



# Whatcom County Superior Court Residential Guidelines

1. **Introduction:** The Residential Guidelines Committee of the Family Law Re-envisioning process submits the following recommendations to the Court. These Guidelines have been compiled from the King County and Spokane Guidelines, the American Academy of Pediatricians and from the expertise of the committee members. The recommendations are to provide information from research and current practice, which will put paramount the best interest of the children in this community. The Guidelines are advisory. Family situations and a child's relationship with a parent must be considered. [Note: the following Guidelines are not to be considered if there are allegations or evidence of physical, sexual, emotional, or substance abuse.]

It is the committee's recommendation that the process of dissolution focus on children first and property issues second. Current information will help families and their legal advocates consider creating Parenting Plans that put the children's best interests foremost. Mandated education for parents early in the process and programs geared to helping children adjust to the family change are recommended.

These guidelines primarily focus on the child's needs and abilities according to normal development. While the following guidelines are expressed in month and year age ranges, all should recognize that a particular child's development may vary within the broad ranges. Each family situation is unique and the guidelines must be applied giving due consideration to a number of factors:

- The uniqueness of families, both in circumstances and in cultural diversity.
- The quality, history and consistency of each parent's relationship to their children.
- The parents' ability to communicate and co-operate with each other in parenting the children.
- Frequent changes of residential arrangements are not advised if parents cannot talk about the issues regarding the children, on a daily basis if necessary.
- Negative comments about the other parent inappropriately uttered in the presence of their children.
- Statutory restrictions on parental access to children, described in RCW 26.09.191.

- A. **Abuse Situations:** In cases of allegations of physical, sexual or severe emotional abuse the court will appoint a G.A.L. appropriately trained in issues of domestic violence to make recommendations. It is the committee's recommendation that the court allow only supervised visitation until a G.A.L. report is submitted to the court for consideration.

Definition of severe *emotional* abuse is:

- Repeated patterns of demeaning or belittling the child or the other parent in the presence of the child.
- Subjecting the child to the witnessing of battering of others.
- Neglect of appropriate supervision and failure to provide a safe physical environment, including the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

- B. **Needs of Children:** The following guidelines have been developed to provide information regarding a child's age and the normal developmental tasks they must complete. The guidelines will reflect the importance of stability, consistency and predictability in a child's life. They also respect the need for children to have a strong relationship with both parents unless there is reason to consider that an ongoing relationship with a parent may not be in the child's best interest. There is intentional overlap in ages since development stages can vary.

- Residential schedules allow consistency, predictability and stability for the children and for parents.
- Children's adjustment to the many changes will be easier if they have stability and consistency. Children who can predict what is expected of them develop a feeling of competency. The residential schedule can help all family members diminish their anxiety when they need to support a continuing relationship with each other.
- Although some parents can support and honor the flexibility and changes needed in schedules as children grow and their needs change, for others the guidelines will help identify the residential needs of a child depending on the child's age and developmental stage.
- Primary residential parents can often unduly influence a child. It is essential that these persons support an ongoing relationship with the other parent. Children know they are from two people. Both parents are responsible for helping children grow to feel healthy and positive about both parents and enjoy their time with both parents.

We have organized the residential guidelines in age related stages with recognition there can be overlap. Since there are individual differences in development among children of the same age, professional consultation may be an important consideration. The outline form narrative of the age-distinct guidelines is also presented in a four-page chart form.

## 2. **Infants & Toddlers** (0-36 months)

### A. **Infants** ~ 0-12 months

- (1) **Developmental Tasks:** For a baby, the developmental task is to learn to trust. The bond or secure attachment between the caregiver(s) and child that is consistent and predictable develops trust. The caregiver must be able to read the needs of the infant and fulfill those needs. The child develops a sense of security in the caregiver(s) that promotes trust and a feeling of safeness.

Patterns of access should not disrupt the ability of parents to provide continuous well ordered childcare that is consistent and stable. Daily contact with the nonresidential parent in a familiar environment where the child feels safe and secure is ideal. The nonresidential parent being able to fulfill routines such as bathing, changing or feeding in the infant's familiar environment promotes bonding without putting undue stress on the infant.

Changes in routine or unexpected interruption of care places undue stress on infants. If the parents are unable to co-operate, access periods need to be established in a neutral place where the security of the child is foremost.

During this period, frequent, predictable and non-stressful contact with the child is best. If circumstances do not allow several contacts a week, there should be no more than one to two hour contacts away from the primary residential parent. Finding ways to have frequent contact without disruption to the child's routine is the goal.

