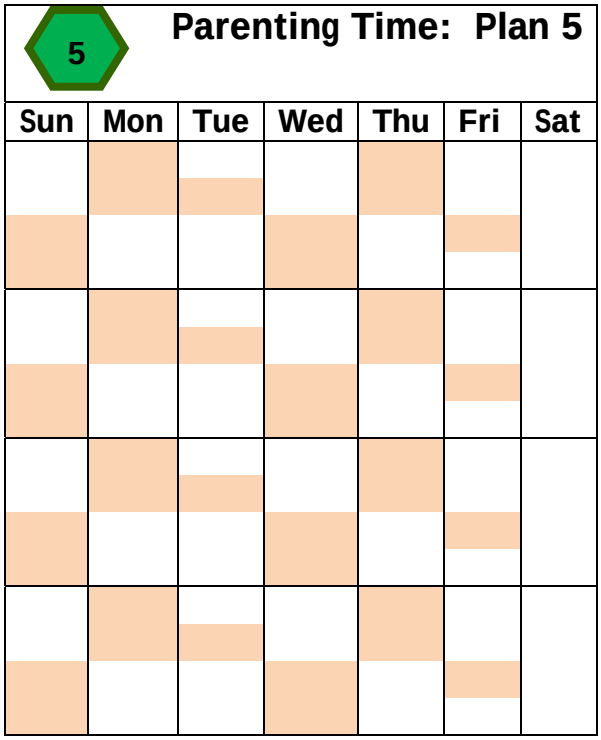
- There are 5-6 exchanges each week, which might be difficult if the parents don't get along.
- The week may seem a bit "choppy" or broken up.

Advantages of Plan 5:

- The child has frequent but short visits with the non-custodial parent.
- The custodial parent has almost daily "breaks."

Disadvantages of Plan 5:

- There are many (almost daily) exchanges, which might be difficult if the parents don't get along.
- The week may seem a bit "choppy" or broken up.



PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLAN 6

6 **Parenting Time: Plan 6**

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Plan 6

- The child never goes more than two days without seeing a parent.
- Many parents like the longer blocks of time to better bond with the child.

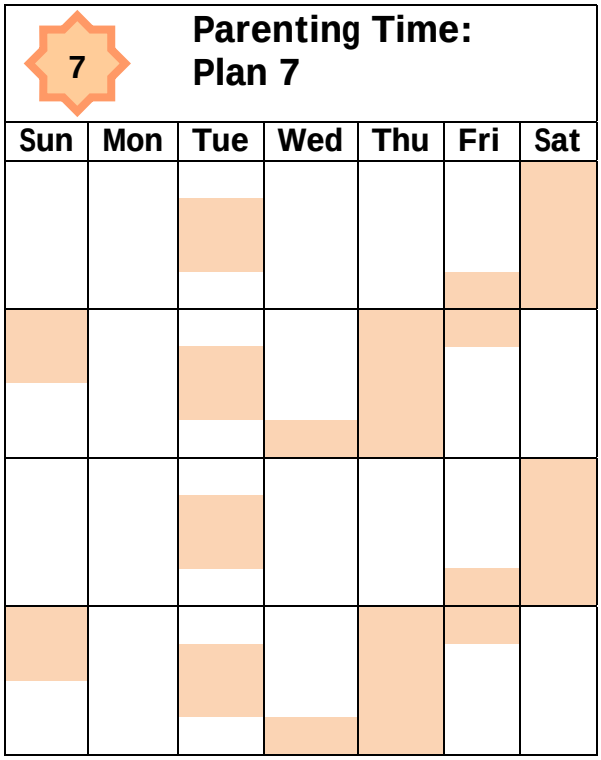
Disadvantages of Plan 6

- There is no consistency (what happens in one week does not happen again for four weeks), which may make it hard to make plans.
- Some young children may dislike not seeing a parent for two full days.
- The week may seem a bit "choppy" or broken up.
- Neither parent has a full weekend with or without the child.

Comment: The use of Plan 6 requires a high degree of communication between the parents, a low level of conflict about how to parent, and work schedules and living arrangements that limit the stress on the child. Plan 6 is designed only for those parents who can agree on this plan.

Research clearly shows that children **are at risk of being harmed** if parents argue, act disrespectfully toward each other, and can't talk to each other about their child.

PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLANS 7 AND 8



Advantages of Plan 7:

- The child sees the non-custodial parent 3-5 days per week and the custodial parent almost daily.

Disadvantages of Plan 7:

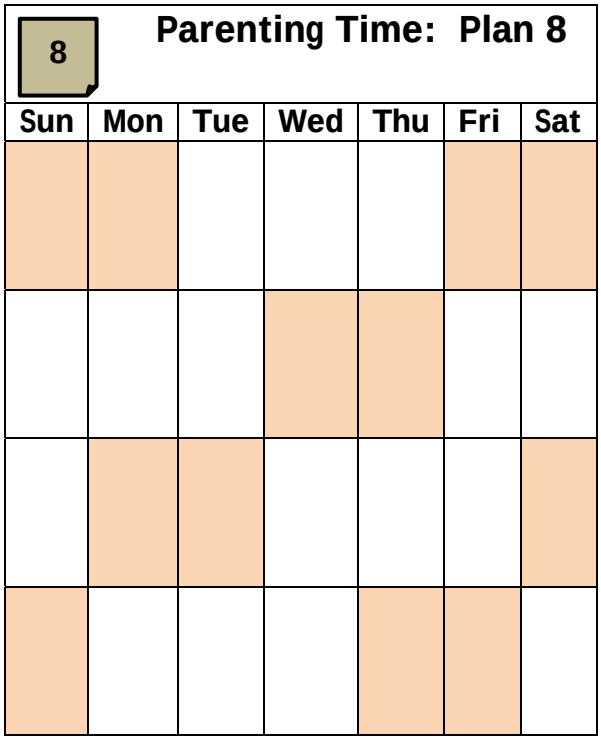
- Only Mondays are consistent every week.
- May seem "choppy" or fragmented
- There are 3-5 exchanges each week, which might be difficult if the parents don't get along.

Advantages of Plan 8:

- Each parent has solid blocks of time (2-3 days) with the child.

Disadvantages of Plan 8:

- Inconsistent from week to week (what happens on Monday in Week 1 doesn't occur in Week 2)
- It may be confusing for the parents to follow and remember which days they are to care for the child.
- Only rarely would a parent have a full weekend.
- It might be hard to arrange the child's extracurricular activities unless both parents agree. For example, if one parent wants to enroll the child in karate on Mondays and the other parent doesn't agree, the child may miss several lessons.



PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLANS 9 AND 10

9 Parenting Time: Plan 9

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Plans 9 and 10:

- Consistency/predictability throughout the school week

Disadvantages of Plans 9 and 10:

- Limited time for one parent
- The child does not see one parent for six days in alternate weeks.

10 **Parenting Time: Plan 10**

S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S

Alternate Sundays can be overnights.

Optional Plan 10 modification:

Parenting Time: Plan 10

S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S

Alternate Wednesdays (before other parent's weekend) can be overnight.

- *Every Wednesday can be overnight OR*
- *Both alternate Wednesdays and alternate Sundays are overnight.*

11 PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLAN 11 (ALTERNATING WEEKENDS)

Parenting Time: Plan 11						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tues**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Fri**	**Sat**

Advantages of Plan 11:

- Minimal parental face-to-face contact (none if exchange is Monday morning at school and pick-up is every Thursday at school)
- Consistency and predictability most weekdays (school days)
- Alternate prolonged weekends (Thursday-Sunday) often appealing in the summer for short trips

Disadvantages of Plan 11:

- Six-day block every other week when the child does not see the non-residential parent
- Some children may have difficulty on Monday at school after being away from the primary parent for four days.

Optional Plan 11 modifications:

Parenting Time – Plan 11						
S	**M**	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**S**

End weekend on Sunday evening

Parenting Time – Plan 11						
S	**M**	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**S**

Add Wednesday in alternate weeks

12 PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLAN 12 (SPLIT WEEK)

Parenting Time : Plan 12						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

Advantages of Plan 12:

- The child never goes more than three days without seeing a parent.
- Consistency and predictability each week
- The child can "settle in" at each household for a few days.
- Most children enjoy having a "stay home" (weekend) day with each parent every week.

Disadvantages of Plan 12:

- Neither parent has a full weekend (although this can be accommodated with flexibility and/or with the holiday and vacation plans).

Optional Plan 12 modifications:

Parenting Time: Plan 12						
S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S

The exchange can occur on Saturday evening.

Parenting Time: Plan 12						
S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S

The exchange can alternate between Saturday evening one week and Sunday morning the next week.

13 PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLAN 13

Parenting Time: Plan 13						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tues**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Fri**	**Sat**

Advantages of Plan 13:

- All exchanges can occur at school or daycare, which is easier for most children to handle.
- No parental face-to-face contact, which makes this an ideal plan for high-conflict parents
- Consistency and predictability on weekdays
- Full weekends for each parent
- Five-day blocks may be appealing to many parents (especially in the summer for "mini" vacations").

