



MINISTRY OF  
**JUSTICE**  
*Tāhū o te Ture*



# Making a parenting plan

**A workbook to help you decide what's  
best for your children after separation.**

## Safety first

### WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT MY CHILD'S SAFETY OR MY SAFETY?

This booklet is for separating couples who are able to work together to reach agreement about the care of their children. This isn't always possible if there are safety issues you are concerned about, such as violence, abuse, or drug or alcohol dependency.

Your child's safety and your own safety come first. You don't have to let anyone have contact with your child if that puts you or them at risk. Family violence and abuse have a huge impact on children – protect them from harm and get help now by contacting:

- the Police, by calling 111
- Women's Refuge Crisis Line, by calling 0800 REFUGE (0800 733 843)
- Child, Youth and Family, by calling 0508 326 459.

To find out how Protection Orders could help protect you and your children, talk to a lawyer.

If you are concerned about your children's safety while with the other parent, the court can arrange supervised contact.

### WHAT IF I THINK MY CHILD'S OTHER PARENT IS GOING TO TAKE OUR CHILD OVERSEAS?

The Family Court can order that your child is not to leave New Zealand. Phone a lawyer urgently and talk about your options. If you don't know who to see, phone the Ministry of Justice helpline on 0800 2 AGREE (0800 224 733).

Sorting out your own parenting arrangements is usually better for you and your children. This is what most people do, and it will usually be quicker and less stressful for everyone than having to go to court.

**If you are able to agree on care arrangements and you're both happy with what you have agreed, then you don't have to do anything else (unless you want the court to make your agreement legally enforceable).**

**If you need help to reach agreement, there are a range of family justice services to help you. These include:**

- Family Legal Advice Service
- Parenting Through Separation
- Family Dispute Resolution.

**See the back page for contact details.**

## How this booklet can help you

This booklet gives you and your former partner some ideas to help you work out how you will look after your children after you separate. It includes a guide parenting plan that you can fill in or use as a checklist of things you may need to think about if you want to make your own parenting arrangements.

The questions in the parenting plan can help you and your former partner focus on what you need to do so your children are cared for and have time with both of you.

Also see the back page for links to more information about caring for children after separation.

---

### What arrangements do we need to make for our children?

Even though you're separated, you're still both responsible for your children. Together you'll have to work out how to organise your children's day-to-day care.

#### WHO SHOULD DECIDE ON THE ARRANGEMENTS?

It's best for everyone, especially your children, if you can agree on how your children will be cared for yourselves. Children cope more easily with separation when they know the people who care about them are working together.

Parents are often better at different things – think about this when working out who does what.

It's best if:

- children can keep up a loving relationship with both parents as much as possible
- children can keep up their relationships with

extended family/whānau, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, and their friends

- children have as few changes as possible, especially at first.

---

### Listening to your children

If your children are old enough, encourage them to say what's important to them. Don't put them under any pressure to choose between you. Respect what they say but don't make them feel they have to sort it out – that's your job. If you can't do what they want, let them know why.

---

### There are many ways of organising things

Children want to share their time with both of you and most say they want it to be fair. Use the parenting plan in this booklet to help you organise things so your children get to see both of you.

It's easier to organise things, and best for the children, if both parents can continue to live in the same area as before they separated. This way, there are fewer changes for children to adapt to and less travel.

---

### Making arrangements for children of different ages

The plan that works best for a child will be different for each child and will change as they get older.

#### BABIES AND PRE-SCHOOLERS (BIRTH-5 YEARS)

Young children experience time very differently; a day can seem like a long time for an infant.

Little children shouldn't be away from either of you for more than a few days at a time if they're going to be able to love and trust you

both. Infants and toddlers usually do best if they have a home base with one parent and frequent visits with the other parent.

Short visits to the other parent three or four times a week are a good idea. These should include doing routine things like feeding, playing, bathing, going for a walk and putting to bed.