- (2) **Developmental Risks:** Children at this age are unable to distinguish between relational bonding and a consistent environment. The primary caregiver should not be removed for long periods from the child. Parental conflict will diminish the child's ability to develop trust, feel secure and attach to the important people in his/her life. For a child this age, six to eight hours away from the primary residential parent is an exceedingly long period of time and can cause intense stress. Overnights with the nonresidential parent should be discouraged unless the child has a strong bond and the nonresidential environment is familiar.

If children are not adjusting smoothly, the following symptoms may be seen: lethargy, frequent illness, fussiness and refusal to be soothed. In some cases, children may develop delays in their development and exhibit symptoms of failure to thrive.

## B. **Toddlers** ~ 12 - 36 months

- (1) **Developmental Tasks:** The tasks for children at this age are for them to separate from parents and feel competent within boundaries of safety. Giving children adequate freedom to explore within an environment of safety and security is paramount. It is important that the child begin to assert independence, yet learn to obey.

At this age some children can handle more time away from the residential parent depending on the child's connectedness and security with the nonresidential parent. If the nonresidential parent has been significantly involved and the environment is familiar, an overnight a week will not be a problem. If the child is separated for longer periods from the residential parent, there is an increasing risk the child may become distressed.

Children at this age remain susceptible to separation anxiety and stress particularly if there is a major difference in the parenting styles of the residential and nonresidential parent. The more similar and stable the routines and discipline, the more confident children are in learning acceptable behavior. Parents are more effective when they 1) continue to provide children with a secure base; 2) keep their own personal conflict from affecting and disrupting their children's lives; and 3) teach them how to give and take.

- (2) **Developmental Risks:** The symptoms that may be seen are: fear, anxiety, irritability, whining and clinging; regression to earlier behaviors such as incontinence, prolonged crying and excessive fear of separation without an ability for the parent to console particularly at transitions. Also, children will show increasing aggressive behavior and may have sleep problems. Children at this age who are experiencing chronic stress will have difficulty developing impulse control or self-control.

## C. **Suggested Residential Guidelines, 0-36 months:** It is imperative that the child

- Has a primary residence
- As an infant has its physiological/psychological needs supported, including being able to stay connected to the important people in the child's life.

The first three years of a child's life are the most critical because they establish the foundations for subsequent growth and development. Issues of bonding and attachment occur shortly after birth and are essential ingredients for them to feel loved and secure. Affection and caring form the core of the parents' relationship with their children and play a powerful role in shaping their subsequent behavior. During the first 6 months of life diminishing stress to the infant is an imperative. A consistent caretaker should be supported. Visitation should encourage minimal environmental changes. Also, it must be recognized that with the increasing numbers of mothers breast feeding, all attempts at visitation should occur only when they do not conflict with this important activity. After six months of age, as additional foods are introduced in the child's diet, more flexible visitation can occur. As children

develop, parents must begin discipline in a loving and consistent way. It is imperative that children remain safe, away from conflict and nurtured with their basic needs being met by both parents.

Twelve-month-old children require vigilance and patience. Important issues of parenting include safety, discipline and consistency. These lay the foundation for future expectations about behavior by teaching children not to do something that they very much want to do, thus establishing the first step in self-control. Inconsistencies in parenting, or disagreements about these issues may justify the court ordering one or both parents to participate and successfully complete parenting classes

By two to three years of age, as children's independence and autonomy increase, more demands are placed on the parents to insure their safety. Inability to ensure their safety, evidence of abuse (physical, verbal, substance abuse, or neglect) or continued problematic behavior following a visitation should suggest an evaluation by a professional.

Demonstrative nurturing and love, firm but consistent limit setting and providing an environment that is safe will allow children to maintain self esteem, and will develop improved impulse control.

#### **D. Long Distance Parenting, 0-36 months**

**From 0 - 24 months**: Ideally, the non-residential parent will come to the child's environment for time with the child. This may require a neutral family member or friend who will be with the non-residential parent while in the infant's environment. Any other arrangements should keep paramount a child's physiological and psychological well being.

**From 24 - 36 months**: Extended visits of several days may be considered if the nonresidential parent has exercised regular visitation through the early years of the child's life and they have become bonded.

### **3. Pre-Schoolers/Early Elementary/Later Elementary (3 years to 12 years)**

#### **A. Pre-Schoolers (36-60 months)**

(1) **Developmental Tasks**: Given the security of the primary relationships in their lives, children of this age group are becoming more autonomous, developing peer relationships and identifying with their gender. They are becoming better able to handle their own impulses. They are also able to spend more time away from the primary attachment figure without losing a sense of security.

