

## Children - Parenting Plans

A Parenting Plan is one option which can be adopted by separating parents in relation to their children. It is a less formal approach to a Parenting Order when it comes to managing the arrangement that is in the best interests of children in the event of a relationship breakdown. A Parenting Plan is not enforceable like a Parenting Order.

A Parenting Plan is simply a written document signed and dated by both parents. There is no standard form, each Parenting Plan is unique to each situation.

A Parenting Plan can include one or more issues including:

- With whom the child is to live;
- The time a child is to spend with the other parent;
- The allocation of parental responsibility for children;
- The manner in which parents will consult each other about decisions made in relation to their children (for example schooling, religious and cultural upbringing, overseas travel etc.);
- The way in which any future disputes will be resolved;
- The way in which it is agreed that arrangements for the children can be changed;
- Financial support of the children;
- Any other relevant matter.

The overriding consideration for developing a Parenting Plan remains the best interests of the children. In considering what is to be included in your Parenting Plan, you can consider whether children spending equal time with each of their parents or alternatively significant and substantial time is in the best interest of the children and whether these options are reasonably practicable.

Any Parenting Plan or Court Order is able to contain provisions about how the agreements between parents will be changed, how disagreements in relation to arrangements for children will be resolved, and how decisions are made about major issues in relation to your children's life. These provisions can include engaging Mediation Organisations, Private Counsellors, or Family Dispute Resolution Centres to assist in any disputes that arise in relation to the Parenting Plan including disputes in complying with the plan.

If you are separating and have children and you want to know the best option for your situation, and in the best interest of your children, contact us to discuss whether a Parenting Plan is suitable for your case. We are also able to provide you with appropriate referrals to Child Counsellors, Mediation Dispute Resolution Services, and other relevant organisations to help you develop a Parenting Plan if you wish.

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