

## **How to write a Parenting Plan**

If you are separated or divorced, it becomes essential at one stage or another for you to reach an agreement about how you parent your children. The emotions and irrational reactions that the adversarial nature of family courts encourage means it is nearly always better to try and establish some level of common understanding prior to a court appearance. Discussion of a parenting plan can help here.

There is no single parenting plan that covers all parents and all children so this template gives some ideas and phrases you could use but you should feel free to adapt it to meet the needs of your children, expectations of your ex and your own needs too. Some of the sections you may not want to include or have no need for, so leave them out. There are no essential sections or special legal language that needs to be used but be sure you cover everything that is likely to be problematic and don't skimp on the detail.

In this template there are two children called Sanjay (3yrs) and Adele (7yrs) and the parents are Frank and Lena.

### **The Parenting Plan for Sanjay and Adele**

#### **Children of Frank and Lena Scott**

##### **Statement of Principle**

Frank and Lena agree that they will both take equal responsibility for the parenting of Sanjay and Adele. We will try our best to ensure that Sanjay and Adele have the benefit of two loving parents for the rest of our lives. We both agree to co-operate with each other in this endeavour.

##### **Where the children will live**

The children will live with both of us. This means they will stay overnight with both of us at different times during the school term and during school holidays. We agree to take the opinions of the children with regard to where they spend their time into account but, to make final decisions together.

While the children are pre-school we have agreed that they will live more with Lena but it is expected that the proportion of time spent with Frank will increase as the children get older. This will allow Lena to return to work or training at some agreed future date.

Both Lena and Frank will endeavour to live close to each other and to the children's school. This will encourage cooperation between us and be most convenient for the children and our shared parenting arrangement.

Either parent intending to change this arrangement must consult the other parent and provide a reasoned and practical solution to how the shared arrangement will continue.

##### **Current arrangements**

The current arrangement (date here) we have agreed is that the children shall live with Lena during the week (Monday to Friday) and live with Frank at weekends. The arrangements for weekends are as follows:

- Every other weekend Frank will pick up the children after work on Friday and return them to Lena on Sunday at times agreed in advance.
- During the intervening weekend Frank will take the children out on Sundays (pick up and drop off times to be agreed in advance).
- During the week Frank will endeavour to come to Lena's house to babysit so she can have an evening out with her friends. This will depend on Frank's work commitments and may not always be on the same evening each week.

### **Financial Arrangements**

Frank will pay Lena, by standing order, the Child Maintenance agreed by the CSA, pro rata.

Frank and Lena will share the cost of additional activities eg karate and ballet lessons. This will be paid by Frank and Lena as the need arises and Frank will keep a tally to ensure we both pay the same over each term. Adjustments will be made in cash at the end of each term.

No additional activities that involve expenses shall be started without either parent consulting the other one. The running total for additional costs will be posted on Whatapp for the other parent.

Both parents will contribute to a savings account in our joint names to be used by the children for University. No money can be withdrawn from the account without the signature of the other parent.

Lena will remain on JSA and claim housing benefit and receive child benefit while Frank will claim tax credits but continue working. We both agree to discuss this with the benefit authorities truthfully and in the best interests of the children and keep each other informed.

### **Communication**

Both parents agree we will not speak negatively about the other parent in front of the children.

We both agree to be positive as far as possible when discussing the other parent with the children.

We will keep a Communications Diary to pass information to the other following our parenting time. The children will bring this with them when they move between us. The children will be encouraged to write in the diary too. Parents will include plans for their next contact so such items as laptops, homework, wellies etc can be coordinated.

Our primary method of communication will be by Whatsapp. If two blue ticks are shown by any message, the sending parent is to assume the other has read and understands it.

We will communicate by phone for emergencies only. This includes unforeseen lateness, unplanned hospital or Dr. visits, or matters where there appears to be a dispute between the children's expectations and the parent, that need clarifying. This includes times when we feel the children are trying to play one parent off against the other.

## **The Car**

Lena will keep the car during the time she has the children. Frank will use the car when he has the children and will ensure it is insured and has a current MOT. In the meantime Frank will use his bike for transport. We will share the cost of car repairs and insurance. Frank is intending to get his own car when he can afford it, at which time we will discuss how we can manage to support two cars.

## **Extended Family**

We both agree to trust each other, at least with the health, welfare, safety and security of the children. With that in mind each parent will decide with whom the children play, in what environment, which adults they meet and the nature of their supervision in the knowledge that they will not consciously put the children at risk while the children are with them.

Frank is aware of the concerns Lena has regarding some members of his family and will not put the children at risk while they are in the company of his family. This arrangement goes for Lena too.