The ability of children to control their own impulses must be understood in the context of parents verbally setting limits and demonstrating clear role models, exemplifying the values they wish their children to learn.

The level of conflict between parents will have a major impact in children's ability to accomplish developmental tasks for this age group. The schedule of contact for preschool children is less important than the level of conflict between parents. Important intellectual and physical developmental tasks will be delayed if children are living in emotional chaos.

Predictability of the contact is also a major factor. Frequent and regular contact is important. Since sporadic or infrequent access reduces a child's sense of security. One overnight for younger preschoolers and full weekends for older preschoolers during the winter and summer are recommended. Further, a parent may take the children on vacation for one week long periods during school breaks or in the summer.

- (2) **Developmental Risks** Parental conflict can increase the risk of home or school based behavioral problems. Conflict reduces a child's ability to develop healthy relationships and the feelings of confidence and self-reliance. Symptoms seen are: numerous fears, sleep disturbance, irritability, anxiety, anger, clinging and regressive behaviors. Children this age may blame themselves for the family problems. Sometimes children may withdraw or act "too good".

Children in this age group may act like younger children and show anger and aggressiveness toward the residential parent. Children this age may blame themselves for the absence or unhappiness of their parents, feel insecure, and frequently feel anxious that the residential parent may abandon them. It is important not to assume automatically that the children's relationship with either parent may be causing the negative reaction. Looking at the residential schedule, transitions and the environment around the exchanges are important.

- B. **Early Elementary** (5 years to 8 years) Children at this age are entering the larger world with peers, teachers, and community members.

- (1) **Developmental Tasks:** The primary task for this age child is to distinguish reality from fantasy, to expand the child's knowledge of the social and physical environment and to develop sexual identification. Children need to feel secure with a schedule that is consistent and predictable. This is an important age to teach children empathy. They are learning about and labeling feelings, thoughts and actions; their own and those of the people with whom they are in contact. They are expanding their attachments and deepening connections with other important people. This can occur in a natural and normal manner if the primary parental attachments are nurtured and feel secure.

Children are expanding their activities. Parenting schedules need to factor that into the plans. There should be no less than an every other weekend schedule for the nonresidential parent. If transitions are peaceful and the connection between the nonresidential parent is strong, older children may need access several times during the week between weekends for a few hours to feel satisfied.

Children can spend extended time with the nonresidential parent because they have developed a better sense of time. Dividing the summer equally may be appropriate, although not necessarily all at one time.

Contact with the parent whom they do not see for longer periods needs to be predictable and arranged so that the children remain connected.

- (2) **Developmental Risks:** Mastering the skills for success at school becomes more difficult when children must spend time learning to cope with the stress of conflict and confusion at their homes. At this age the risks may be exposing a child to experiences for which they are not prepared and stunt the child's ability and willingness to explore and expand the child's interests in relationships.

Symptoms may be behavior, relationship or school problems. They may be anxious, irritable, clingy, moody, preoccupied, daydream, have tantrums, whine, or be overly aggressive and fearful of separation. They can also display regressive behaviors. They may show a pervasive sense of sadness and conflicts of loyalty. They also fear they have caused the situation. Often children will yearn for the parent with whom they are not in residence and feel they are being divorced. Physical illness may increase.

### C. **Later Elementary** (8 years to 12 years)

- (1) **Developmental Tasks:** The patterns for this age are similar to the above age group. It is important that children feel a sense of accomplishment in mastering skills in physical development, school tasks, peer relationships, self-control and self-management. Skills will include grooming and appearance, dealing with anger, maintaining peer relationships and developing self-reliance. A child is very moralistic at this age and lives in absolutes, (i.e. something is good/bad or right/wrong).

The older children will be more vocal about decisions that affect them and will need to be acknowledged and involved in some decisions. Impulse control, learning empathy for others and problem solving are developmental tasks that children are involved in throughout their youth. At this age, children who have self-control and can empathize with others need to be allowed to explore and expand problem-solving skills.

- (2) **Developmental Risks:** Feeling a sense of mastery over the developmental skills can be undermined by parental conflict. Maneuvers by parents to involve children into taking sides on issues may bring forward the following symptoms from children: 1) concern about their performance, 2) anger, tantrums, whining or being overly aggressive, 3) blame, 4) moodiness, 5) preoccupation or day dreams, and 6) physical illness.

