



Playing Fair: 7 Tips for
Creating a Fair Parenting Plan
for You, Your Ex,
and Your Kids

Deciding on the division of parenting responsibilities is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of a divorce. After living as a cohesive family unit, many parents are scared to give up time with their children and put them through the difficulties of living in two homes. If you are already committed to doing what is right for everyone in the family, you have already taken a great first step. Crafting a parenting plan that is fair for you, your ex, and most importantly, your children, is key to helping your children develop and maintain strong relationships with both parents.

1. Consider the Different Aspects of a Parenting Plan

There's a lot to discuss with your ex while writing up a parenting plan. One topic to approach delicately is parenting time. In some cases, both parents feel entitled to the majority of time with the children. However, this isn't about you or your ex—children deserve time with both of their parents. You may want to start by assuming a 50/50 split and adjusting as needed to accommodate your family's needs. Remember to plan for the school year, summer break, holidays, other days out of school, and birthdays.

Your plan should also cover legal decision making responsibilities. The court generally prefers that parents share these responsibilities, so you may only want to press for sole legal custody if there's a genuine reason that your ex cannot make decisions on behalf of your children.

Once you've made it through the bulk of your parenting plan, consider planning for unique situations and exceptions that are likely to arise. Putting these plans in writing can alleviate anxiety if these situations come up in the future. You may want to discuss what will happen if someone has to work unexpectedly during their parenting time, wants to go on vacation during the other parent's allotted time, or wants to switch a weekend or holiday.

2. Remember What Your Children Are Going Through

Your children should be at the forefront of your mind at all times. Divorce brings up lots of negative emotions, which can make it difficult to put aside your own feelings and consider your children's. Remember that they are experiencing a great upheaval in their lives, and it's up to you to help them create a new normal.

As you discuss different possibilities with your ex, put yourself in your children's shoes. What will everyday life look like for them if you choose one plan over another? Will they be able to spend enough time with both parents, other family members, and their friends? Can they keep doing the activities they love? What will they lose, and is there another option that can help them avoid losing an activity or routine they love? When you frame issues in this way, it's often much easier to make necessary sacrifices.

3. Look at the Logistics of Your New Lives

In an ideal world, children would get completely equal time with both parents. In real life, parents work, attend school, and have to deal with the challenges of single parenthood. You and your ex may want to discuss what each of your new lives will look like.

Talk about your work schedule, where you'll live, how much time you'll spend commuting, and what other obligations you have to meet. If one parent works 80 hours a week and the other works 40, a 50/50 split may simply be impossible. Rather than trying to force a custody plan that looks good on paper, create a practical plan that doesn't leave either parent overextended or overburdened.

4. Prepare for the Future

Some future circumstances are impossible to predict or plan for, but some can be discussed while creating your initial parenting plan. While it may be difficult to discuss, talk about what will happen when one or both of you begin dating again, set clear expectations for when children should meet new partners, the role of a new partner in your children's lives, and cohabitation.

If your children are very young, you may also want to talk about what to expect when they begin full-time school, as schools can significantly change the amount of parenting time you actually have. Don't feel pressured to hammer out the details of these issues right away. Simply bringing them up and being on the same general page may be enough at this stage.

5. Try to Set Your Own Feelings Aside

Don't feel ashamed if this process brings up feelings of sadness, betrayal, or anger. This could be one of the most difficult things you ever do in your life, and you must respect your own feelings. However, try to keep your negative emotions out of the parenting plan as much as possible. If you become overwhelmed, take a break and revisit the topic later. It's likely that both you and your ex will need multiple breaks to keep this conversation calm and productive.

6. Work as a Team, Not as Competitors

Too many parents enter this process with a "you vs. me" mindset. Your ex isn't your enemy or competitor, and there is no winner or loser. The goal of a successful parenting plan is for children to lose as little as possible and enjoy rich, meaningful relationships with both parents.

If an argument starts or you begin to feel attacked, take a moment to remind yourself and your ex that you are on the same team. You both want what's best for your children. You may have different ideas of what that means, but if you work together, you can eventually come to a consensus.

7. Stay Flexible and Keep Your End Goal in Mind

While writing a parenting plan, remain flexible. You may have set ideas about what you want from negotiations and what type of schedule you want, but rigidity has little place in coparenting discussions. Be ready to compromise, and you won't feel slighted when you have to give something up. If you keep your end goal in mind—doing what is right for your children and fair for both parents—you'll find it much easier to push through the difficult topics and come to a parenting plan that is suitable for everyone.

Divorce is a challenging transition, and it can be even more difficult if you have little support or guidance. Working with an objective, experienced family law attorney can help you get through this process while maintaining your coparenting relationship and protecting your own interests. Wherever you are in the process, we are here to help. Call KL Family Law and set up a consultation now.