Disadvantages of Plan 13:

- Five days may be too long to be away from one or both parents.
- Transitioning every 2-5 days may seem hard for some children (especially ensuring that their clothes, books, toys, etc., accompany them).

Optional Plan 13 modification:

The Wednesday/Thursday parent's time can end on Sunday evening.

Parenting Time: Plan 13						
S	**M**	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**S**

14 PARENTING TIME SCHEDULE: PLAN 14 (ALTERNATING WEEKS)

Parenting Time: Plan 14						
Sun	**Mon**	**Tues**	**Wed**	**Thurs**	**Fri**	**Sat**

Advantages of Plan 14:

- Limited transitions (actually none if transitions occur at school)
- The child is able to "settle in" at each parent's home.
- By starting the alternate week on Friday, the child has the weekend to adjust to the upcoming family environment.

Disadvantages of Plan 14:

- Requires effective parental communication and cooperation to arrange weekly activities (for example, soccer on Tuesdays would have to be agreed upon, flute lessons on Thursday, etc.)
- Seven days away from each parent may be unsettling for some children (particularly younger ones).
- Transitioning to the other parent's household after being gone a week may be difficult.

Optional Plan 14 modification:

Parenting Time: Plan 14						
Sun	**M**	**Tu**	**W**	**Th**	**F**	**Sat**

Add a mid-week visit (limited hours or overnight).

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SUGGESTED PARENTING PLANS

These plans take into consideration different kinds of situations between parents and children. The bond between a parent and child will continue to grow as long as the parent remains actively involved with the child. However, some parents may not have had the opportunity to begin forming that bond. For example, when a plan includes overnights, it's presumed that the parent with parenting time not only has care-giving experience but that the child is sufficiently bonded to and used to being in the care of that parent.

BIRTH TO 2 YEARS

Babies learn quickly. They are learning to love and trust familiar caregivers. Babies become attached to parents and others through consistent, loving responses such as holding, playing, feeding, soothing, talking gently and lovingly, stimulating, creating bedtime and bath time routines, and prompt attention to their needs. Babies begin to respond to a range of different (but equally valuable) types of parenting styles that each parent provides.

Most parents have different ways of parenting. It's helpful if parents share information about how they're parenting the child while the child is in their care. In addition, parents need to be sensitive to their baby's emotional reactions, ability to adjust to changes when going from one parent to the other, and mood. It helps when parents talk about these things when making or changing schedules.

Babies can't remember things they experienced over time – in other words, "out of sight, out of mind." Therefore, it's important that they have frequent contact with each of their parents and have a stable schedule and routine. On the other hand, babies do have "emotional memories" of conflict that can have long-term negative effects, so parents shouldn't argue when children, even babies, can hear the arguing. Many babies are sensitive to the tension between the parents at exchange, time, so if you can't be pleasant to each other, you may need someone else to help with the exchange times.

At around six months, babies can recognize their parents and other caregivers and may become uneasy around strangers. Regular

caregivers understand how the child signals the need for food, comfort, and sleep. When away from parents or significant caregivers, babies may become anxious and have eating and sleeping problems. However, being away from one parent or caregiver and in the care of the other parent to whom the child is bonded shouldn't be a problem for most babies.

Babies have basic sleep, feeding, and waking schedules. It's important to keep the baby on these schedules. Parents should work out their own plans so they don't interfere with the baby's normal routine. Also, in creating parenting plans for this age group, parents ought to think about the special needs of breast-feeding babies. Nursing mothers may want to express milk and send bottles with the baby so the father can feed the baby during his parenting time. (For more information, see Breast-Feeding on page 57.)

Make exchanges easier for your child by following predictable schedules, avoiding conflict with the other parent in front of your child, and supporting your child's relationship with the other parent.

One- to two-year-olds are becoming more aware of the world around them and the people who have a lot of contact with them. A baby at this age can be attached to many caregivers, including grandparents, extended family members, and daycare providers. Babies are also becoming independent and developing the ability to comfort themselves by thumb sucking or holding onto favorite blankets or toys. Their sleeping and eating schedules are becoming regular. They continue to respond to the different types of nurturing provided by their parents. Two-year-olds commonly test parental limits ("terrible twos"), and consistent and loving parental responses can build the child's self-esteem for years to come.

Moving between the parents' homes may be difficult for some youngsters, and they may become upset at these times. For some children, resistance to exchange time is normal. This behavior doesn't necessarily mean that the other parent isn't a good parent or that the child doesn't want to be with the other parent. While parents need to be sensitive to whatever the child is experiencing, most children calm down shortly after the exchange. You can make exchanges easier for your child by following predictable schedules, avoiding conflict with the other parent in front of your child, and supporting your child's relationship with the other parent.

DESIGNING A PLAN FOR BIRTH TO 2 YEARS

***Plans 1** and **2** are for when:*

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not yet developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.*

Plan 1 -- Three periods of three to five hours spaced throughout each week (See a sample schedule on page 12.)

Comment: Frequent contact helps the child bond with each parent, something that is important for the child's healthy development.

Plan 2 -- Two periods of four to six hours spaced throughout each week (See a sample schedule on page 12.)

Comment: This plan is more helpful than Plan 1 when the parents' work schedules, living situations, or levels of conflict with each other make more frequent exchanges difficult. Because this plan has only two visits each week, bonding between the parent and child may take a little more time, and the child may have difficulty going from one parent to the other.

Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule aren't recommended unless the parents agree.

Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

***Plan 3** is meant for situations where:*

- *Parents have been using Plans 1 or 2 for some time, or*
- *Parents may start with Plan 3 when both*

Plan 3 – Two periods of three to five hours and one period of eight hours spaced throughout each week (See a sample schedule on page 12.)

Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule aren't recommended unless the parents agree.

parents have a bond with the child, or

- *When parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but where one of the parents has less available time than the other to devote to the child.*

Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

Plans 4, 5, *and* ***6*** *include overnights. These plans are for parents who:*

- *Have cared for the child about equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child won't have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Parents have been successfully following Plan 3 for a while.*

Plan 4 -- Two periods of three to six hours and one overnight each week (See a sample schedule on page 13.)

Plan 5 -- One period of three to six hours and two non-consecutive overnights each week. (See a sample schedule on page 13.)

Plan 6 -- An equal parenting time schedule where the child isn't away from the other parent for more than two consecutive days (See a sample schedule on page 14.)
Comment: The use of Plan 6 requires a high degree of communication between the parents, a low level of conflict about how to parent, and work schedules and living arrangements that limit the difficulties on the child. Plan 6 is designed only for those parents who can agree on this plan.
Caution: Research clearly shows that children **<u>are at risk of being harmed</u>** if parents argue, act disrespectfully toward each other, and can't talk to each other about their child.

Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule aren't recommended unless the parents agree.

Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

2 TO 3 YEARS

Ages two to three are an important time for children to develop independent skills. Although children this age are learning to be independent, they may still cling to their caregiver and resist separation, even from one parent to the other. They may say "NO!" to parents' requests and demands just to express their independence. They may also be fearful about unfamiliar activities and objects.

Predictable, regularly scheduled routines help children manage their fears and help them learn that the world is a safe place. Moving between parents' homes may become difficult for some children at this age, and they may become upset. This behavior doesn't necessarily mean that the other parent isn't a good parent or that the child doesn't want to be with the other parent. Parents must continue to ensure that the transitions between the two parents' homes are free of parental arguing and tension.

DESIGNING A PLAN FOR 2 TO 3 YEARS

***Plans 3** and **4** are for when:*

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not yet*

Plan 3: Two periods of three to five hours and one period of eight hours spaced throughout each week (See a sample schedule on page 12.)

Plan 3 Vacation: Vacations that are much different from the regular parenting time schedule aren't recommended unless the parents agree.

Plan 4: Two periods of three to six hours and one overnight each week (See a sample schedule on page 13.)

developed a bond with a parent, or

- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.*

Plan 4 Vacation: Parents may have two one-week periods separated by at least four weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

*Parents may start with **Plan 5** when:*

- *Both parents have a bond with the child, or*
- *Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but where one parent has less available time than the other to devote to the child, or*
- *Parents have been using Plans 3 and 4 for some time.*

Plan 5: One period of three to six hours and two non-consecutive overnights each week. (See a sample schedule on page 13.)
Comment: Ideally, a child this age shouldn't be separated on a regular schedule from either parent for longer than three days. For legitimate reasons, however, such as vacation and other such reasons, children can be separated from either parent for somewhat longer periods of time, up to a week if need be.

Vacation: Parents may have two one-week periods separated by at least four weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

***Plans* 7** and **8** *include overnights. Plans 7 and 8 are for parents who:*

- *Have cared for the child about equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child won't have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*

Parents can also change to Plan 7 after successfully following Plan 5 for a while.