Overnight visits with a parent, when children are used to being cared for by them, may be OK as long as:

- the child's routine is kept up
- the child shows no signs of stress
- you and your former partner are able to work together.

If you haven't been involved much with the children, you'll have to build up your relationship with them gradually. Parenting courses may help you learn new skills for looking after your children.

Toddlers and older pre-schoolers often get clingy and upset at changeovers. This is likely to be a reflection of anxiety and indicates a need for comfort and reassurance. Changeovers need to be handled patiently and carefully, with as little tension as possible between parents. It can be easier for one parent to drop children off for their visit rather than for the other parent to take them away.

If another caregiver is involved (like a grandparent, member of the extended whānau or childcare worker), watch out for signs that there are too many changeovers.

### **SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN (5-11 YEARS)**

School-aged children are more used to being away from their parents, like when they go to school or visit friends or family/whānau. Keeping one home base can help children continue their school friendships and activities.

If both parents have been involved in parenting, it can work well for some children to split their time up more or less equally between

### **Tips on reaching agreement**

Set aside time when you and your former partner can talk, away from the children. This could be in a public place like a cafe, over the phone or through emails, if that works better.

Ask a friend or family/whānau member to look after your children while you talk. It's best if your children don't see you getting upset over them. They may feel guilty and think it's their fault.

Be honest with yourself about how much the children love both parents and their wider family/whānau. In most cases, it's much better for children to have time and contact with both of you, despite how upset you both are at each other.

Focus on your children's needs. Talk about your relationship, money and family property issues later.

It's OK to ask children what they want but don't ask them to take sides. Teenagers are likely to want more say in how they're cared for.

The initial arrangements you make don't have to be final. You can change them and renegotiate with your former partner as you get used to the new living arrangements.

If you don't like the plan that your former partner has proposed, sometimes it's still easier, at least in the beginning, to see the children on your former partner's terms. But you must tell your former partner you aren't happy with the plan and want it changed, so there are no misunderstandings.

It may not work to have overnight stays in different locations for babies and very young children. Young children should see both their parents regularly but be careful about expecting them to relocate too quickly or too often. Young children need routine to feel secure.

two homes. Others prefer one home base with regular, frequent overnight visits midweek, as well as at the weekends, to their other parent's home.

### TEENAGERS (12 YEARS AND OLDER)

It's usual for teenagers to want to have a say in how they spend their time with each parent.

Teenagers need more flexibility and a different kind of parenting as they start to develop their own independent lives. Parents need to take their teenagers' school, social and other activities into account, as well as their need for time to relax.

Teenagers who have split their time up equally between their parents in the past might now prefer to have just one home base. Both parents can increase time with them by, for example, going along to their school and sports activities.

---

### Contact arrangements

If only one parent will have day-to-day care of the children, it's important to work out together how your children are going to stay in contact with their other parent. Things like phone calls, instant messaging and email can help you stay in touch when your children aren't staying with you.

---

### What do we do when we've agreed?

Write everything down so there's less chance of a misunderstanding later on. Use the parenting plan in this booklet or write up your own plan.

[www.justice.govt.nz/family/](http://www.justice.govt.nz/family/)

### HAVING THE COURT MAKE YOUR PLAN INTO A CONSENT ORDER

After you've made a parenting plan, you can ask the Family Court to make it into a consented Parenting Order (Consent Order). This means if one side isn't sticking to the agreement, the court can make sure they do.

To apply for a consented Parenting Order, you need to fill out a 'Joint application for a new Parenting Order by consent'. There's a \$220 fee.

A judge must be satisfied the agreement is in the best interests of the children or they may make an order that differs from your agreement.

Once you have a consented Parenting Order, if you both agree that you want to change it at a later date, you can fill out a 'Consent memorandum' asking the court to vary the order.

See the back page for a link to more information about Parenting Orders.

---

### What if we can't agree?

There are many ways you can get support to help you and your former partner agree on how you'll look after the children without going to court.