The child who lives with a parent who is constantly angry and bitter may show increased symptoms of depression, withdrawal, anger, regression and excessive rebellion. The child's school performance may suffer and they may agonize over divided loyalty to parents. Also, they may try to mediate or become a perfectionist in an effort to create peace.

This age group is susceptible to becoming a "peer" to their parent and may tend to try to fill the void they know a parent is feeling, i.e., becoming a parent to a parent.

As a peer, the children stop their own growth and development and the parent's growth and development also ceases. This may be seen by the child becoming increasingly concerned about a parent's well being.

#### **D. Suggested Residential Guidelines, 3 years to 12 years**

##### **(1) Cardinal considerations**

- Primary Residence
- Access to extended families and peers
- Respect for connection with each parent barring any evidence of physical, sexual, substance, or emotional abuse.
- Use school free days, holidays and summer to promote the bond with the nonresidential parent.

One home is the primary residence. Children reside at the other residence for two visits a month - Thursday/Friday after school until Sunday at 5:30 p.m.. Children benefit from a two or three hour transition time before bedtime. On the weeks not having a visit, the children spend one midweek evening from after school until 1/2 hour before bedtime.

##### **(2) Holidays**

Brief holidays are spent at alternate residences. School vacations longer than three days are divided with 50% of the child's time spent at each residence, depending on the child's developmental age.

If the children have siblings in the same age category, the siblings follow the same schedule. If siblings are under three years a separate schedule is maintained for them until the younger children reach the age of three years. Then the children follow the same schedule.

#### **E. Long Distance Parenting, 3 years to 12 years**

A long distance parenting relationship is when a mid-week or every other weekend visit becomes impractical.

The intent is not to limit contact with the nonresidential parent, it is to prevent excessive stress of transient time on the child. If the commute exceeds a five-hour round trip, the nonresidential parent may come to the child's environment and reside with family, friends or a local hotel.

From three to seven-year-olds - maximum one week at a time absent from the primary residence.

School age - take advantage of all holidays and free days from school during the school year to make longer visits with the non-residential parent. The school mid winter and spring breaks can be with the nonresidential parent.

- Christmas break is divided equally.
- At least one half of the summer or longer when the child reaches 8 or 9 years of age.
- Both parents should have the right to take the child on vacation during the summer months.
- Scheduled phone calls will be on a consistent basis to contact the non-residential parent during the school year and the residential parent during the summer and school breaks periods.

#### 4. **Adolescents/Teens** (12 years to 18 years)

##### A. **Early Adolescence** (12 years to 15 years)

###### (1) **Developmental Tasks:**

Early adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood. Parental support and guidance are important as children learn to develop social skills and personal identification. They will be exploring autonomy from the important people to whom they have been attached.

Their bodies are changing and as the changing awareness of their sexual self unfolds they need moral values to assume a sense of responsibility for their own behavior. Their need to belong to a peer group is the bridge between true autonomy and their parents. They are learning and practicing maintaining committed adult relationships. Parents need to stay connected to their children at this age since the perception of abandonment can be devastating to a young teen.

The schedule can be similar to the 9-12 year olds, but an older child's activities may warrant more flexibility in scheduling. The importance of parents being aware of their young teens' activities by talking to each other is essential. A young teen may be put under tremendous pressure by peers and needs adult supervision and guidance.

Children at this age should not be pressured to decide where they would live. Their input is important, yet the final decision needs to be made by the parents.

- (2) **Developmental Risks:** Excessive stress due to parental conflict, or pressure by one parent put on children to judge the other parent, or the feelings of being abandoned by parents can cause developmental delays in this age child. Children feel torn by the conflict and may assume responsibility and experience guilt believing they are the cause. Chronic stress will increase the chances of young teens turning to drugs, alcohol, sexual relationships, excessive rebellion, anger and negativity. Problems in school and with peers are major symptoms. Also, excessive isolation, depression and complacency are symptomatic of this age group signifying they need help.

Parents provide security by setting clear limits, structure and emotional support for their children. Clear and firm limits allow a child to experience autonomy within a framework of responsibility.

## B. **Later Adolescence** (15 years to 18 years)

For the older teens, their time with both the residential and the nonresidential parent will not be as consistent. Yet this age group needs to know they can count on their parents. Time with the nonresidential parent can be negotiated between children and parent as long as the primary residential parent is informed. Brief contact on a weekly basis with the nonresidential parent is strongly recommended.

Although Washington State does not have a legally designated age at which children have the right to choose with whom they will live, listening to the older teens, being aware of their activities and contact with both parents is important. Older teens may feel grounded if they have to spend an entire weekend with one parent or the other.