Plan 7: One period of three to six hours and two consecutive overnights each week. (See a sample schedule on page 15.)

Plan 8: Two days with one parent (including overnights) followed by three days with the other parent (including overnights) with this schedule continuing over time. This plan requires both parents to live near enough to one another, manage conflicts away from their child, and communicate well about their child. This plan may also be appropriate when there is an older child who spends considerable time with both parents. (See a sample schedule on page 15.)

Vacation: Parents may have two one-week periods separated by at least four weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents should consider dividing holidays or special occasions in time blocks similar to their regular parenting time.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

3 TO 5 YEARS

Three- to five-year-olds are attached to their regular caregivers, and separation may make them uncomfortable and anxious. They may also be fearful about unfamiliar activities and objects and may experience night fears like "monsters" under the bed.

Three- to five-year-olds may show increased emotional discomfort when moving between parents' homes. Some of these children may become very upset at these times. This behavior doesn't necessarily mean that the other parent isn't a good parent or that the child doesn't want to be with the other parent. Parents can make exchanges easier for children by following predictable schedules and making sure the child isn't exposed to conflict between the parents.

Children are more likely to resist going to the other parent if the parents are tense or hostile or argue with each other at the exchange. If tension is present, the child might become difficult to manage or might act out negative feelings. If parents can't be nice to each other, or at least civil, they should avoid talking to each other at these exchanges. Parents must not use the child as a messenger to communicate with the other parent. Children may also feel more secure if they can take favorite stuffed toys, family photos, or other objects that will remind them of the other parent.

After age three, children become more aware of holiday celebrations. Parents should schedule holidays, which may be religious, cultural, or national, that are meaningful to the child and the family. Parents should also include birthdays, Mother's Day, and Father's Day in the parenting plan.

Three- to five-year-olds may benefit from structured time with children their own age, away from parents. This time helps them develop social skills and learn that they can be safe and happy away from both parents.

DESIGNING A PLAN FOR 3 TO 5 YEARS

The plans suggested for the 2- to 3-year age group are also appropriate for this age child.

***Plans 9** and **10** are for when:*

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not yet developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.*

Plan 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Plan 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Vacation: Each parent may have up to 10 days in town or out of town each year or two one-week periods taken separated by at least three weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: See the "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

*Parents may start with **Plan 11** when:*

- *Both parents have a bond with the child, or*
- *Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but where one parent has less available time than the other to devote to the child, or*
- *Parents have been successfully using*

Plan 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2 (See a sample schedule on page 17.)

Vacation: Each parent may have up to 10 days in town or out of town each year or two one-week periods taken separated by at least three weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Plans 9 and 10 for some time.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

***Plans 12** and **13** include overnights. Plans 12 and 13 are for parents who:*

- *Have cared for the child about equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child won't have long car trips between the homes, or*
- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Parents have been successfully following Plan 1 for a while.*

Plan 12: Split each week and weekend. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)
Comment: This plan provides a consistent routine and accommodates a young child's ability to be apart from either parent for three to four days. It also allows the child to have a "stay home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week, which is helpful to many young children. If parents dislike not having full weekend parenting time, the schedule may be modified to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. If desired, parents may alternate exchanges so one week one parent has three overnights and the other has four overnights and the next week the number of overnights is reversed.

Plan 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive weekday overnights each week and alternates the weekends. (See a sample schedule on page 19.)
Comment: This plan provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The child is away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days, which may be difficult for some children this age. This is commonly referred to as a 5-2-2-5 schedule. This plan is ideal when older siblings would benefit from this schedule. This plan is helpful when the parents' level of conflict makes exchanges difficult, because all exchanges can take place at day care.

Vacation: Each parent may have up to 10 days in town or out of town each year or two one-week periods taken separated by at least three weeks. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

6 TO 9 YEARS

Six- to nine-year-old children may worry that one parent doesn't love them or that they will lose one parent. They may miss the absent parent and feel sad, confused, and angry about their parents' divorce. They also may try to get their parents to back together.

Some six- to nine-year-old children benefit from spending more time at one home, while others move back and forth on a regular basis with ease. Children differ in how long they are comfortable being away from each parent. Some may be comfortable being away from their custodial or primary residential parent on a regular basis for two or more days. If the child has spent considerable quality time with the parent who has parenting time, the child may cope better with a long separation from the other parent. As a child matures, longer periods of parenting time with fewer exchanges between parents may be preferred.

In making a parenting time schedule, parents should keep their work schedules in mind and try to use their time off from work to spend as

much time as possible with the child. If a parent's work schedule changes from week to week, the parenting plan may let that parent spend time with the child on the parent's days off from work after giving plenty of advance notice to the other parent.

DESIGNING A PLAN FOR 6 TO 9 YEARS

Plans 9 *and* ***10*** *are for when:*

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not yet developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.*

Plan 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Plan 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

*Parents may start with **Plan 11** when:*

- *Both parents have a bond with the child, or*
- *Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but where one parent has less available time than the other to devote to the child, or*
- *Parents have been using Plans 9 and 10 for some time.*

Plan 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. (See a sample schedule on page 17.)

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

***Plans 12, 13,** and **14** include overnights. These plans are for parents who:*

- *Have cared for the child about equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child won't have long*

Plan 12: Split each week and weekend. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)

Comment: This plan lets the parents take part about equally in the child's school life. It provides a consistent routine, accommodates a child's ability to be apart from either parent for three or four days, and allows the child to have a "stay home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week, which is helpful to many young children. Parents who want full weekends with or without the child may not like this schedule, but it can be written to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. Also, the schedule can be written so that

car trips between the homes, or

- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Parents have been successfully following Plan 11 for a while.*

in Week 1, Parent A has three overnights and Parent B has four, and in Week 2, Parent B has three overnights and Parent A has four.

13

Plan 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternates the weekends. This is commonly referred to as the 5-2-2-5 plan. Each week, the child spends Monday and Tuesday night with Parent A and Wednesday and Thursday night with Parent B. In Week 1, the child spends the weekend with Parent A. In Week 2, the child spends the weekend with Parent B. (See the sample schedule on page 19.)

Comment: This plan provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The child is away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days, which may be difficult for some children. This plan is helpful when the parents' level of conflict makes exchanges difficult, because all exchanges can take place at school or day care.

14

Plan 14: The parents share time with the child during alternating seven-day periods. A midweek overnight period is optional with the parent who doesn't have parenting time that week. The best exchange time in most cases is Friday after school or work. (See a sample schedule on page 20.)

Comment: The more consistent the child's life is from week to week, the easier it is for the child. Parents who can't communicate and work well with each other will find it hard to make this plan succeed for the child. For example, if one parent wants to enroll the child in karate lessons on Tuesday evenings, the other parent should take the child to karate when the child is with that parent. As another example, the child may have a hard time in school if Parent A handles homework differently than Parent B. All exchanges for this plan can take place at school or daycare if desired.

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

10 TO 12 YEARS

Ten- to 12-year-old children often want to be independent from their parents and are becoming more attached to their friends. They may blame one parent for the divorce, may be angry and embarrassed by the breakup of the family, and may side with one parent.

Children of this age often want to have a say in where they live. Parents should let them express their views, while making it clear it is up to the parents to make the final decisions. As children begin junior high school, parents should make sure the parenting plan considers the child's school and extracurricular activities. The parents also should consider the child's desire for an occasional overnight with friends away from both homes. Parents should be

flexible while at the same time making sure that each parent has parenting time regularly.

DESIGNING A PLAN FOR 10 TO 12 YEARS

Plans 9 *and* ***10*** *are for when:*

- *The child will spend less time with one parent because of work schedules, living arrangements, or great distance between homes, or*
- *The child has not yet developed a bond with a parent, or*
- *A parent has limited parenting skills, or*
- *The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.*

Plan 9: Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three- to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Plan 10: Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

*Parents may start with **Plan 11** when:*

- *Both parents have a bond with the child, or*
- *Parenting skills of each parent are adequate, but where one parent has less available time than the other to devote to the child, or*
- *Parents have been using Plans 9 and 10 for some time.*

Plan 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. (See a sample schedule on page 17.)

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

***Plans 12, 13,** and **14** include overnights. These plans are for parents who:*

- *Have cared for the child about equally, or*
- *Both know how to care for the child overnight, or*
- *Live close enough to each other that the child won't have long*

Plan 12: Split each week and weekend. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)

Comment: This plan lets the parents take part about equally in the child's school life. It also provides a consistent routine, accommodates a child's ability to be apart from either parent for three or four days, and allows the child to have a "stay home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week, which is helpful to many young children. Parents who want full weekends with or without the child may not like this schedule, but it can be written to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. Also, the schedule can be

car trips between the homes, or

- *Can communicate and cooperate with each other about the child's care and well-being, or*
- *Parents have been successfully following Plan 11 for a while.*

written so that in Week 1, Parent A has three overnights and Parent B as four, and in Week 2, Parent B has three overnights and Parent A has four.