- The 'Family' section of the Ministry of Justice website has lots of information about working out how to care for children after a separation as well as useful contacts for support agencies that can help.
- Parenting Through Separation is a free information programme for parents about how to help your children adapt to separation. It's a four-hour course, usually delivered in two sessions of two hours. Your former partner won't attend the same course as you. PTS has helped thousands of parents and includes loads of practical information and ideas.

- Family Dispute Resolution involves you and your former partner meeting together with a neutral mediator who will help you sort out arrangements for the care of your children. The mediator will ensure issues are identified and information shared so you can make good decisions about your children's care, but they won't make a decision for you.
- Preparation for mediation – you may be too angry or stressed about your relationship issues to think clearly about your children's care arrangements. This is quite common. Preparation for mediation may be offered to help you manage these feelings so you can focus on what's best for your children.
- See the back page for all contact details.

### **COST**

Family Dispute Resolution, the Family Legal Advice Service and Preparation for Mediation are free of charge if you qualify for the government-funded service.

If you don't qualify for full government funding, you can still use the Family Dispute Resolution service but you'll have to pay a set total price of \$897 (including GST). This cost is split between the people taking part in the mediation.

If one of you qualifies for government funding, you'll be eligible to attend Preparation for Mediation for free. If neither of you qualifies for government funding, you'll need to pay for your Preparation for Mediation and legal advice.

---

### **Can we change our parenting plan?**

You and your former partner can agree to review and change your parenting plan at any time to meet the changing needs of your children as they grow up.

Reviews should be carried out every year or whenever your children reach a new stage in their lives. But if it's been really hard for you

to reach agreement and the agreement is working, it may be best to review it less often.

If you want your new agreement reflected in an order, you can ask the court to change the consented Parenting Order (Consent Order).

---

### **What if one of us doesn't stick to the parenting plan?**

You should both stick to your parenting plan as closely as you can but be flexible if things change unexpectedly.

If your former partner isn't sticking with the plan and you don't have a Consent Order, you can apply to the court for a Parenting Order. Unlike a Consent Order, a parent can ask for a Parenting Order without the agreement of the other parent.

In most cases, unless a delay could result in serious injury or undue hardship, you'll be expected to have completed a Parenting Through Separation course and attempted Family Dispute Resolution before you apply for an order.

The court will try to help you reach agreement but if this isn't possible, a Parenting Order can be made by a Family Court judge.

# Making a parenting plan

## Steps

1. Go through the parenting plan and agree on what arrangements work best for your children.
2. Write them down.
3. Keep a copy for each of you.
4. If you are having trouble agreeing, attend a Parenting Through Separation course.
5. If you need more help, go to Family Dispute Resolution.
6. Do your best to make the plan work for your children.

## What does the parenting plan cover?

As you work your way through this guide parenting plan, you'll see that it's set out in two parts. Part 1 covers the main parenting arrangements including:

- when and where the children spend time with each parent
- what schools they will go to
- the children's holiday arrangements
- rules about contact with the other parent and extended family when the children are with one parent
- how you'll handle changeovers between parents
- how you'll handle cultural and religious matters
- how you'll deal with any special health or medical needs your children have.

These types of things are called day-to-day care and contact arrangements. You will need to have decided what to do about these if you ask a Family Court judge to turn your plan into a Consent Order.

Part 2 of the parenting plan covers agreements on things like pocket money for children, cellphone and computer usage, or when they're allowed sweets. This part, while important to you and your children, can't be turned into a Court Order.

*If you're giving your parenting plan to the court (when applying for a Consent or Parenting Order), just hand in the back half of this book (from page 8).*

# Parenting plan – part 1

## 1. CHILDREN'S NAMES

---



---



---

## 2. LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

### When will our children spend time with each of us?

Describe the arrangements. An easy way to get started is to make a weekly or monthly calendar showing how the arrangements all fit together. Blank weekly and monthly calendars are on the next 2 pages for you to use.

