
FAMILY LAW RIPPLES

"A pebble drops, transforming the lake"

About Family Law Ripples

"Ripples" is a bi-monthly publication focused on legal matters affecting families. It promotes responding to family change with an eye to cooperation, connection and positive values.



Inside this Issue: Parenting Plans: Key Elements, Parenting Plans on the Internet, and Quotes of the Month

PARENTING PLANS: KEY ELEMENTS

Parenting is more than simply having a child with you. Often it is helpful for separating or separated parents to discuss explicitly other important aspects of parenting. Doing this tends to help parents develop a complete definition of the new co-parenting situation.



Minnesota law on custody defines only two aspects of parenting: physical custody (daily care and control of the child) and legal custody (major decision making). See Minn. Stat. Sec. 518.003, Subd 3 at www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/518/003.html. Parents may agree upon their own definition of custody and include additional details if they choose to use a parenting

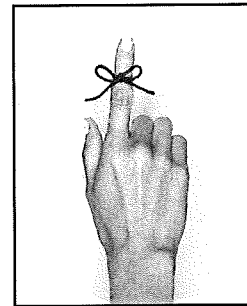
plan. See Minn. Stat. Sec. 518.1705 at www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/518/1705.html.

Many parents use a combination of the statutory definitions and some of their own, often tailoring the details to their unique circumstances.

Key elements to co-parenting are communicating about the child, sharing information about the child and the child's life, participating in the ordinary events of childhood, making decisions on behalf of the child and spending time with the child.

When parents reside together, some of these elements are fulfilled in informal, unstructured and unsystematic ways, because there are many incidental connections each day or week in family life. After a separation, parents cannot count on such connections.

Co-parenting after a separation usually requires a conscious effort to work with the other parent as an ally or at least a potential ally. This means that a minimum of a business-like manner needs to be adopted and a friendly one is preferred.



The business of the co-parenting team is raising a child in a way which keeps the child's life more or less focused on his/her own development and the ordinary experiences of childhoods. Keeping an eye on this general goal should identify situations where the choice of one detail over another detail is not significant – a choice just needs to be made.

These concepts inform parents' discussions of the following key elements, which together with a parenting time schedule, define a complete parenting plan.

Communication

What method of communication is most effective for the parents? E-mail? Telephone? Communication notebook that goes back and forth with the child? Should a different method be used when there is an emergency or information that needs to be conveyed immediately?

How frequently should they communicate? For most families, it works to communicate at least once a week.

When should they communicate? For most parents, it works best to set a date and time for the once weekly communication to be sure that it occurs on a regular basis.

What should they communicate about? For most parents, fine-tuning the upcoming week takes priority plus planning details for the future.

Information-Sharing

What information does each parent want to have about the child? Typically, parents will generate a list that includes school information, activities information, health information, etc. Some parents have information which is unique to their family. The purpose of discussing the specifics for each family is to ensure that each parent has a good understanding of the other parent's expectations.

What information will one parent convey to the other parent? What information will each parent obtain independently for him-herself?

Will the school, lesson instructors and others be given contact information for both parents?

Participation

What events in your child's life do you both want to attend? Typically, these events include parent-teacher conferences, games, performances, and school event. For some families, they also include attending health care appointments and other events.



Are there any events that one of you has always done with the child and wants to continue being the primary parent taking the child to the event?

Who will transport the child to/from events when both parents attend? If the assigned parent cannot take the child to an event, is the other parent willing to provide the transport?

Decision-Making

When will a parent communicate to the other parent about a decision that needs to be made? Most parents prefer to know about the issue enough ahead of a deadline for making the decision so that it

can be discussed between the two of them and possibly also with the child.

When will a decision be communicated to the child? Most parents find that it works best if no promises or commitments are made to the child before both parents agree on the decision.

What decisions does each parent want to have a say in? For some families, this list is general. For others it may be more detailed, taking into account decisions that are down the road such as teen dating and college shopping.



Once a decision is made who will convey the decision to the appropriate place?

If it is the child waiting for a decision, what language should be used to convey the decision to the child? For most children, it builds the impression of parental cooperation if parents deliberately emphasize their acting as a unified front – “Your father/mother and I think that...”

If the parents are unable to reach an agreement, what will they do next to resolve the dispute? Mediation? Use a Parenting Time Expediter if it is a schedule issue? Use a Parenting Consultant? Go to Court?

PARENTING PLANS ON THE INTERNET

Planning for Shared Parenting: A Guide for Parenting Living Apart – written materials available from www.affc.org (select “Publications”).

Model Parenting Plan – written form available from www.aaml.org (select “Publications”).

We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan – one-day workshop sponsored by the University of Minnesota Extension Service – for information see www.parenting.umn.edu/ (select “Parent Education”). A parenting plan worksheet and a ten-minute Powerpoint presentation are also available from this website.

Parenting Plan (Annotated Document) – guide for attorneys drafting parenting plans along with a parenting plan form – available from www.minncle.org (selection "Publications").

A Parental Guide to Making Child-Focused Parenting Time Decisions – online pamphlet which can also be downloaded available from www.mncourts.gov (select "Publication and Reports").

Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for Your Child – book by Isolina Ricci available from www.amazon.com and most bookstores.

QUOTES OF THE MONTH:

The family is a unit composed not only of children, but of men, women, an occasional animal and the common cold. **Ogden Nash**

Parents are often so busy with the physical rearing of children that they miss the glory of parenthood, just as the grandeur of the trees is lost when raking leaves. **Marcelene Cox**

We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future. **George Bernard Shaw**

The central struggle of parenthood is to let our hopes for our children outweigh our fears. **Ellen Goodman**

Be gentle with the young. **Juvenal**



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