13

Plan 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternates the weekends. This is commonly referred to as the 5-2-2-5 plan. Each week, the child spends Monday and Tuesday night with Parent A and Wednesday and Thursday night with Parent B. In Week 1, the child spends the weekend with Parent A. In Week 2, the child spends the weekend with Parent B. (See the sample schedule on page 19.)

Comment: This plan provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The child is away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days, which may be difficult for some children. This plan is helpful when the parents' level of conflict makes exchanges difficult, because all exchanges can take place at school or day care.

14

Plan 14: The parents share time with the child during alternating seven-day periods. A midweek overnight period is optional with the parent who doesn't have parenting time that week. The best exchange time in most cases is Friday after school or work. (See a sample schedule on page 20.)

Comment: The more consistent the child's life is from week to week, the easier it is for the child. Parents who can't communicate and work well with each other will find it hard to make this plan succeed for the child. For example, if one parent wants to enroll the child in karate lessons on Tuesday evenings, the other parent should take the child to karate when the child is with that parent. As another example, the child may have a hard time in school if Parent A handles homework differently than Parent B. All exchanges for this plan can take place at school or daycare if desired.

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation.

Holidays: Parents may alternate, share, or split the holidays for children of this age. The "Holidays, Vacations, and School Breaks" section on page 45 offers some ideas of what to think about and how to divide holidays and other special days.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

TEENAGERS (13 TO 18 YEARS)

The teenager is developing greater independence and beginning to separate from the family, including both parents. Teens start to feel like young adults who think they no longer need their parents, but they also have times when they still want their parents to take care of them. They begin to plan for driving and dating, and they are thinking about college or work.

They are feeling the pressures of school, family, and friends, and they may not like a strict parenting time schedule. They may show their dissatisfaction by becoming irritable or moody or having an attitude they never had before. Many lack the skills to express the many strong but conflicting emotions that go along with growing up. When parents are establishing a parenting time schedule or thinking about making changes in an existing schedule, they should give more

thought to the needs and wishes of their teenager. Parents should let them express their views, while making it clear it is up to the parents to make the final decisions.

During a separation or divorce, parents often feel the need to pull their teen closer to them to reassure themselves they aren't losing their child to the other parent. Sometimes parents are tempted to get their child on their side. A teen may avoid both parents or reject one parent and cling to the other, especially if the parents are putting them in the middle of their conflict. Some teens want little or nothing to do with either parent and turn to friends or others to talk to who aren't part of the conflict. Teens are often confused and angry at the way their parents are acting and may feel their parents haven't been concerned about how the divorce or separation is affecting them. The strong conflicting emotions they experience may cause them to act in new and unfamiliar ways as they struggle to deal with these changes in their lives. Therefore, parents shouldn't assume that their child's mood swings or acting out are caused by the other parent.

Parents should let their teen express his or her views, while making it clear it is up to the parents to make the final parenting time decisions.

13 TO 15 YEARS – EARLY TEENS

Children between ages 13 and 15 continue to use the family as a base of support and guidance. This is a time when the child is striving for independence but still is tied to the parents. Teens, for many different reasons, begin to assert more independence at different ages. Decision-making abilities vary widely among teens in this age group as well as from one situation to another.

Teens often have outside interests that compete with the scheduled parenting plan. They frequently prefer to spend more time with their friends than their parents and may become resentful or angry if they can't do what they want to do.

Teens may try to reach a deal with one or both parents to get what they want, which may affect either parent's parenting time. It's important for parents to talk with each other to decide when their parenting plan should be more flexible.

16 TO 18 YEARS – LATE TEENS

It's important for parents of teenagers of this age to maintain the child's accessibility to school, friends, extracurricular and community activities from both homes.

Teens may feel they should have more independence and may resist a rigid parenting time schedule. Parents must add greater flexibility to the parenting plan by thinking about the child's wishes and deciding parenting time issues with the child. That way, teenagers won't feel forced to comply with a parenting schedule in which they had no say but instead will feel like they are doing something they want to do.

Your teen may benefit from a primary home base, with specific evenings, weekends, and activities at the other home scheduled on a regular and predictable basis. More than anything, your teenager will usually want a say in the parenting plan but the teen doesn't get to choose. Regardless of your teen's needs, the parenting plan should include the considerations listed below:

- work
- extracurricular activities
- social life
- increased schoolwork
- jobs
- peer relationships
- sports

Many teens prefer one primary home (close to their friends), and weekends or evenings with the other parent. Some will prefer a balanced, 50-50 plan with their parents. Much of this will depend on the history of the relationship with each other, the distance between parents, and the parents' availability to meet their child's needs.

DESIGNING A PLAN FOR TEENS

Parents of teens should think about the child's schedule and commitments, distance between the parents' homes, each parent's work schedule or other obligations, the child's temperament and wishes, and a teen's need for unstructured time.

It's important for parents to be flexible when creating a parenting plan with a teenager.

Parents may need to think about many circumstances when making schedules for teenagers. Their involvement with school, friends, clubs, sports, or other commitments can create an exhausting schedule. The result may be that the teen is home for little more than sleeping and eating, leaving no time for family or parents.

Parents may lose a lot of time with their teens because activities or friends take even more of the teen's time. Planning the schedule of a teen that can balance all of these areas may require the help of professionals, such as counselors, mediators, or parenting coordinators, who have created such plans, if the parents are unable to do so.

It's challenging to create parenting schedules for this age group because each family's circumstances are unique. It's especially important for parents to be flexible when creating a parenting plan with a teenager. When parents agree, a flexible schedule may work best for a teen as long as the parents are able to work together with little conflict and the teen spends time with each parent. In this case, teens can plan their schedule based on their activities and social lives. The amount of time they spend at either parent's house is due to the teen's interests, not a preference for one parent over the other. Having "No Plan" may be an acceptable alternative that doesn't favor one parent and yet still allows the teen to have a schedule that supports his or her life. The fact that there is no plan shouldn't undermine the parent-child relationship.

This is also a time when children may talk about a desire for a home base because of the growing importance of their own friends and activities. Both parents can increase contact through regular attendance at the child's athletic, performance, academic, or other activities. This allows for a large amount of parental involvement in activities important in the child's life.

Although many different plans may work for teens, here are general options that can be a framework for developing a plan.

9

Plan 9 -- Two consecutive overnights every other week. An additional three-to six-hour period or overnight may be added each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Comment: Provides a home base for the child with time with the non-residential parent during the week and on weekends.

Plan 10 -- Three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional four- to six-hour period each week. (See a sample schedule on page 16.)

Comment: This may or not occur, depending on the teen.

Plan 11: Four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. (See a sample schedule on page 17.)

Plan 12: Split each week and weekend. (See a sample schedule on page 18.)

Comment: This plan lets the parents take part about equally in the child's school life. It also provides a consistent routine, accommodates a child's ability to be apart from either parent for three or four days, and allows the child to have a "stay home" day (Saturday or Sunday) with each parent each week. Parents who want full weekends with or without the child may not like this schedule, but it can be written to allow full weekends during the summer or on holidays. Also, the schedule can be written so that in Week 1, Parent A has three overnights and Parent B as four, and in Week 2, Parent B has three overnights and Parent A has four.

Plan 13: Each parent has the same two consecutive midweek overnights each week and alternates the weekends. This is commonly referred to as the 5-2-2-5 plan. Each week, the child spends Monday and Tuesday night with Parent A and Wednesday and Thursday night with Parent B. In Week 1, the child spends the weekend with Parent A. In Week 2, the child spends the weekend with Parent B. (See the sample schedule on page 19.)

Comment: This plan provides each parent with alternating full weekends with and without the children. The child is away from each parent during alternate weeks for five days.

14

Plan 14 -- Alternating seven-day periods with or without mid-week time. Mid-week time may add more scheduling challenges. (See a sample schedule on page 20.)

Vacation: Each year, each parent can take from to two to four weeks of vacation time with the child. Two two-week periods may be best for younger children. If a four-week vacation period is used and the child is in town, the child should have the opportunity to be with the non-vacationing parent for one weekend during the vacation period. At least 30 days before the planned vacation, each parent must give the other parent written notice of the travel dates. At least 3 days before travel, each parent must give detailed information to the other parent, including the places they'll be going and how to reach the child or the parent during the vacation. Keep in mind your teen's work schedules and extracurricular activities.

✓Create your own schedule using the sample form on page 9.

HOLIDAYS, VACATIONS, AND SCHOOL BREAKS

The schedule for holidays, vacations, and school breaks takes priority over the regularly scheduled parenting time. In deciding how to schedule these events, think about it from your child's point of view. Children enjoy having the opportunity to have special time with each parent and extended family members. Each parent may need to encourage his or her extended family to adjust some of their schedules so the child can participate in celebrations during parenting time. Also, think about the child's need to have contact with the other parent during extended vacation time. Scheduled phone calls during a vacation can help reduce anxiety for both the parent and the child without disrupting the vacation.