## **Children's activities while in the care of the each parent**

The children's activities while in the care of each parent will be their responsibility to organise and prepare for. This means equipment required will be provided by that parent. In the event equipment is located at the other parents home, it will be the responsibility of the caring parent to arrange for it to be transferred and returned in time for any future events, in the same condition it was received.

We do not expect the children to have two sets of property at each house except basic things like underwear, t-shirts, socks etc. However no one parent should be responsible for all the washing and ironing. The children should be returned to the other parent in clean clothes unless previously arranged for reasons connected with time, convenience or travel.

No parent should arrange activities for the children that occur while they are with the other parent other than with prior consent.

## **The children's diet**

We both agree that the children should have a healthy diet and will restrict the consumption of biscuits, sweet and junk food by cooking at home when at all possible. Each parent will ensure the children clean their teeth after meals.

## **The future of the parents**

Both Frank and Lena have no new partners currently although we understand that Lena has a boyfriend but no future arrangements at the moment. We will not encourage or instruct the new partners of either parents to take over the role of the other parents, either by instruction, assumption or expectation. We will encourage future partners to cooperate with our parenting plans and develop good relations with the other parent.

We understand that when the children are both at school that Lena will want to return to full time work or training. Frank will encourage this and do all he can to assist her. We believe this will be a good role model for the children but that our spirit of cooperation and consultation should continue.

### **Children's paperwork**

Lena will keep all the original paperwork for the children. This includes passports, birth certificates, school certificates, medical information etc. Lena will provide Frank with photocopies. In the event Frank requires originals (eg passports). Frank will make Lena aware of this in good enough time for their safe transfer (eg 2 weeks).

### **Handover**

Although the current handover arrangements are at the shopping centre we understand this is only a temporary agreement. We hope to arrange handover at each other's home once we both agree. This is for convenience to both of us. At the time of writing we have agreed to continue the shopping centre handover but re-assess the arrangements when Sanjay starts mainstream school.

### **Holidays**

Holiday arrangement are as follows.

- Each parent will have half the school holidays eg. either 3 or 4 days of half term or half the Easter holiday . Exact details will depending on agreed prior arrangements. No parent is to make assumptions on this and must discuss the arrangements well in advance. eg prior to buying tickets or making promises.
- Each parent will have two weeks with the children during the summer when they will take them away for a summer holiday. Details of the trip eg. dates, venue, contact arrangements, return date etc. should be with the other parent well before the date of departure.
- Lena to make the passports available to Frank two weeks prior to departure should the holiday be abroad.
- The children will spend one of the last two weeks of the summer holiday with each parent. Lena has asked for the the final week to allow time for the children to adjust ready for the return to school.

### **School Events**

We will attend school events together. This is what the children want. If there are school events communicated to either parent, we will confirm the other parent is aware of it. We will both do our best to attend all parent's events at school.

We will both ensure the other parent is recorded in school files as the next of kin and emergency contact for the children.

### **Rewards and punishments**

We believe our children should be appropriately rewarded for good behaviour, hard work and being respectful and considerate towards others. We do not believe that rewards always need to be physical things and will also reward our children with praise, attention and our support.

Although our house rules may be different at our homes, we believe the children will have no problem coming to terms with this as long as we are consistent and reward good behaviour appropriately. We will not disrespect the other parent's decisions regarding rewards and punishment and will not expect the other parent to punish behaviour that has occurred during their parenting time. We will tell the other parent about good behaviour while the children are with us so they can be rewarded by us both.

### **Parenting Plan – future amendments**

We both agree that this parenting plan may not be complete or appropriate for the future and will ensure we discuss how it could be amended as the children grow older and our new relationships develop

Signed            Frank Scott  
                         Lena Scott

Date.

This plan will not suit all parent's needs. Some will need to be short term and specific around pick up and return and communications. Others are more comprehensive and can allow for flexibility. What two parents can agree in the light of recent breakup and possible court action depends on how compromising each parent is willing to be.

I have known cases where an excellent parenting plan has been drawn up by cooperative and flexible parents and falls flat months later. There are numerous reasons. New partners are often the cause. For success they will need to be involved and included in the parenting plan and understand their role is not to usurp the role of the other parent but support the children's relationship with both their parents.

Other reasons for the collapse of a parenting plan include, a change in job, a decision to move away by one parent, illness, a return to work or college, poor advice from agencies or charities or simply the inability of one parent to organise their life around the needs of the children.

If you feel this advice sheet could benefit from your experience please let us know.

East London – Families Need Fathers – Both parents Matter

26/05/2017

