

Parenting Plans

At the heart of any Parenting Agreement for separating parents is the child's welfare and wellbeing. It is usually in the best interests of the child if parents can come to their own agreement on how, going forward, they will share the responsibilities to take care of their children.

A Parenting Plan is a clear, practical, written agreement which is often achieved with the guidance of a mediator through a Family Dispute Resolution Service. The agreement is signed by both parents but is not legally enforceable.

If parents would prefer plan to be enforceable then the Parenting Plan or an agreement is presented to the court for approval. The court will review the plan to ensure that the best interests of the child/ren have been taken into consideration before issuing a legally enforceable Parenting Order. In some cases, the court will refer the parents to a mediation service for further work on their agreement.

When making a Parenting Plan with the help of a mediator, the mediator will talk you through what can be included in the plan, such as:

- Who the child should principally live with
- How parenting time is shared including birthdays, holidays, religious celebrations
- How to maintain consistency in children's schedules (e.g. sport, school, social)
- How the child maintains relationships with other family members
- Communication (phone calls, texts, emails) with non-resident parent
- Decision making processes (e.g. health, education). Who will take the lead?
- How you will resolve any disagreements.



There is no set format for a Parenting plan and no hard and fast rules. They can include as much information as the parents feel is necessary. The only requirement is that they are made with the best interests of the child at heart.

As children grow older their needs change and a Parenting Plan can be changed if both parties agree in writing. A parenting court ordered agreement can also be changed as long as those orders don't prohibit them from doing so. It is often beneficial to involve older children in discussions to ensure their feelings and preferences are considered when making an agreement.

The relationship between the separated parties will often dictate which Parenting Agreement is best:

- An oral agreement
- A written agreement or
- A court ordered agreement.

Mediators are here to help parents work things out without having to go to court. They provide a safe space for each party to consider what they feel is in the best interests of their child/ren.