Whenever the child will be traveling to a different place, it's important for the parents to share information about where they will be staying, how they can be contacted, and when they will be returning. If the vacationing parent provides a written schedule that includes this information, the non-vacationing parent will be assured of the ability to communicate in case of emergency. In that same way, the non-vacationing parent should provide contact information if he or she will not be at home during the child's vacation.

In determining what to do about school breaks, consider the child's activities and the availability of one or both parents during the break. If the child needs day care, the parents can consider a plan that minimizes day care during the break. If both parents must work, the child may still enjoy a break from the regular schedule that allows him or her to spend more time with a parent than is usual.

HOLIDAYS

The first step is to decide what holidays either of you wish to celebrate. Keep in mind the traditions the child has experienced through his or her life and how the holiday parenting time might affect these traditions and the child's security. Children thrive on healthy traditions and celebrations and respond more enthusiastically to a plan when *both* parents work on it together and support it.

Here's a list of typical holidays. Choose the ones that apply to your family and add any others that should be included in the parenting time plan.

Independence Day/4th of July
Labor Day
Rosh Hashanah
Yom Kippur
Veterans' Day
Thanksgiving
Hanukah
Christmas Eve
Christmas Day
New Year's Eve
New Year's Day
Martin Luther King, Jr./Civil Rights Day
Halloween
Presidents' Day
Passover
Easter
Mother's Day
Memorial Day
Father's Day
Child's birthday
Parents' birthdays

After you decide which holidays apply, think about whether all holidays should be handled the same way or whether it makes more sense to divide some and alternate some. Many parents agree that the children will be with the mother every Mother's Day and the father every Father's Day. Many parents divide most of the holidays but split up the time on days that are special for both parents, such as Christmas Eve and Christmas or the child's birthday.

VACATIONS

Most parents agree to a set time for each parent to enjoy a vacation with the child. Whether you're traveling for vacation or just staying home, your child will enjoy spending any time you can take away from work with you. Whether a parent has the ability to take time off from work, vacation parenting time is intended to allow each parent the chance to either travel or stay home and spend an uninterrupted period of time with their child.

A child may become anxious if away from a parent for much longer than usual. Scheduling a phone call midway through a weeklong vacation, for instance, may help the child handle the separation. Sometimes frequent calls from the "away" parent can cause the child to feel sadness and longing. If both parents are sensitive to the needs of their child, they can find a balance between contact and too much contact. If a long vacation period is going to be spent at home, or

close to home, it might make sense to break it up with a short visit with the other parent. Parents need to make all of these decisions ahead of time to reduce conflict between them and to provide predictability for the child.

Because transportation, weather, and other issues can cause problems during travel, it's important to provide the other parent with details about when and where travel will occur. Details include flight numbers and times, hotels, places where the child will be staying, and telephone numbers. If an emergency arises, a parent should be able to contact the other parent or the child. The parent traveling with the child should have passports, travel documentation (including a notarized consent to travel form if traveling outside the United States), updated medical information, insurance cards, prescriptions and any other special supplies the child will need.

Communication about when each parent will use vacation time needs to take place well in advance of the vacation. Because of school schedules, most parents plan vacations in the summer and will often set a deadline to communicate the dates of their vacations. For instance, if each parent has a two-week period, they may decide that in even years, Parent A will have the first chance to choose the vacation dates and must communicate those days in writing by April 1; Parent B will then choose the vacation dates out of the remaining dates and communicate those days in writing by April 15. In this example, Parent B would have first choice in odd-numbered years.

SCHOOL BREAKS

School districts will determine the break schedule and usually publish their yearly calendars well in advance. Most districts have websites that provide current schedules. As with holidays, the first step is to determine which breaks the school observes. Schools may have spring, summer, fall, and winter breaks as well as early release or other school release days.

If the parents have a regular parenting time schedule with nearly equal time, many parents will not change the parenting time schedule during the school breaks. The regular schedule will continue. Other parents will decide to alternate breaks each year or share the break by splitting the time between each parent. Since the

> breaks sometimes occur at the same time as the holidays, such as Christmas or Passover and Easter, it may be helpful to look at the holiday schedule at the same time when planning the break schedule.

Here are some ideas on how to share the holidays and language you can use when you create your parenting plan.

Divide Split the day or weekend (not necessarily equally) between both parents.

Sample parenting plan language: *The children will be with Parent A on _____ (name the specific holiday, such as Thanksgiving) from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and with Parent B from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.*

Alternate The children are with one parent on specified holidays in even years and with the other parent in odd years.

Sample parenting plan language: *The children will be with Parent A on _____ (specific holiday, such as Thanksgiving) in all even years from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and with Parent B in all years from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.*

Substitute The children always spend a specific holiday with one parent (for example, Halloween) in exchange for a different holiday with the other parent (for example, Fourth of July).

Sample parenting plan language: *The children will spend _____ (specific holiday, such as Fourth of July) each year with Parent A and _____ (specific holiday, such as Halloween) with Parent B each year.*

Follow regular schedule The children follow their regular schedule and celebrate the holiday with the assigned parent who has parenting time on that day or time.

Sample parenting plan language: *The children will celebrate _____ (specific holiday, such as Fourth of July) as it falls on the regularly scheduled parenting time.*

LONG-DISTANCE PARENTING AND RELOCATION

Parents must be aware of the impact of relocation on their child and that relocation may require the permission of a judge. Long-distance parenting rules can apply whenever the move between homes is more than 100 miles or there is travel between two states. Please read the Arizona relocation statute, A.R.S. § 25-408, before thinking about a move. The statute permits a long-distance move of a child only when the move is in the best interests of the child. The statute can be found in public libraries or on the Internet by following the links at www.az.gov.

Disagreements about long-distance parenting time often result in the judge making a decision. Unfortunately, a decision by a judge may not please either party. Each relocation case is unique, and the right decision is based on the specific facts for each family. Parents should make a serious effort to resolve a parenting time dispute themselves or with the help of a mediator, or an attorney. Any reasonable agreement between the parents negotiated in good faith is usually better than having a judge decide the matter after the expense and stress of a court hearing.

Long-distance parenting means sacrifice – in time and in money. It requires a strong commitment by each parent to ensure involvement by both parents with their child.

A parent who wants to move a long distance with, or without, a child should think about many things before making a decision. Long distances often weaken the relationships between children and parents. If the move is necessary, parents might want to consider relocating both households to the same city. If it isn't possible, parenting time for the distant parent must be at regular and frequent times during the year. The court considers many factors, and parents should think about these factors. Each parent should take a moment and "stand in the other parent and the child's shoes." What is their point of view? How would I feel if my child moved away to another city? Think about all the facts including the age and maturity of the child, the child's developmental needs, sibling bonds, school and work schedules, transportation costs, the presence of supportive family and friends in each city, and the gains or loss of extended family.

For most children, a long-distance move may result in less regular contact with both parents. If both parents are within a reasonable distance of each other, the child benefits. When parents live far

apart[1], a child's daily and weekly contact is reduced and large gaps of time without physical contact between the child and parent develop. When both parents move to the same general area, it is less disruptive. No matter the distance, a child will benefit from as much regular and frequent physical contact with each parent as possible.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Children generally are resilient following their parents' divorce, and those who have healthy relationships with both parents can thrive.

When parents live far apart, there should be a minimum of four blocks of parenting time between the child and parent each year. Blocks of time should occur over the summer, winter break, spring break, and at least one other block of time. When the parents live close enough to each other, parents can add once-a-month weekend time during the months not covered by the four parenting time blocks. When the driving distance is under four hours, the opportunity exists to add every-other-weekend contact or long weekends in the plan.

Holidays and special occasions are challenging for parents who live far apart. As children reach age three, they become aware of holidays. Parents must be flexible, cooperative, and allow the child to enjoy special times with each parent. New family traditions may develop for each household. Parents should arrange for the many religious, cultural, or national holidays that exist in each home including family birthdays and Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Long-distance parenting is expensive. The cost of travel is covered in the child support guidelines. If the court hasn't said who pays for the travel expenses in the child support order, the parents should agree on how to share these costs before a move. In the case where the move is necessary, the costs usually are divided in proportion to the parents' incomes. However, if the move is voluntary, the moving parent usually pays a greater percentage of all travel costs. A cost-saving idea is to have the distant parent do most of the traveling and not the children.

[1] The term "far apart" means different things to different people. The courts examine long-distance parenting when the distance in time for **travel** or miles is so great that it has a serious impact on a child's welfare.

