

## **Parenting Plan Considerations**

### **Parents Who Live 30 to 100 Miles Apart**

#### **In General**

- What is fair and equal for the parents is not necessarily what is best for the child.
- The aim of these visitation guidelines is to build positive relationships between the parents and the child.
- Moving too quickly into lengthy visits could have an opposite, potentially disruptive, effect on the relationship-building process.
- When parents are in conflict, parents need to consider a neutral transition plan so their child is protected from the distress parental conflict can cause.
- Parents must consider their children's individual needs when they develop shared parenting arrangements. Children differ in how they cope with change and adjust to their parents' separation.
- If you have more than one child, you may need a different schedule for each. For example, a schedule that works well for an eight year old, may not work for a teenager. If this is the case, you may want a schedule that allows all of your children to be together at certain times.
- When a parent has not been an active parent prior to separation, the initial parenting plan should allow that parent time to develop a relationship with the child. As the parent-child bond strengthens, changes can be made to the plan.
- Parents who have been away or absent for a length of time (perhaps in the military or because of job requirements) need to build trust gradually with their children, so their children have an opportunity to get to know them.

**NOTE:** With today's technology, it is possible for the distant parent to maintain a closer relationship. Instant Messaging, Skype, or similar means could be used. Many of these services are free. Phone conversations can be more meaningful when the child and parent can see each other while they talk. The distant parent could help children with their homework or work on projects together. They could even play games together. For the younger children, they have the advantage of "seeing" the distant parent on a regular basis. Parents should be encouraged to read a book on long-distance parenting for more ideas.

During extended visitation with the distant parent, the residential parent should be afforded the same contact.

## **Parenting Plan Considerations Parents**

### **Who Live 30 to 100 Miles Apart**

#### **Birth to Eighteen Months**

- Consider a schedule that provides for the child to spend six to eight consecutive hours with the distant parent. If there has not been significant contact with the visiting parent, parents should start with two, three – four hour blocks for the first few visits, gradually increasing them six to eight hour blocks.
- The distant parent could consider having one overnight visit, if trust is established between the parents and the parent and child.
- Extended number of overnights and vacations with the non-residential parent are not advised during this early process.

#### **Eighteen Months to Three Years**

- Consider visitation once every other week, or more often if practical. Time the child spends in the car traveling should be taken into account.
- Visits could start with two consecutive days, up to eight hours per day. If visitation is new to the child, parents might start with doing two, four hour blocks of time each day.
- Visits could gradually increase to overnights lasting (for example) from 9:00 am the first day to 5:00 pm the second day.
- Lengthily overnights and vacations with the non-residential parent are urged against during this early process.

#### **Three to Six Years**

- At this age, a child may be able to tolerate from two to four overnights in a row.
- Consider visits that occur once every two weeks, for example, from 6:00 pm on the first day to 6:00 pm on the third day.
- Additional/summer parenting time may be up to three weekends of three to four days in length each year. Visits may then gradually increase to two or three week blocks of time each separated by at least two weeks with the home base parent.
- Regular phone contact is encouraged with little expectation of reciprocity by the child. During extended visitation, the child should be allowed regular phone contact with the home base parent, also with little expectation of reciprocity. Young children may only be expected to talk on the telephone for short periods of time, one to five minutes, typically.

## **Parenting Plan Considerations Parents Who Live 30 to 100 Miles Apart**

### **Six to Nine Years**

- At this age, consider visits that occur every other weekend, for example from 6:00 pm on Friday to 6:00 pm on Sunday.
- If school is closed on the Thursday before a visitation weekend then the visit can start on Thursday at 6:00 pm. If school is closed on Monday following a visitation weekend, then the visit can end on Monday at 6:00 pm.
- Holidays can be split equally between the parents or alternate even/odd years.
- Summer visitation may be three to four weeks in one to two week blocks, each separated by at least one week with the home base parent.
- Regular phone contact should be established. During the extended visitation, the child should have ample opportunity to maintain contact with the residential parent.

### **Nine to Sixteen Years**

- Consider visits that occur every other weekend, from 6:00 pm on Friday to 6:00 pm on Sunday. Consider the child's growing social and extra-curricular schedule.
- If school is closed on the Thursday before a visitation weekend then the visit can start on Thursday at 6:00 pm. If school is closed on Monday following a visitation weekend, then the visit can end on Monday at 6:00 pm.
- Holidays can be split equally between the parents or alternate even/odd years.
- Summer vacation visitation can be from four to six weeks. It is suggested that the visits be in two to three week blocks with at least one week in between with the home base parent; **or** one block of visitation with the home base parent having the option for alternate weekend visits
- Regular phone contact should be established. However, as the child enters their teen years, phone visitation should not be as rigid, allowing the child ample opportunity to call the parent.

### **Sixteen to Eighteen Years**

- Consider visitation of one or two, two to four week blocks each year.
- Holidays can be split equally between the parents or alternate even/odd years.
- The distant parent should not call too often, rather give ample permission for the child to call them.