- (1) **Developmental Tasks:** Older teens continue to need guidance, but more latitude for them to make their own decisions while encouraging responsibility helps them to develop a sense of competence and independence.

Older teens can spend the summer away from the residential parent with minimum contact. Contact with the nonresidential parent should be predictable and established for specific times.

- (2) **Developmental Risks:** Children given responsibility beyond their competency and ability will develop pseudo-maturity and they will become overly dependent on peers and peer-culture. The major symptoms seen in this age group will be depression and withdrawal, becoming too good or compliant, perfectionist behavior, or rebellion and antisocial behavior in the forms of abuse, i.e. drugs/alcohol/sexual promiscuity or violence.

It is not uncommon a child this age will resent the complications of the divorce and may have accompanying fear and mistrust of intimacy.

It is important that parents maintain their proper role, communicate and agree on limits. For them, parents should keep rules consistent, yet not overly restrictive. This provides children with a solid and secure base from which to launch their independence.

Adolescents may assume a greater degree of emotional independence as a way of dealing with their feelings about the divorce. Angry feelings may be turned into aggressive antisocial behavior. Adolescents may worry about the financial and emotional effects of divorce on the family.

## **B. Suggested Residential Guidelines, 12 years to 18 years**

### **Primary Considerations for Early (12-15) and Later Adolescence (16-18)**

- Respect for school schedule and social, recreational activities
- Respect for connection with each parent barring any evidence of physical, sexual, substance, or emotional abuse.
- Consistent schedule, yet need to allow flexibility for their schedule.
- Use school free days, holidays and summer to promote the bond with the nonresidential parent.

Washington State has no specific age of determination. Therefore, to prevent manipulation or pitting the parents against one another, it is imperative that parents co-operate with their different freedoms and discipline.

Given the developmental tasks of early adolescence 12-15 (group identity) and of later adolescence 16-18 (identity formation), parental expectations for visitation must recognize that developmental needs will change prior visitation routines. Often parents equate this need to alter routine with simply allowing adolescents to choose when and where they want to reside. This "choice" can become a major trigger for regressive and anxiety based behaviors with resulting regret.

Exposure to both parents for role modeling during adolescence is critical (unless addiction or abuse exists) regardless of likeability. Parents must share the role of contending with rebellious behavior and emotional upheaval. Accountability is most often achieved with one parent assuming residential custody. Most important at this stage is the willingness of both parents to adopt a similar structure of expectations and privileges.

## **C. Long Distance Parenting, 12 years to 18 years**

The child's needs along with parental desire must be considered.

## 5. **Other General Recommendations**

A. **Holidays:** Access on holidays which allows family traditions to be maintained needs to be clearly delineated and stated in the Parenting Plan. Major holidays may need to be alternated and minor holidays can be connected to a parent's weekend. School vacations need to be divided in ways that are consistent with the child's age and developmental need. Holidays and special occasions will take precedence over the routine schedule.

B. **Moving:** (regardless of age)

When a parent is going to move from the area and the present Parenting Plan cannot be maintained, the first question both parents need to ask is - how will the child's life be disrupted? The child's need for a continuing relationship with the nonresidential parent must be given strong consideration.

If the child's age is 0 - 36 months see page 7 of the guidelines. If preschoolers are connected with the nonresidential parent and can separate from the residential parent, longer periods of time may be acceptable. When children reach school age and feel safe and secure with the nonresidential parent one half of school vacations may be spent with the nonresidential parent.

6. **Red Flags:** If the following symptoms are newly exhibited, or an existing symptom has increased, it may be related to the divorce, and should be of concern to parents irrespective of the age of the children:

- Frequent physical illness
- Regressive behavior, i.e., resistance to toilet training or use
- Sleep disorders
- Changes in eating/sleeping habits
- Change in direction - increased or decreased achievement
- Increased sibling rivalry
- Stealing, lying, shoplifting
- Abuse of drugs/alcohol
- Antisocial behavior - increased aggression/anger/rage
- School truancy
- Delinquency
- Isolation
- Depression
- Sexual activity
- Hyperactivity

The Parenting Plan should provide a means of addressing any of the above symptoms that persists for as long as one week in your young child and two weeks in an older child.

7. **Conflict Resolution:** Due to the excessive stress that conflict puts on children and their normal development, it is suggested that the parents devise an early timeline in the parenting plan to address problems regarding the children.