Example: *Jaime and Pat move from Florida to Arizona in 2005 because of Pat's job. They have a two-year-old daughter and a son who is five. Both parents work. Jaime has two weeks of vacation each year and Pat has four weeks. During the marriage, Jaime was the primary caregiver and Pat was an active secondary caregiver. This year they file for divorce. Jaime is an only child whose elderly parents live in Florida. Jaime wants to move back to Florida to have more income and to be closer to them. Pat's job requires travel out of state for a week each quarter. Pat wants to remain a vital and active parent in the children's lives. The parties ask for a resolution management conference with the judge to help sort out the move dispute.*

The judge suggests:
1) Pat ask at work about a hardship move back to Florida
2) The parents price the cost for a joint move or a delayed move by Pat with reimbursement
3) The parents think about sharing the cost of moving Jaime's parents to Arizona
4) Jaime use job services in both locations to compare the incomes (while keeping in mind the added costs Jaime could face for transportation of the children)
5) Jaime consider staying in Arizona until the children are both school age
6) The parents sacrifice their vacation time to always vacation in the same location as the other parent until the children are old enough to travel unaccompanied by a parent
7) The parents meet in mediation to explore more options
8) The parents continue to discuss solutions between themselves or through their attorneys.

AGE-SPECIFIC RECOMENDATIONS

BIRTH TO PRE-SCHOOL

This is an important time for bonding between parents and children. For most children, the loss of a strong bond is a lifelong issue. In contrast, building a strong bond creates a sense of belonging, encourages active and committed parents, causes healthy adult relationships with both genders, facilitates co-parenting, and improves communication between parents and a growing child. If possible, the long distance separation should be delayed so that both parents and children can make best use of their time together during these formative years. If the move can't be delayed, the parenting

time schedule should be designed to provide the most direct and frequent physical contact between the child and both parents that time and money permit.

KINDERGARTEN TO 12 YEARS

The parties should continue to make the most of the time each parent has with the child. The schedule should be adjusted to follow closely the child's regular school schedule. The school year parent must sacrifice frequent physical contact during non-school times such as the summer and holidays, while the non-school parent must sacrifice frequent physical contact during the school semesters. Some schools have year-round or modified year-round schedules that provide for more frequent or longer breaks with the distant parent. If parents can find a school with such a schedule, this will be of assistance to children.

13 TO 15 YEARS

The parties should continue to take full advantage of the time each parent has with the teen. The schedule should continue to follow closely the available times from the teen's school schedule. The distant parent may need to accommodate the school schedule and extracurricular activities. The school parent may need to sacrifice holiday time to offset the parenting time lost by the distant parent. Weekend parenting time may become more difficult during the school year because of the teen's involvement with school activities, work, and friends. Flexibility by both parents is critical. Parents can expect the teen to start to try to negotiate time with both parents. Consider your teenager's ideas in your decision-making. Expect that some teens may want to switch hometowns for the opportunity to get to know the other parent better. As with any plan, parents must make the final decision about schedules. Summer parenting time is even more important to ensure that the distant parent and teen have a continuing relationship. The distant parent should make every effort to provide matching activities, summer school classes, or employment opportunities for a teen so that the teen remains enthusiastic about continuing the summer schedule.

16 TO 18 YEARS

Teens at this age normally think of themselves as young adults preparing for the world ahead of them. Parents can guide their teenager by permitting greater responsibility and independence. One opportunity to make them good decision-makers is with the

parenting time schedule. Ask their opinion, listen to what they have to say, and give them choices. Teens want their parents to be available but also want to control their own day-to-day activities. Communication and compromise will lead to the desired flexible schedule.

***Example**: Chris and Terry have been divorced for four years in Arizona and both have remarried. Each parent has a new toddler. The parties have teenage twins, a daughter and a son. The twins live primarily with Chris and spend substantial time with Terry. Chris and Terry have continuing conflicts. The twins are entering their sophomore year of high school. This year, Chris gave Terry timely notice of an intent to move to California at the end of the school semester because Chris's new spouse is being transferred to Sacramento. Terry objects and files a request to prohibit the relocation of the twins. Chris says Terry is opposing the move out of spite. Terry says Chris is using the move to damage further Terry's relationship with the kids. The parties ask for a resolution management conference with the judge to help sort out the move dispute.*

The judge suggests:
1) The parents put aside their conflict and consider the impacts, pro and con, of the move on the teens
2) The parents consider child interviews
3) Chris's new spouse ask at work about a hardship move back to Arizona
4) The parents price the cost for transportation to and from California
5) The parents seek advice from educational professionals on the impact of a change in high schools
6) The parents meet in mediation to explore more options
7) The parents continue to discuss solutions between themselves or through their attorneys.

GENERAL TIPS

AIR TRAVEL

Ideally, a child younger than eight shouldn't travel alone. If it's necessary for a child to travel by air, direct flights between major cities are preferred over multiple stops or plane changes. To save costs, tickets should be priced at a 30-day advance notice, economy class, on major carriers. Consult each airline for how and when unaccompanied or monitored minors may fly. Remember that if a person younger than 18 is traveling in the United States alone or

with only one parent or another adult, a court order or certified consent letter proving that both parents permit the trip should be carried.

DELAYS AT EXCHANGE POINTS

Communication is never more important than when a long-distance exchange occurs. Keep your contact numbers current and notify each other of the safe arrival of your child. Also, be sure to keep each other informed of any unforeseen delays as soon as possible. Discuss in advance what a reasonable waiting time is for each means of transportation.

DROP-IN VISITS

Opportunities can occur for either parent to be in town when the children are in the care of the other parent. When such opportunities arise, parents should be flexible and set aside normal routines to allow contact on short notice. A lot of good faith can arise from such cooperation. Remember, the shoe may be on the other foot someday.

FREQUENT MOVES

Families benefit from financial stability in their lives. It's also a fact that the average U.S. family moves every five years. Typical reasons include jobs, health, education, marriage, and family emergencies. However, when either parent moves frequently and without good reason, that parent can expect to bear the burden of the move and pay more for the costs and travel time for parenting.

INTERNATIONAL PARENTING TIME AND BORDER TRAVEL

International parenting time and travel have unique challenges. Children may leave the country without restriction but can't return without proof of citizenship. Passports and visas are required. The primary custodial parent should safeguard these documents and make them easily available to the other parent at the scheduled times and places of exchange. Likewise, the documents should be returned promptly at the conclusion of parenting time. The non-custodial parent should keep copies of important travel documents. For the latest requirements, review the crossing borders section of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security found on the DHS web page at http://www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/crossingborders/. For long-term planning, review the information found in the Office of Children's Issues, U.S. Department of State, found on its web page at http://travel.state.gov/family/about/about_605.html.

MILESTONES AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The parent who is away from the children for a significant length of time may be out of the loop on their general welfare. It's important for each parent exercising parenting time with the children to keep the other informed about school progress, awards, special recognition, report cards, sports performance, physical and emotional health concerns, extracurricular activities, and other important milestones and developments in the child's life. Likewise, the child should know the significant, age-appropriate events in each parent's life during his or her absence. All are equally important. Traveling or shared journals are a useful tool for such purposes.

TIME LOSS FOR TRAVEL

In a long-distance parenting plan, anticipate the loss of time with children by both parents because of travel over great distances. Building parenting time into travel may be a possible solution. Travel time activities can be a chance for parents and children to transition and enhance their relationship. Thus, when possible, the receiving parent should be the accompanying travel parent.

"VIRTUAL PARENTING"

Maintaining contact by phone, letter, text messaging, e-mail, web cam and other technological means may be helpful and worthwhile for long-distance parenting. However, virtual parenting is not an ideal substitute for regular in-person contact, and it shouldn't be used as an alternative that decreases the parenting time of a parent.

WILD CARDS

Parents can expect pre-teens and teens, at a certain level of age and maturity, to start to negotiate with both parents about their living arrangements. One solution is to build into the plan some "wild card" days for the child to choose to expand or contract time inside an otherwise fixed schedule.

SPECIAL ISSUES

ABSENT PARENT REUNIFICATION

Some children may have a parent who wants to become part of their lives after years, or a lifetime, of not being involved with them. Other children may have a parent who was in their lives at one time but left, and then, after many months or years, wants to be part of their lives again. The emotional issues for both children and the custodial parent are often very complicated and difficult to understand. Most children and parents need professional help to build trust between the child and the absent parent. This kind of help is called reunification counseling. The time it takes for the counseling to be successful will depend in part on the child's age and personality. Counseling also can help parents learn to communicate and cooperate. This kind of counseling is called co-parent counseling.

BLENDED (STEP) FAMILIES

Today, at least one-third of all children in the U.S. are expected to live in a stepfamily before they reach age 18. When two families unite, new personalities, habits, rules, and memories become part of the household. Most blended families are capable of working out their differences or conflicts and living together successfully. It takes patience, open discussion of feelings, positive attitudes, mutual respect, and thoughtful planning on the part of both parents (biological and step) to make the formation of a new family succeed. Parents also need to be sensitive to the children's needs (those of their children and those of the other parent) and understand that blended families are complex.