EXAMPLE A: Weekly plan (more appropriate for younger pre-school children)

A weekly plan for a pre-school child might look something like this. The shaded times are with Parent A – all day Monday and Monday night, 4pm to 7pm Wednesday, all day Friday and Friday night, and Saturday morning. The blank areas are the time the child spends with Parent B.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
8am	Shaded				Shaded	Shaded	
9am	Shaded				Shaded	Shaded	
10am	Shaded				Shaded	Shaded	
11am	Shaded				Shaded	Shaded	
noon	Shaded				Shaded		
1pm	Shaded				Shaded		
2pm	Shaded				Shaded		
3pm	Shaded				Shaded		
4pm	Shaded		Shaded		Shaded		
5pm	Shaded		Shaded		Shaded		
6pm	Shaded		Shaded		Shaded		
7pm	Shaded				Shaded		
8pm	Shaded				Shaded		
overnight	Shaded				Shaded		

EXAMPLE B: Monthly plan (more appropriate for school-aged children)

A monthly plan for a school-aged child might look something like this. The shaded times are with Parent A – 9am Sundays to 8am Wednesdays (before school). The rest of the time (the unshaded areas) is with Parent B – Wednesdays after school to 9am Sundays.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
week 1	Shaded	Shaded					Shaded
week 2	Shaded	Shaded					Shaded
week 3	Shaded	Shaded					Shaded
week 4	Shaded	Shaded					Shaded



Monthly calendar

The shaded boxes  show when \_\_\_\_\_ (parent's name) will have the children.

The unshaded boxes  show when \_\_\_\_\_ (parent's name) will have the children.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
week 1							
week 2							
week 3							
week 4							

---



---



---



---



---

3. CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS

When our children stay with one of us, what contact will they have with the other parent?

---



---



---

When will our children spend time with other important family, whānau and friends?

---



---



---

4. CHANGEOVERS

How will our children get from one household to the other?

---



---



---

Will changeovers sometimes take place at school (for example, will one parent drop off our children at school in the morning and the other parent pick up the children from school in the afternoon) and on what days?

---



---



---

**5. HOW WILL WE DEAL WITH SPECIAL OCCASIONS?**

Birthdays (children's and parents')

---

---

---

---

Mother's Day

---

Father's Day

---

Long weekends and other public holidays

---

---

---

Christmas and other festivals

---

---

---

**6. HOW WILL WE DEAL WITH HOLIDAYS?**

Who will our children spend their holidays with and which one of us will make the travel arrangements?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Is one of us allowed to take the children out of the country for a holiday? If so, who makes the travel arrangements and how will the other parent be contacted?

---

---

---

---

---

**7. SCHOOL**

Will our children be able to stay at the same school?

---

Which of us will tell the school that our children's family circumstances have changed?

---

Which of us will go to parent-teacher interviews, parents' evenings and other school events?

---

When our children get older, they may need to change schools. How will we choose the school?

---

---

---

Do we want our children to receive religious instruction at school?

---

Do we want our children to receive sex education at school?

---

---

How will we decide on our children's school subjects?

---

---

---

How will we know about our children's progress at school?

---

---

---

Which one of us will tell the school that reports and notices need to be sent to both of us?

---

Who will look after our children during teacher-only days and other short school days?

---

#### 8. SPECIAL CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS MATTERS

For example, do we want our children to go to church? Which church will they go to?

---

---

---

---

#### 9. SPECIAL MEDICAL OR HEALTH NEEDS

How will we deal with our children's special medical or health needs?

---

---

---

---

## Parenting plan – part 2

This part of the plan details other matters such as supervision, who takes the children to medical appointments, pocket money, etc. You don't need to fill all of this out, only what's relevant to you and your children.

#### 10. SAFETY RULES

Supervision at home – will our children be allowed at home on their own? Remember, children aged under 14 years require supervision by an adult.

