

# We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan



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**EXTENSION**

**We Agree:  
Creating a Parenting Plan**  
*Parenting Apart - Helping Parents to Get It Right*  
A tool for parents raising children in  
different households

Jo Musich and Ellie McCann  
Regional Extension Educator, Family Relations



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**Goals for this session**

- Overview of parenting plans & how they can be used
- Explore child focused decision making
- Encourage use of parenting plans to
  - decrease conflict
  - increase cooperation between parents and other caregivers.



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*Parenting Education Resources*  
parenting.umn.edu



**Parents Forever**  
<http://www.parenting.umn.edu/programs/parentsForever/index.htm>



**Padres para siempre**  
<http://www.parenting.umn.edu/programs/parentsForever/padresParaSiempre/index.htm>



**We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan**  
<http://www.parenting.umn.edu/programs/parentsForever/weAgree/index.htm>



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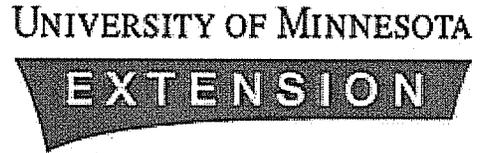
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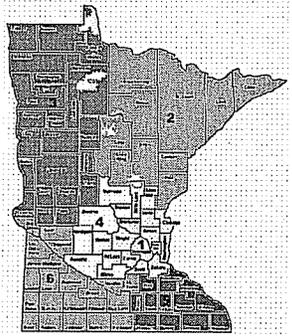
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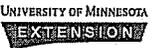
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**FEN Map  
Family  
Education  
Network**



1. Metro
2. Northeast
3. Northwest
4. Central
5. Southeast
6. Southwest



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What is a parenting plan?



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¿Qué es un Plan para padres?

Un acuerdo por escrito entre padres que no viven bajo en mismo techo y que tienen uno o más hijos en común

Estos planes consideran:

- ✓Decisiones entre padres
- ✓Cómo hacer cuando están en desacuerdo
- ✓Cómo tomar decisiones en el futuro
- ✓Arreglar asuntos sobre la vivienda y los tiempos en que cada padre estará con los hijos.

El tema básico es:  
Decidir juntos lo que es mejor para los niños



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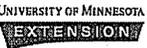
What is a Parenting Plan?

A written agreement between parents not living together who have a child or children in common

Parenting Plans consider:

- ✓Parenting decisions
- ✓How to deal with disagreements
- ✓How to make future decisions
- ✓Residential arrangements and parenting time

The bottom line:  
To give parents a tool to decide together what is best for their children



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## Parenting Plans are now allowed in Minnesota

- Supreme Court established the **Parental Cooperation Task Force** – August 1998
- A report was submitted the Minnesota State Legislature - January 2000
- The Legislature put the recommendations of the task force into the **Parenting Plan Statute** effective January 1, 2001



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## Advantages of parenting plans

- ✓ To help parents consider all the decisions they need to make about the care of their children
- ✓ A good plan will reduce conflict between parents
- ✓ Both parents are more likely to follow a plan they make themselves
- ✓ Less interaction with the courts



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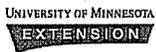
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## A new language for divorce

*Different terms -  
Visitation becomes parenting time*

- *Legal custody* is decision making responsibilities regarding the child
- *Physical custody* is daily care and residence of the child
- *Sole or joint legal custody* and *sole or joint physical custody* can be described by parents using alternate terms

A word of caution: You need to clearly define the terms you are using – it is a good idea to consult with an attorney to make sure you are using terms that will be understood by the court if there are disagreements



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- What should be in a Parenting Plan?

What is one parenting responsibility decision that needs to go in a Parenting Plan?

What is one parenting time decision that needs to go in a Parenting Plan?



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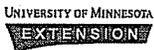
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## A Parenting Plan may include:

- Residential arrangements
- Parenting time schedule
- Medical care
- Communication with school
- Religion and cultural heritage
- Legal custody defined
- Vacations
- Participation in activities
- Plans for ongoing parent-child contact
- Child care arrangements
- Family connections
- How parents will communicate
- Transportation
- Financial responsibility
- How the agreement will be changed



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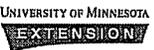
## How the court uses Parenting Plans

### When parents develop their own plan:

The plan is reviewed by the court and accepted if it is determined that both parents fully understand and agree to the terms and that it meets the best interests of the child standard. It may be attached to the divorce decree.

Check with your attorney or the court about procedures for using Parenting Plans

When there is high conflict or domestic abuse:  
A parenting plan may not be allowed.



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**• WHAT WILL THE COURT LOOK FOR IN YOUR PARENTING PLAN?  
"Best interests of the child"**

- What are the residential and parenting time arrangements
- Where do the children want to live?
- What is the relationship between each parent and the children?
- Who else should continue to have regular contact with the child?
- The child's temperament
- Length of time in the home or community
- Ability of each parent to provide love, guidance and care to the children
- Will the children be connected to their cultural roots?
- Support by both parents for children's relationship with other parent
- Special needs of individual children
- Stability of the current home
- Is there a history of domestic violence?