No matter how hard the parents try, when two separate families come together under one roof, there will be conflicts. Children can be sad or fearful as these changes occur, and it takes time for them to adjust to the new family. Several common problems can occur within a blended family. One problem is discipline. The parents should agree and explain to the children if and how a stepparent is going to discipline stepchildren. Another possible problem is what name the children are to call the stepparent. In addition, some children want time alone with their biological parent and may become angry when the parent spends time with the new partner and his or her children. There are also children who resist developing a close bond with a stepparent because they fear this could anger their biological parent of the same gender. Family counseling for all family members may be needed if a child continues to resent a stepparent, if a stepparent continues to resent a stepchild, if a stepparent continues to openly

favor his or her children, or when a member of the family continues to avoid contact with the new family members. Here are some tips for parents and stepparents to create positive relationships for each member of the blended family:

- Be sensitive about introducing a new partner into your children's lives.
- Spend some alone time with your own children so they don't feel overshadowed by the new family members.
- Discuss parenting problems with the other parent away from the children.
- Avoid any display of favoritism regarding your children.
- Let the children choose an appropriate name or title for the stepparent.
- Plan regular family meetings to discuss all members' needs.

BREAST-FEEDING

Pediatricians agree that breast-feeding is best for most babies. There is no proof, though, that breast-fed babies form closer relationships with their parents than do bottle-fed babies. Children develop secure and positive relationships when they have frequent contact with a parent who holds, talks, comforts, and feeds them in a sensitive and caring manner.

Parents who are not raising their child together must balance the baby's need to nurse with its need to bond with the father. The parents should talk often and openly with each other about the baby. Breast-feeding shouldn't be used to stop the father from spending time with the child. Instead, mothers need to offer the father parenting time, and fathers need to be flexible regarding the need of the baby to nurse. A father can feed an infant with the mother's expressed (pumped) milk, particularly after nursing routines are well established. If there are any questions about breast-feeding, parents should talk to the baby's pediatrician.

CHILDREN WHO DON'T WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH A PARENT

Some children find it hard to go from one parent's home to the other, and they express these feelings through their behavior. There are many reasons why some children say they do not want to spend time with the other parent. Some of the reasons have to do with a child's age and personality, while for others it has to do with how their parents get along. How a parent reacts to a child not wanting to be with the other parent can also affect whether the child or teen is willing to be with the other parent. Toddlers, for example, may not yet understand what is happening to them at exchange time, and

they may cry when they leave one parent. This is a natural reaction, and these children usually calm down once they are distracted and are engaged in a fun activity. Sometimes children just don't want to stop doing what they are doing because they're having fun. Other children may not have gotten used to being in a new environment, and they would rather stay in a home and a neighborhood that they know. Parents can help children adjust by understanding their feelings but insisting that they spend time with the other parent, just as a parent would do if the child doesn't want to go to school.

Parents should also understand that sometimes there are problems that need to be worked on through counseling. For example, some children may have serious problems getting used to a parent's new partner and his or her children. There are also children who are caught in the middle of their parents' conflict and who may take sides with one parent and refuse to do what any parent or judge tells them to do about spending time with the other parent. In situations like this, professional help is usually necessary. If there are concerns that the children don't want to go because they're being abused or neglected, Child Protective Services should be contacted.

CONTACT WITH AN INCARCERATED PARENT

An incarcerated parent is still a parent to a child. In many cases, a child has a legal right and an emotional need to remain in contact with the parent in prison. It's important to understand that the needs of the child may be different from the custodial parent's needs regarding contact with the incarcerated parent. Before a child visits the parent in jail or prison, the custodial parent should talk to the child about what to expect. After the visit, the child should be encouraged to talk openly about thoughts and feelings regarding the visit, and the custodial parent should respond sensitively.

HIGH CONFLICT

Many parents co-parent well, but some do not. Some parents argue with each other when they exchange the children or talk to each other on the phone. They sometimes blame the other parent for the problems they're having, and in extreme cases, some parents tell the children how bad the other parent is.

When parents do these things, children can develop emotional and behavioral problems. They may become fearful, thinking that they're the cause of their parents' fighting, finding themselves having to choose between their parents, or developing low self-esteem.

For parents who can't cooperatively co-parent, parallel parenting is a way for them to raise their child with little contact between each other. Each parent makes day-to-day decisions about the child while the child is with the parent. With parallel parenting, communication between the parents is limited, except in emergencies, and usually is in writing. A co-parent therapist or a parent coordinator often helps parents handle parallel parenting arrangements.

In some counties, parents can attend high conflict resolution classes or cooperative parenting classes. In these classes, parents learn that any continuing conflict between them will likely have a long-term negative effect on their children. They also learn skills to be better co-parents.

MILITARY

The reality for military families is movement. When parents are first divorced or separated, they may live in the same community. This will require a parenting plan that focuses on sharing the child when the parents live close to each other and allowing for temporary duty assignment (TDY) possibilities. Military families should think about including a long-distance parenting plan in case parents are no longer living in the same area. Detailed travel arrangements are an important part as well as allowing for deployment and TDY issues.

Parents may want to think about how parenting time can be rearranged because of temporary duty assignments or overseas commitments. One idea is to extend summer or winter breaks to allow for such situations.

Maintaining contact between the child and the non-residential military parent is important. The residential parent can support the child's relationship with the other parent by having a consistent plan of communication with the other parent. It may seem at times (to the residential parent) that he or she is shouldering most of the responsibility for fostering the child's relationship with the absent parent. It's important to know that the child will benefit from this effort as the child gets older.

NEVER MARRIED

When parents aren't married to each other when their child is born, the biological father has no legal right to custody or parenting time until paternity is legally established and the court orders custody and parenting time. The court also will not order child support until paternity is legally established.

When a parent hasn't had parenting time with the child before, the court may order limited parenting time at first and gradually increase it over time. The court may order supervised parenting time at first until the parent has gained parenting skills and the child feels comfortable with the parent.

Unmarried parents may not know each other very well and as a result can't rely on previous experiences of working together as parents. If the parents never lived together or did so only for a short time, they will have to develop a cooperative co-parenting relationship. The parents may find joint counseling helpful.

The extended family members should be supportive of each parent's relationship with the child. It's important for each parent to be responsible for his or her relatives and to ask them to support the child's relationship with the other parent.

A child who has had little or no contact with the other parent may have developed an important relationship with someone he or she perceives as a parent. A child could have difficulty coping and adjusting to a parent who reappears after a long absence. See the section on page 56 concerning reunification.

SAFETY

Protective Orders -- When an Order of Protection is in effect, the parenting plan cannot include contact that would violate it. Only the court can change a protective order. If there is a protective order between you and the other parent, you may ask the court to change the protective order to allow parenting time exchanges in specific locations with no contact between the two of you. You also can ask a third person to help transport the child for parenting time exchanges.

Domestic Violence -- When there has been a history of significant domestic violence, the court will not order joint custody. The parenting plan must provide for the safety and well-being of the child, if the child was present when domestic violence occurred (See A.R.S. § 25-403.03 for more specific information.) In cases of domestic violence, the plan may provide for supervised parenting time during which a specified adult must be present. The plan should name the person who will supervise the parenting time. Some courts have supervision programs but many do not. If there is no court supervision program available, the supervisor named in your plan

must be a responsible adult who has time to supervise the parenting time and can act calmly and maturely with the parent who is being supervised.

Alcohol or Drug Use or Abuse -- If you're concerned about the other parent's alcohol or drug abuse, the parenting plan may provide for drug testing or include other provisions limiting alcohol or drug use during parenting time for one or both parents. If testing is required, the parenting time order should state how often testing will happen, who will pay for it, and what will happen if there is a positive test.

SCHEDULES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES

It's a good idea to keep siblings together. Sometimes, though, this isn't possible. Consider the unique needs of your children when deciding how much time each parent will spend with each child. For example, when there's a wide age difference between siblings, the parenting plan might include some alone time with the parents for each child. Remember, the plans based on ages are only suggestions. Parents may decide that a certain plan works best for all of their children, even though that plan is not recommended for a child's age.

SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

Almost one-third of all children under the age of 18 suffer from one form or another of on-going mental or physical health problems. It's important that both parents understand the health problems and agree to follow the treatment the doctor recommends. In most cases, it's best when both parents attend the doctor appointments. The more serious the child's health problem, the more the parents need to talk to each other and keep each other informed. The parents must also learn to organize medication, medical equipment, and treatments. When the parents have joint legal custody, they both need to be involved in major decisions about medical treatment, unless their court order says something else. The parenting time schedule should fit the child's medical needs.