---

---

---

---

---

Supervision away from home – will our children be allowed to walk to places or catch public transport on their own? In what circumstances will they be allowed to do this?

---

---

---

---

Other concerns – for example, what are our arrangements for picking our children up after sports and music practice or from friends' places?

---

---

---

---

**11. OTHER PEOPLE LOOKING AFTER OUR CHILDREN**

Who else is allowed to look after our children?  
(Other carers could include babysitters, relatives, childcare centres, after-school care.)

---

---

---

What happens if one of us isn't available to look after our children during our scheduled time?

---

---

---

**12. AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

Who will take responsibility for getting our children to these?

---

---

Which parent will go to school camps?

---

---

**13. HEALTH**

How will we communicate with each other if our children are sick?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How will we share responsibility for looking after our children when they are sick or unable to go to school?

---

---

---

How will we share responsibility for taking our children to medical or dental appointments?

---

---

---

Do we agree that our children should be immunised?

---

**14. REGULAR DISCUSSIONS**

When will we have regular discussions about our children?

---

---

---

**15. CHILDREN'S IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS**

Who will look after our children's important documents?

---

---

**16. MONEY CHECKLIST**

Are either of us making regular payments for our children to the other parent? (These can include payments through Inland Revenue Child Support.)

---

---

How will we pay for our children's everyday clothes and shoes?

---

---

---

How will we pay for our children's uniforms, clothes, shoes, sports and activities at school?

---

---

---

How will we pay for our children's after-school activities (like sport, church camps, music, dancing)?

---

---

---

How will we pay for our children's other school expenses (like fees, donations, transport, trips, stationery)?

---

---

---

How will we pay for our children's medical expenses (like doctor's fees, dentist, optician)?

---

---

---

How will we pay for our children's childcare?

---

---

How will we pay for our children's holidays and travel (like visits to grandparents, family, whānau and friends)?

---

---

How will we pay for large items for our children (like a bicycle, mobile phone, computer)?

---

---

Will either of us give our children pocket money and, if so, how much?

---

---

How will we make sure we keep this plan up to date for our children?

---

---

**17. ARE OUR CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS DIFFERENT FROM THIS PARENTING PLAN?**

Yes. Explain what's changed and why it needs to change.

No. How long have the current arrangements been in place?

---

---

---

**18. REVIEW DATE**

When will we review this plan?

---

---



## In an emergency

### Police: call 111

Women's Refuge Crisis Line: call 0800 REFUGE (0800 733 843)

## Find more information

### Online

#### **Caring for children after separation**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

#### **Find a family lawyer**

[familylaw.org.nz](https://familylaw.org.nz)

#### **Family Dispute Resolution**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

#### **Family Legal Advice Service**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

#### **Funding eligibility table**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

#### **Ministry of Justice 'Family' section**

[justice.govt.nz/family](https://justice.govt.nz/family)

#### **Parenting Through Separation**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

#### **Parenting Orders**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

#### **Protection Orders**

[justice.govt.nz/family/domestic-violence](https://justice.govt.nz/family/domestic-violence)

#### **Supervised Contact**

[justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children](https://justice.govt.nz/family/care-of-children)

### Video content on the Ministry of Justice's YouTube channel:

#### **Families and professionals talk about separation, part 1**

[youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_bxlp9bwU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=E_bxlp9bwU)

#### **Families and professionals talk about separation, part 2**

[youtube.com/watch?v=7k5Rkt5YK8A](https://youtube.com/watch?v=7k5Rkt5YK8A)

#### **Families and professionals talk about separation, part 3**

[youtube.com/watch?v=ke4ISAMmEzE](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ke4ISAMmEzE)

#### **Kids talk about separation, part 1**

[youtube.com/watch?v=RHDhZ1G2z7U](https://youtube.com/watch?v=RHDhZ1G2z7U)

#### **Kids talk about separation, part 2**

[youtube.com/watch?v=n0dKWs4tHgQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=n0dKWs4tHgQ)