

Parenting Plans (Part 1): Why Do I Need a Parenting Plan?

We are both here to help you create a parenting plan. This series has all the information you need to navigate this court process smoothly.

Let's get started.

In this video, we'll talk about the parties, or the people who create a plan. We'll look at your first steps in the process, why parenting plans are important, and what happens once a plan is in place.

First, let's talk about what the court means when it talks about "parties" in a custody case.

CHAPTER HEADING: PARTIES

A parenting plan is a written agreement describing how parties will work together to care for their children. It's also called a custody agreement. Notice we said "parties," not "parents." A party in this context is someone who wants to maintain or establish a parent-child relationship. Naturally, this includes biological, step, and adoptive parents. It also includes people recognized by the court as having-forged a parent-child bond. This is called a de facto parent.

CHAPTER HEADING: STEP ONE

At your first appearance in court, you will be directed to two important resources: the *Maryland Parenting Plans Instructions*, form CC DRIN 109, and the *Maryland Parenting Plan Tool*, form CC DR 109. These documents are available at mdcourts.gov/parentingplan. Review them and think about what type of parenting plan might work for your family.

Every family is different. There is "no one-size-fits all." If you have multiple children, you may need separate plans for each child. You are the experts on your children's needs.

CHAPTER HEADING: WHY PLANS ARE IMPORTANT

A parenting plan is personal to the needs of your family because it is drafted by YOU. Working together empowers you to decide what is best for your child. The alternative is to leave this decision to a judge who knows very little about your family. Courts prefer that parties reach an agreement independently because you know what is best. Drafting your own parenting plan also reduces the emotional and financial cost. It provides consistency, predictability, and can help prevent future conflict.

If you settle on a plan, file it with the court. If the court agrees that the plan is in your children's best interest, it can be written into a custody order. But what if you agree on some issues but disagree on others? That's okay, too. The trial will focus on your disagreements. Either way, a parenting plan helps avoid costly and time-consuming litigation.

Last topic.

CHAPTER HEADING: PLAN IN PLACE

Once a plan is in effect it becomes a guide for how you will make decisions about your children and when they will spend time with each of you. Your plan can be general. Or, it can be specific. The level of detail needed to provide a predictable routine depends on your family. It's a roadmap for privately navigating your family conflicts without court intervention. The court is always available to resolve problems. But you save time and money -- and avoid stress -- if you figure out issues together.

CHAPTER HEADING: LET'S REVIEW

Parties include all types of parents. Take advantage of the court's resources. The best plan for your family is one drafted by you. It can be as detailed or as general as you like.

It's your plan. You're the experts.