# Whatcom County Superior Court Residential Guidelines

	Developmental Tasks & Risks	Suggested Residential Guidelines	Distance Parenting
<b>Infants (0-12 Months)</b>	<p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> For a baby, the developmental task is to learn to trust. The bond or secure attachment between the caregiver(s) and child that is consistent and predictable develops trust. The caregiver must be able to read the needs of the infant and fulfill those needs. The child develops a sense of security in the caregiver(s) that promotes trust and a feeling of safeness.</p> <p>Patterns of access should not disrupt the ability of parents to provide continuous well ordered childcare that is consistent and stable. Daily contact with the nonresidential parent in a familiar environment where the child feels safe and secure is ideal. The nonresidential parent being able to fulfill routines such as bathing, changing or feeding in the infant's familiar environment promotes bonding without putting undue stress on the infant.</p> <p>Changes in routine or unexpected interruption of care places undue stress on infants. If the parents are unable to cooperate, access periods need to be established in a neutral place where the security of the child is foremost.</p> <p>During this period, frequent, predictable and non-stressful contact with the child is best. If circumstances do not allow several contacts a week, there should be no more than one to two hour contacts away from the primary residential parent. Finding ways to have frequent contact without disruption to the child's routine is the goal.</p> <p><b>Developmental Risks:</b> Children at this age are unable to distinguish between relational bonding and a consistent environment. The primary caregiver should not be removed for long periods from the child. Parental conflict will diminish the child's ability to develop trust, feel secure and attach to the important people in his/her life. For a child this age, six to eight hours away from the primary residential parent is an exceedingly long period of time and can cause intense stress. Overnights with the nonresidential parent should be discouraged unless the child has a strong bond and the nonresidential environment is familiar.</p> <p>If children are not adjusting smoothly, the following symptoms may be seen: lethargy, frequent illness, fussiness and refusal to be soothed. In some cases, children may develop delays in their development and exhibit symptoms of failure to thrive.</p>	<p>It is imperative that the child: 1) Has a primary residence; 2) As an infant has its physiological/psychological needs supported.</p> <p>The first three years of a child's life are the most critical because they establish the foundations for subsequent growth and development. Issues of bonding and attachment occur shortly after birth and are essential ingredients for them to feel loved and secure. Affection and caring form the core of the parents' relationship with their children and play a powerful role in shaping their subsequent behavior. During the first 6 months of life diminishing stress to the infant is an imperative. A consistent caretaker should be supported. Visitation should encourage minimal environmental changes. Also, it must be recognized that with the increasing numbers of mothers breast feeding, all attempts at visitation should occur only when they do not conflict with this important activity. After six months of age, as additional foods are introduced in the child's diet, more flexible visitation can occur. As children develop, parents must begin discipline in a loving and consistent way. It is imperative that children remain safe, away from conflict and nurtured with their basic needs being met by both parents.</p> <p>Twelve-month-old children require vigilance and patience. Important issues of parenting include safety, discipline and consistency. These lay the foundation for future expectations about behavior by teaching children not to do something that they very much want to do, thus establishing the first step in self-control. Inconsistencies in parenting, or disagreements about these issues may justify the court ordering one or both parents to participate and successfully complete parenting classes</p> <p>By two to three years of age, as children's independence and autonomy increase, more demands are placed on the parents to insure their safety. Inability to ensure their safety, evidence of abuse (physical, verbal, substance abuse, or neglect) or continued problematic behavior following a visitation should suggest an evaluation by a professional.</p> <p>Demonstrative nurturing and love, firm but consistent limit setting and providing an environment that is safe will allow children to maintain self esteem, and will develop improved impulse control.</p>	<p><b>From 0 - 24 months:</b> Ideally, the non-residential parent will come to the child's environment for time with the child. This may require a neutral family member or friend who will be with the non-residential parent while in the infant's environment. Any other arrangements should keep paramount a child's physiological and psychological well being.</p> <p><b>From 24 - 36 months:</b> Extended visits of several days may be considered if the nonresidential parent has exercised regular visitation through the early years of the child's life and they have become bonded.</p>
<b>Toddlers (12-36 Months)</b>	<p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> The tasks for children at this age are for them to separate from parents and feel competent within boundaries of safety. Giving children adequate freedom to explore within an environment of safety and security is paramount. It is important that the child begin to assert independence, yet learn to obey.</p> <p>At this age some children can handle more time away from the residential parent depending on the child's connectedness and security with the nonresidential parent. If the nonresidential parent has been significantly involved and the environment is familiar, an overnight a week will not be a problem. If the child is separated for longer periods from the residential parent, there is an increasing risk the child may become distressed.</p> <p>Children at this age remain susceptible to separation anxiety and stress particularly if there is a major difference in the parenting styles of the residential and nonresidential parent. The more similar and stable the routines and discipline, the more confident children are in learning acceptable behavior. Parents are more effective when they 1) continue to provide children with a secure base; 2) keep their own personal conflict from affecting and disrupting their children's lives; and 3) teach them how to give and take.</p> <p><b>Developmental Risks:</b> The symptoms that may be seen are: fear, anxiety, irritability, whining and clinging; regression to earlier behaviors such as incontinence, prolonged crying and excessive fear of separation without an ability for the parent to console particularly at transitions. Also, children will show increasing aggressive behavior and may have sleep problems. Children at this age who are experiencing chronic stress will have difficulty developing impulse control or self-control.</p>		