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## We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan Booklet Content

- **Before You Meet**
  - Background on elements of a parenting plan
  - Child development information
  - Parenting practices
  - Individual assessments
- **Making Your Parenting Plan Together**
  - Conflict reduction strategies
- **Maintaining Your Parenting Plan**
  - Parent communication
  - Decision making and changing the plan
- **Parenting Agreement Worksheet**
  - A worksheet for parents to use developed by Washington County Community Corrections-Family Court Unit




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## Using the Parenting Agreement Worksheet

- ✓ A working document – a tool, adapt it
- ✓ Used by parents who are divorcing or have never been married
- ✓ Language is gender free
- ✓ Does not assume you will have a particular legal or physical custody arrangement
- ✓ Parenting time schedule provides detail to help avoid conflicts




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## Where there is domestic violence

- ✓ You may not be able to use all parts of the parenting agreement worksheet
- ✓ Shared parenting may not be in the best interest of one parent or your child
- ✓ You may need to use this as a tool to reduce conflict and specify how you will parent apart safely.



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## It's all about the children:



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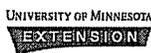
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## Benefits of creating a Parenting Plan

- Avoid costly legal battles around custody and parenting time issues
- Lessen the conflict that is part of many divorces
- Improve how parents work together to parent their children in the future
- Keep both parents involved with their children
- Create happier, healthier families



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### How to share parenting time

Decisions you need to make:

- Where will your child live?
- If one parent moves out of town, how will transportation be handled?
- With whom will your child spend vacations, holidays and special events?
- How will your child have continued contact with relatives?
- How will your child's medical needs be handled?
- How will your child participate in religious and cultural activities with each parent?

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### Parenting Time and the new Child Support Guidelines

**The amount of parenting time is now a part of the child support calculation.**

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Amount of parenting time	Parenting Expense Adjustment	
	Less than 10%	0%
10% to 45%	12%	
45.1% and above	Considered equal	

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Cantidad de tiempo que los padres pasan con sus hijos (plan para los padres)	Ajuste de los gastos de los padres	
	Menos del 10%	0%
	Del 10% al 45%	12%
	Del 45.1% y más	Se considera igual

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### Making child focused parenting time decisions

Factors to consider:

- The child's age and stage of development
- The temperament of the child
- The ability for both parents to maintain a predictable and safe parenting environment

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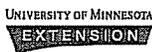
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### How Children Grow

Depending on their age, children have different needs and how you will meet the needs or... help them meet needs changes.

Decisions you need to make vary for

- Infants and toddlers (birth – 18 month)
- Preschoolers (2 1/2 years – 5 years)
- Elementary age (5-12 years)
- Adolescents (12-18 years)

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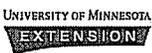
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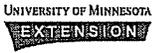
## Understanding Temperament

Different children respond to change in different ways. Is your child:

- An **easy child** – who responds to change well
- A **difficult child** – who resists change and lets you know it
- A **slow-to-warm-up child** – who needs more time to get used to new situations

*Consider your child's temperament when you make decisions about parenting time and transitions*






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### What we do well

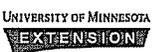
Every parent brings certain strengths to the parenting role. Think about the parts of parenting that you do particularly well. Think about the strengths of the other parent. Sometimes you'll share strengths; sometimes a task is easier for one parent than for the other.

*Put a check inside the strengths you identify for yourself, then do the same for the other parent. Feel free to add other strengths to those listed.*

Things the other parent does well at:

Is loving with our children	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be open and available to them	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show the children lots of physical affection	<input type="checkbox"/>
Find what they do right and praise them often	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep the children on a schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be a good listener	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accept them just the way they are	<input type="checkbox"/>
Set clear rules and limits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enforce the rules and limits we set	<input type="checkbox"/>






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## Helping parents focus on their children's needs

Parenting plans need to consider the unique needs of each child

Encourage parents to make a list of the special qualities and needs for each of their children and keep these in mind as they develop a plan

This will help you create a plan that centers on your child's needs and is more consistent between households






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**Different Parenting Styles**

**Positive**  
High nurturing  
High expectations for  
behavior  
High respect between parent  
and child

**Dominating**  
nurturing  
High expectations for  
behavior  
respect between parent  
and child

**Permissive**  
High nurturing  
expectations for behavior  
Moderate respect between  
parent and child

**Unengaged**  
nurturing  
expectations for  
behavior  
respect between parent  
and child



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**Are you using a  
Positive Parenting Style?**

- Your expectations for your child's behavior are reasonable based on their development
- You encourage your children to express their opinions
- You involve your children when you set limits, expectations, rules and consequences for breaking the rules
- You firmly, consistently and kindly enforce your rules
- You praise your children when they do something well
- You monitor your children and know who they are with, what they are doing, how and when they will return home
- You are there for your children and will seek outside help when you need it



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**Different Parenting Styles Can  
Cause Conflict Between Parents**

Keep in mind:

- You can only control your own parenting style
- Have similar rules and expectations when possible
- Your child will do better if at least one parent uses a Positive Parenting style

Your child needs you to:

- Love them unconditionally
- Set rules and have high expectations for their behavior
- Monitor their activities and friends
- Be a role model for how to deal with conflict, stress and communication in your relationship with the other parent



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# We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan



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## What are your beliefs about parenting?