THIRD-PARTY INVOLVEMENT

A parent may be tempted to involve a third party (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, grandparents, or friends) in parenting time exchanges or discussions with the other parent. If there is any chance of conflict with the other parent, letting a third person speak for you usually is not a good idea and can make matters worse. Instead, a neutral third party, such as a mediator or a parenting coordinator, may be able to assist parents in resolving their disputes.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Given the differing circumstances in each family, courts use a variety of community professionals to help. Some of the services offered by mental health experts are outlined below. The use of such professionals does not mean one of the family members suffers from a mental disorder. Helping identify problems that can affect your children and getting the right person to help starts when you know the different types of services and can request the ones that best suit your family.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR): SOLVE IT WITHOUT A JUDGE

Collaborative Divorce Coaching and Consulting	Team approach to divorce involving the parents, their attorneys, financial analysts, consultants, and others who provide information and education to help resolve parental disputes without court involvement.
Conciliation Court or Conciliation Services	A department within the superior court of each county that offers alternative dispute resolution services as ordered by the court for those involved in family law cases. Services provided may include: parent education classes, conciliation counseling, custody/parenting time mediation, parenting conferences, evaluations, and parenting coordination. Each county may offer different services, and in some counties, services may be contracted out to private providers.
Mediation	Uses a variety of negotiation tools and strategies to assist parents to reach agreement about all aspects of child custody and parenting plans.
Parenting Coordinator	Case management, dispute resolution process using mediation and arbitration concepts to help implement parenting plans.

ASSESSMENT: PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE JUDGE

Brief Focused Evaluation	Less comprehensive evaluation focused on addressing specific issues or updating an already-existing parenting plan.
Child Custody Evaluation	Comprehensive fact-finding process resulting in extensive decision-making and parenting time recommendations. Especially helpful where there are high-conflict parental relationships, relocation issues, or allegations of sexual abuse, child abuse, or domestic violence.

Child Forensic Interview	Specialized interview of a child to answer specific questions for the court without involving the child directly in the legal system.
Neuropsychological Evaluation	A process by a medical professional to determine if a person has a physical brain injury that significantly disrupts the person's life, typically manifested by "short fuse" violence and post-traumatic stress disorder.
Psychological Evaluation	Process using psychological tests, interviews, and observations to evaluate mental status and functioning or treatment needs.
Psychosexual Risk	Process using psychological tests, polygraphs, interviews, and observations to evaluate the potential risk for physical and/or sexual abuse of children.

THERAPEUTIC: GETTING HELP

Co-Parenting Therapy	Joint parental therapy intended to increase positive coordination by parents and reduce conflicts.
Family Therapy	Treatment provided when two or more members of the family need treatment in order to normalize and stabilize functioning.
Forensic Therapy	Non-confidential treatment provided by a therapist ordered by the court . It's common for a forensically informed therapist to write a report for the court.
Therapeutic Intervention	Treatment and case management often used in therapeutically complex cases or in reunification cases where intervention focuses on supporting the renewal of a relationship between a parent and a child.
Therapeutic Supervision	Supervision of parent-child contacts provided by a therapist.

OTHER

Court Self-Service Center	Provides people who choose to represent themselves in family cases with information and access to reasonably priced forms. The information is intended to help you help yourself through the court system.

WORDS YOU MAY NEED TO KNOW

This is not a list of legal definitions. It has been prepared for use by persons who are not lawyers.

Access, Visitation, Parenting Time – Words used to describe the schedule of time that a child has with each parent.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) – Ways to solve legal problems without a trial. Examples include mediation, resolution management conference, or other settlement methods.

Attachment – Positive feelings of the child toward parents and other parent figures.

"Best Interests of the Child" – When a judge decides a custody or parenting plan issue, the judge decides what would be best for the child based on all the information.

Bonding – Close relationship that develops between a young child and a parent or a parent figure.

Confidentiality – Private information that cannot be shared with anyone else except as required by law.

Co-Parenting – When parents share the responsibility for raising a child even when the parents do not live together.

Court Order – A written order made by a judge that must be followed.

Dissolution of Marriage – Divorce.

Divorce – The legal process of dissolving a marriage.

Domestic Violence – Domestic violence is legally defined in Arizona in A.R.S. § 13-3601(a) as a criminal act of physical, verbal, or sexual behavior or threats or intimidation by one partner toward another. Significant domestic violence is a factor considered in determining parenting time decisions under A.R.S. § 25-403.03.

Exchange – Pick-up and drop-off of a child between parents or other caregivers.

Family Law – The laws that relate to family relationships. They include laws about divorce, paternity, custody, parenting plans, property and debt division, child support, spousal support ("alimony"), and other topics. The laws are based on statutes, rules, and reported court decisions.

Filing – Giving your legal papers to the Clerk of the Court.

"Frequent and Continuing Contact" – How the law refers to children having regular and ongoing contact with parents.

"Full Custody" - This is not a legal term defined by law in Arizona. In Arizona, the term is not used and it has no meaning. However, often this term is confused with "sole custody." (*See* ***Sole Custody***.)

Hearing – A scheduled appearance in court where parents and attorneys may call witnesses and introduce evidence.

Holiday Plan – A part of the parenting plan that specifies how children will spend holidays with each parent and defines each holiday so both parents know when the holiday begins and ends.

Joint Legal Custody – Both parents share major decision-making for their children. Neither parent can overrule the other parent unless specifically allowed by the parenting plan or by court order. *See also* ***Legal Custody***. (*See* A.R.S. § 25-402(2).)

Joint Physical Custody – The child has roughly the same amount of time and contact with both parents. This does not mean the parents have ***Joint Legal Custody***. *See also* ***Physical Custody***. (*See* A.R.S. § 25-402(3).)

Legal Custody – The right of a parent to make major decisions for the children. Major decisions may include medical care, personal appearance, religion, or education. Custody may be either joint with both parents or sole with one parent. (*See* A.R.S. § 25-402.)

Maternity – A legal action that results in a court order naming the child's mother.

Mediation – A meeting with a mediator who helps the parents try to solve problems cooperatively. Mediation may occur face to face or separately, if necessary. Mediation is confidential. The mediator does not tell the parents what they should do or make a recommendation to the court. (*See* Rule of Family Law Procedure 66.B(4).)

Mediator – A trained, neutral third party who helps the parents try to solve problems cooperatively through mediation.

Modification of Parenting Plan – Changes to the parenting plan. If agreed to, the changes can be enforced only if they are submitted to and ordered by the court. If the parties cannot agree, one party can request modification by filing a motion with the court.

Order of Protection – *See* ***Protective Order***.

Parallel Parenting – See "High Conflict" in the Special Issues section on page 58.

Parenting Plan – A document that states when the child will be with each parent and how decisions will be made. The parenting plan may be developed by the parents on their own or with the help of a professional such as a mediator, an attorney, or a judge.

Parenting Time – The time a child spends with each parent according to a court order.

Paternity – A legal action that results in a court order naming the child's father.

Physical Custody – The actual physical residence of the child at any given time. (*See and compare* ***Joint Physical Custody*** and ***Parenting Time***.)

Primary Residence – The parent's home where the child physically resides most of the time.

Protective Order – Refers to four types of orders (Order of Protection, Emergency Order of Protection, Injunction Against Harassment, Injunction Against Workplace Harassment) designed to prevent violence or harassment between parties. Any court in the state can issue these special orders without notice to the defendant. When the orders are set without notice, hearings must be set within 5-10 days at the request of the defendant. (*See* Rule 1B of the Arizona Rules of Protective Order Procedure.)

Rules of Court – Court procedures are controlled by rules. Family law is controlled by the Arizona Rules of Family Law Procedure (ARFLP). The ARFLP can be found at the local law library or at: http://www.supreme.state.az.us/rules/ramd_pdf/R-05-0008.pdf. The ARFLP can also be supplemented by local county rules.

Sole Custody – When only one parent has the right to make major legal decisions for the child. The sole legal custodian may not change the parenting time of the other parent without agreement. (*See* ***Legal Custody***.)

Statute – A law passed by the state legislature (or adopted by initiative). Most code sections relating to family law are in Title 25 of the Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) and are available at the county law library or on the internet at: www.azleg.state.az.us/ArizonaRevisedStatutes.asp.

Stipulation – A formal agreement of the parties. When it is written and signed by both parties and then approved by a judge, it becomes a court order.

Supervised Exchanges – Pick up and drop off of the child in the presence of another specified adult.

Supervised Parenting Time – Parenting time during which the parent and child must be in the presence of another specified adult.

Therapeutic Supervision – Supervision of parent-child contacts provided by a therapist.

Transition – The adjustment time for parents and the child immediately before, during, and after the exchange of the child between the parents or other caregivers.

Trial – A formal hearing with witnesses and evidence. (See ***Hearing***.)

Virtual Parenting – Parenting time facilitated by electronic means to supplement, not replace, in-person parenting time. Examples include telephone calls, web cam, videoconferencing, instant messaging, on-line chatting, telephone texting, etc.

Visitation – This term is no longer preferred. Instead, see **Access,** ***Parenting Plan*** *or* ***Parenting Time***.

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