	<b>Developmental Tasks &amp; Risks</b>	<b>Suggested Residential Guidelines</b>	<b>Distance Parenting</b>
<b>Pre-Schoolers (36-60 Months)</b>	<p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> Given the security of the primary relationships in their lives, children of this age group are becoming more autonomous, developing peer relationships and identifying with their gender. They are becoming better able to handle their own impulses. They are also able to spend more time away from the primary attachment figure without losing a sense of security.</p> <p>The ability of children to control their own impulses must be understood in the context of parents verbally setting limits and demonstrating clear role models, exemplifying the values they wish their children to learn.</p> <p>The level of conflict between parents will have a major impact in children's ability to accomplish developmental tasks for this age group. The schedule of contact for preschool children is less important than the level of conflict between parents. Important intellectual and physical developmental tasks will be delayed if children are living in emotional chaos.</p> <p>Predictability of the contact is also a major factor. Frequent and regular contact is important. Since sporadic or infrequent access reduces a child's sense of security. One overnight for younger preschoolers and full weekends for older preschoolers in during the winter and summer are recommended. Further, a parent may take the children on vacation for one week long periods during school breaks or in the summer.</p> <p><b>Developmental Risks</b> Parental conflict can increase the risk of home or school based behavioral problems. Conflict reduces a child's ability to develop healthy relationships and the feelings of confidence and self-reliance. Symptoms seen are: numerous fears, sleep disturbance, irritability, anxiety, anger, clinging and regressive behaviors. Children this age may blame themselves for the family problems. Sometimes children may withdraw or act "too good".</p> <p>Children in this age group may act like younger children and show anger and aggressiveness toward the residential parent. Children this age may blame themselves for the absence or unhappiness of their parents, feel insecure, and frequently feel anxious that the residential parent may abandon them. It is important not to assume automatically that the children's relationship with either parent may be causing the negative reaction. Looking at the residential schedule, transitions and the environment around the exchanges are important.</p>	<p><b>Cardinal considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary Residence</li> <li>▪ Access to extended families and peers</li> <li>▪ Respect for connection with each parent barring any evidence of physical, sexual, substance, or emotional abuse.</li> <li>▪ Use school free days, holidays and summer to promote the bond with the nonresidential parent.</li> <li>▪ One home is the primary residence. Children reside at the other residence for two visits a month - Thursday/Friday after school until Sunday at 5:30 p.m.. Children benefit from a two or three hour transition time before bedtime. On the weeks not having a visit, the children spend one midweek evening from after school until 1/2 hour before bedtime.</li> </ul> <p><b>Holidays</b></p> <p>Brief holidays are spent at alternate residences. School vacations longer than three days are divided with 50% of the child's time spent at each residence, depending on the child's developmental age.</p> <p>If the children have siblings in the same age category, the siblings follow the same schedule. If siblings are under three years a separate schedule is maintained for them until the younger children reach the age of three years. Then the children follow the same schedule.</p>	<p>A long distance parenting relationship is when a mid-week or every other weekend visit becomes impractical.</p> <p>The intent is not to limit contact with the nonresidential parent, it is to prevent excessive stress of transient time on the child. If the commute exceeds a five-hour round trip, the nonresidential parent may come to the child's environment and reside with family, friends or a local hotel.</p> <p>From three to seven-year-olds - maximum one week at a time absent from the primary residence.</p> <p>School age - take advantage of all holidays and free days from school during the school year to make longer visits with the non-residential parent. The school mid winter and spring breaks can be with the non-residential parent.</p> <p>Christmas break is divided equally.</p> <p>At least one half of the summer or longer when the child reaches 8 or 9 years of age.</p> <p>Both parents should have the right to take the child on vacation during the summer months.</p> <p>Scheduled phone calls will be on a consistent basis to contact the non-residential parent during the school year and the residential parent during the summer and school breaks periods.</p>
<b>Early Elementary (5 years-8 years)</b>	<p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> The primary task for this age child is to distinguish reality from fantasy, to expand the child's knowledge of the social and physical environment and to develop sexual identification. Children need to feel secure with a schedule that is consistent and predictable. This is an important age to teach children empathy. They are learning about and learning to label feelings, thoughts and actions; their own and those of the people with whom they are in contact. They are expanding their attachments and deepening connections with other important people. This can occur in a natural and normal manner if the primary parental attachments are nurtured and feel secure.</p> <p>Children are expanding their activities. Parenting schedules need to factor that into the plans. There should be no less than an every other week schedule for the nonresidential parent. If transitions are peaceful and the connection between the nonresidential parent is strong, older children may need access several times for a few hours during the week to feel satisfied.</p> <p>Children can spend extended time with the nonresidential parent because they have developed a better sense of time. Dividing the summer equally may be appropriate, although not necessarily all at one time.</p> <p>Contact with the parent whom they do not see for longer periods needs to be predictable and arranged so that the children remain connected.</p> <p><b>Developmental Risks:</b> Mastering the skills for success at school becomes more difficult when children must spend time learning to cope with the stress of conflict and confusion at their homes. At this age the risks may be exposing a child to experiences for which they are not prepared and stunt the child's ability and willingness to explore and expand the child's interests in relationships.</p> <p>Symptoms may be behavior, relationship or school problems. They may be anxious, irritable, clingy, moody, preoccupied, daydream, have tantrums, whine, be overly aggressive and fearful of separation. They can also display regressive behaviors. They may show a pervasive sense of sadness and conflicts of loyalty. They also fear they have caused the situation. Often children will yearn for the parent with whom they are not in residence and feel they are being divorced. Physical illness may increase.</p>		