When parents have different beliefs about how to care for their children, there can be conflict. Here are some ideas for common standards:

We agree:

- Not to expose our children to drugs, tobacco or alcohol
- To set and enforce curfew rules in both homes
- To have the same bed time at both homes
- Our children will go to school unless they are ill
- Homework will be done at both homes
- To protect our children from adults who might harm them
- Our children will have chores at each home
- To give our children positive attention
- To avoid using physical punishment



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## If you find yourselves getting no where – Get Help!

Levels of help for parents:

1. Mediation -Ask for a referral from your lawyer or the court to a professional mediator
2. Meet with your lawyers present
3. Make a plan through your lawyers
4. Let the court determine your parenting plan



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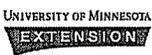
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## Maintaining your parenting plan How to exchange information with the other parent

- Short and focused conversations
- Build relationships with the people in your child's life
- Let the parent know about the little things



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## Changing the parenting plan

Decide ahead on a process for changing your parenting plan. If you can do this outside the court system, you will save time and money.

**Aim for stability**

**Set up regular meetings**

**Ask your children for ideas**

**Put your changes in writing**



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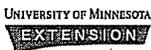
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## It's worth it!

Keep an open mind and a positive attitude.

*Together parents can create and revise a parenting plan to give their children the best of both of them.*



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## Parenting Education Resources

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**EXTENSION**

**How Children Grow**  
**Parenting Time for Infants/Toddlers (birth to 2 1/2 years)**

**Needs:**

- To develop a sense of trust in the world
- To know parents and caregivers will respond consistently to their needs
- Regular schedules
- Familiar surroundings

**How will you meet these needs?**

- Provide parenting time at a familiar location
- Have an older sibling go along with them to unfamiliar places
- Keep stays short and frequent and increase the time gradually

**Decisions you need to make:**

- What can you do to make sure there is a consistent feeding and sleeping schedule
- How will you choose a child care provider
- How will you handle toilet training
- What is your plan for dealing with issues such as tantrums, discipline, etc.





**How Children Grow**  
**Parenting Time for Preschoolers – 2 1/2 to 5 years**

**What they need:**

- Consistent and predictable schedules
- Familiar surroundings
- Chances to explore their world
- Permission to express their feelings

**How you can help them:**

- Time with both parents – overnight stays if this hasn't happened yet
- A positive or neutral attitude toward the other parent

**Decisions you need to make:**

- How you can maintain a consistent schedule between homes
- How to handle toilet training
- How will you choose a child care provider
- Strategies for dealing with discipline and behavior challenges – bedtime, eating, etc.





**How Children Grow**  
**Parenting time for babies (birth to 18 months)**

Babies need time with both parents in order to develop secure attachment

However, time with parents is only one part of this process. Babies need to be cared for by parents who:

- Respond to their needs
- Comfort them when they are upset
- Play with them when they want to play
- Give them quiet space when they need it

When children are parented this way, they feel more secure and are better able to adjust to transitions between homes.





**How Children Grow**  
**Parenting Time for Elementary Age – 5 to 12 years**

**What they need:**

- Consistent and predictable schedules and activities
- Time with both parents
- Parents who are respectful toward each other
- Communication between both parents and their school
- Good role models, and regular opportunities to be with same gender parent

**How you can help them:**

- Familiar surroundings, friends, activities and community
- Time with both parents – and openness to being in contact with the other parent when they are with you
- Good modeling about getting along with others

**Decisions you need to make:**

- What school will your child attend, how will they get there, how will both parents be involved?
- What activities will they be in and how will time and fees be shared?
- Do you need before and after school child care?
- When will you allow the children to stay home alone?
- How will you schedule summer and vacation times?





**How Children Grow**  
**Should babies (birth to 18 months) stay overnight at both parent's homes?**

There isn't agreement on this by child development experts, but if a baby moves between homes, the following needs to be in place:

- Parents need to communicate with each other about the needs of the child
- Parents are able to reduce conflict, especially when the child is present
- Both homes have the necessary equipment – crib, car seat, toys, diapers, etc.
- Both parents are able to keep a similar schedule for eating, sleeping, play time
- The child has a temperament that is conducive to transitions

Very young children need time with both parents, but not always on a 50/50 basis





**How Children Grow**  
**Parenting Time for Adolescents – 12 to 18 years**

**What they need:**

- Permission to question you so they can figure out what they believe and who they are
- Contact with both parents – through parenting time and your involvement in their activities
- Monitoring – knowing where, what, who, why, when
- Consistent rules in both households

**How you can help them:**

- Ask for their input on decisions and provide flexibility when it makes sense
- Give them permission to question your break up with the other parent

**Decisions you need to make:**

- How will you both monitor your teen?
- Guidelines for operating a motorized vehicle
- When and under what conditions can your teen date?
- Curfew rules
- Guidelines for teen jobs



