

Parallel Parenting Guidelines

A period of parallel parenting gives both parents a chance to recover from the loss/anger of the marital relationship, life crisis or extenuating circumstance. These times cause high emotional struggles that often lead to acting out abnormally in a co-parenting relationship. Parallel parenting allows for a cooling off period when the parents are not in constant contact, each has a time to heal, gain perspective and deal with their resentments.

As they let go of the spousal role, and co-parenting position they can begin to gain the strength back to be able to view the future as co-parenting partners once again. With this change in perspective and individual issues mostly settled, they are more likely to be able to co-parent effectively and calmly, thus creating a better environment for all members of the family.

*Emails are discouraged except to send a memo with pertinent information through a Parallel Parenting Memo

A parent with a history of either domestic violence, child abuse, or neglect who can demonstrate change and have it documented by a case manager, mental health or other professional may be a candidate for parallel parenting. Supervised visits might be part of this model. We should always keep in mind the child's safety and well-being are paramount.

A parallel parenting plan and custody order should specifically state:

- the start and end time of each custodial segment,
- the specific exchange place, and elimination of other issues that could cause conflict if there is miscommunication or the court order is vague.

Typically what is seen in a parallel parenting plan or court order is the following:

- specific days of the visits,
 - specific start times and end times,
 - pick up and drop off location,
 - specific provisions about cancellation and make up time, if any,
 - responsibility for transportation
 - what happens after a variance from the guidelines agreed to between the parents occurs
 - specific details that would be in a court order if one has not been developed in an effort to avoid further litigations.
 - A reevaluation date for possible transition to co-parenting (30 days - 3 months).
1. Mom and dad care for their children independently or with approved supervision.
 2. Children are exchanged with minimal interaction and polite regards.
 3. Memos are handed to other parent and brief greeting and gratitude given during exchange of children (if there is a supervisor they do the exchange of children and memos).
 4. Both parents have assigned specific parental duties while minimizing or eliminating contact with each other (organizing religious activities, athletics, hobbies, medical appointments etc.).
 5. Both parents agree to be professional, calm and non-threatening during communications.
 6. Agree to follow parent plan or court order, sticking to the facts when requesting variance through mutual agreement with a memo.

7. All major decisions pertaining to health, education and day care shall be made jointly by the parents through a memo. No prior consultation is required between the parents regarding emergency medical or dental treatment, routine checkups, or minor illnesses. However, the other parent shall be notified immediately in the case of an emergency. A sharing of routine health information will occur through memo.
8. The parent filling out any required forms shall list the names of both parents and their telephone numbers on all school and extracurricular cards/forms as well as with child's treating professionals and insurance carriers.
9. Neither parent shall submit the children to any psychological/psychiatric testing or evaluation or to any new extended course of medical, dental, orthodontic, psychiatric, or psychological treatment/counseling without consultation with one another and consent of both parents which shall be in writing.
10. Neither parent shall enroll the children in activities which require a commitment from the other parent or interfere with a previously agreed upon plan or court ordered schedule without mutual approval through memo.
11. Each parent is to provide the other with the address and telephone number at which the minor children reside. When changes are made, immediate communication through legal counsel, assigned supervision or assigned parental support shall be made and information provided. A parent shall notify the other parent if the parent plans to change the residence of the children for more than thirty (30) days, unless there is a prior written agreement to the removal. The notice shall be given before the contemplated move, by mail, return receipt requested, postage prepaid, to the last known address of the parent to be notified. A copy of the notice shall also be sent to that parent's lawyer if known. To the extent feasible, the notice shall be provided within a minimum of forty-five (45) days before the proposed change of residence so as to allow for mediation of a new agreement concerning custody.
12. Each parent shall keep the other advised at all times of his/her current residence and business address, telephone numbers (home, cell and work), the children's school and daycare, and the location of where the children will be spending any extended period of time (two days or more)
13. Each parent is responsible for keeping themselves advised and for advising each other of all school, athletic, and social events in which the children participate including, but not limited to school report cards, school meeting notices, requests for school conferences, notice of activities related to the children, and order forms for school pictures.
14. Each parent shall keep the other advised within a reasonable time when the minor children visit with the doctor, hospital, or place of medical treatment (excluding checkups), including the date of the visit, the name and address of the doctor, the condition treated, the results of the treatment, and description of any follow-up appointments made.
15. Access to records and information pertaining to a minor child, including, but not limited to, medical, dental, and school records, shall not be denied to a parent because that parent is not the children's custodial parent.
16. Parents agree to allow child to speak about absent parent and will refrain from any discourse with child or other that could result in defamation of character.
17. Parents agree to refrain from course discourse regarding parallel parent, co-parent or absent parent around the child or in the community. For the purpose of child safety and healthy parental processing of concerns such conversations will only take place with professionals or clergy that will respect confidentiality.

Parallel parenting is where each parent makes all the decisions and does all the parenting when the children are with them; schedules are usually close to 50/50 and laid out in great detail. Contact between the parties is minimal, utilizing a business approach through memos when communicating more than polite regards. Negotiations are discouraged and used only as needed to benefit children's dire needs or unavoidable circumstances. They are done through written communication to lessen emotional reactions and to create mature responses. The memos may be able to become legal documents that can be reviewed by a third party if needed. The end goal of parallel parenting is co-parenting. This has proven to be the most effective and healthy way to parent children who have divorced or separated parents.

Co-parenting can not take place if any of the following situations exist.

Situations where:

- one or both parents still harbor resentment toward the other due to the breakup or separation and that affects communication and the willingness to co-parent;
- one or both parents do not respect the other parent's role and refuse to work with the other;
- one or both parents have related emotional upheaval that doesn't allow for effective communication.
- parents do not agree there is no need for approval of the other parent or even communication about anything other than an emergency or other serious issues.

In order to avoid negative responses like depression, resentment, or anger in these circumstances parents should:

- use direct communications and actions. Stick to the Three Ps when communicating [Provide, Protect, Prepare] regarding children's care and avoid unrelated information.
- enhance senses of security in other parent to discourage the other parent in behaving or responding in un-compassionate or selfish ways (example: in a note on the memo write a brief statement like: "I appreciate your efforts in working towards positive relational goals for the sake of our children.")
- develop discernment and confidence about approach to subjects and negotiations regarding parenting to help with presentation (example: write a "pros and con's" list focused on the children not self or other parent when making parenting decisions.)
- agree to transition to co-parenting starting the process with reminders to other parent of good or positive events that happened in their parenting relationship or in the other parent's daily life regarding children to encourage a more compassionate response from them during transition. (initial reactions may be untrusting towards this change in attitude. With time and consistency trust can develop.)
- Initially co-parenting agreements should be very specific, leaving no room for different interpretations and therefore no room for additional conflict.
- Begin to negotiate the rules initially for co-parenting transition. Agreements should be in Memo form and very specific, leaving no room for different interpretations and therefore no room for future conflict.