What Is Covered in a Parenting Agreement?

Nearly 50% of all US births occur outside of marriage. Healthy co-parenting is in the best interests of your child and makes both the parents and the child feel secure. If you have a child and are not legally married to the other parent, you need legal protection to clearly define each parent's rights and responsibilities. Here is a list of what should be included in a parenting agreement.



A well-written parenting and child support agreement is a roadmap of how you will raise and support your child together while living in separate homes and will help you avoid costly, stressful and time-consuming litigation.

A parenting plan should cover the main parental rights and obligations of both parents for each child:

- Legal Custody: Who has the authority and responsibility to make major decisions for the child? This includes decisions about health care, education, and even smaller issues like haircuts and ear piercing. Legal custody can be sole (only one parent decides) or joint (both parents have the authority to make decisions).
- Physical Custody: Will the child reside primarily with one parent or reside with each parent an equal time amount of time? What will the actual schedule be during the week? The parenting plan should include a schedule with calendar dates and specific drop off/pick up arrangements. What happens in the event the schedule needs to change?
- Holidays, School Breaks, and Vacations: How will holidays and school breaks be divided between the parents? Are there any restrictions on traveling with the child out of state, or out of the country, during vacations?
- Financial Obligations: How much will the noncustodial parent pay in child support? Who is responsible for childcare costs, health insurance, medical care, tuition and other educational expenses, and any other foreseen expenses of raising a child. How will unforeseen expenses be discussed?
- Co-Parenting Decisions: A parenting plan can include other important issues such as: healthcare and vaccinations, religious observance, education, discipline, sports and leisure activities.

- Extended Family and Friends: Are there any concerns about certain family members being alone with the child? How and when will a parent's future romantic partner be introduced to the child?
- Communication: How will the co-parents communicate with each other? How will they communicate with the child?
- Modifications: What will happen in case of relocation, remarriage, or substantial income increase/decrease? The parties should include procedures for reevaluating and modifying the child support and parenting plan as the child grows and circumstances change. Children's needs change as they age, and parent's circumstances will likely change in unforeseen ways.

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