Developmental Tasks & Risks	Suggested Residential Guidelines	Distance Parenting
<p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> The patterns for this age are similar to the above age group. It is important that children feel a sense of accomplishment in mastering skills in physical development, school tasks, peer relationships, self-control and self-management. Skills will include grooming and appearance, dealing with anger, maintaining peer relationships and developing self-reliance. A child is very moralistic at this age and lives in absolutes, (i.e. something is good/bad or right/wrong).</p> <p>The older children will be more vocal about decisions that affect them and will need to be acknowledged and involved in some decisions. Impulse control, learning empathy for others and problem solving are developmental tasks that children are involved in throughout their youth. At this age, children who have self-control and can empathize with others need to be allowed to explore and expand problem-solving skills.</p>	<p><b>Cardinal considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary Residence</li> <li>▪ Access to extended families and peers</li> <li>▪ Respect for connection with each parent barring any evidence of physical, sexual, substance, or emotional abuse.</li> <li>▪ Use school free days, holidays and summer to promote the bond with the nonresidential parent.</li> <li>▪ One home is the primary residence. Children reside at the other residence for two visits a month - Thursday/Friday after school until Sunday at 5:30 p.m.. Children benefit from a two or three hour transition time before bedtime. On the weeks not having a visit, the children spend one midweek evening from after school until 1/2 hour before bedtime.</li> </ul>	<p>A long distance parenting relationship is when a mid-week or every other weekend visit becomes impractical.</p> <p>The intent is not to limit contact with the nonresidential parent, it is to prevent excessive stress of transient time on the child. If the commute exceeds a five-hour round trip, the nonresidential parent may come to the child's environment and reside with family, friends or a local hotel.</p> <p>From three to seven-year-olds – maximum one week at a time absent from the primary residence.</p> <p>School age - take advantage of all holidays and free days from school during the school year to make longer visits with the non-residential parent. The school mid winter and spring breaks can be with the non-residential parent.</p>
<p><b>Developmental Risks:</b> Feeling a sense of mastery over the developmental skills can be undermined by parental conflict. Maneuvers by parents to involve children into taking sides on issues may bring forward the following symptoms from children: 1) concern about their performance, 2) anger, tantrums, whining or being overly aggressive, 3) blame, 4) moodiness, 5) preoccupation or day dreams, and 6) physical illness.</p> <p>The child who lives with the constant anger and bitterness may show increased symptoms of depression, withdrawal, anger, regression and excessive rebellion. The child's school performance may suffer and they may agonize over divided loyalty to parents. Also, they may try to mediate or become a perfectionist in an effort to create peace.</p> <p>This age group is susceptible to becoming a "peer" to their parent and may tend to try to fill the void they know a parent is feeling, i.e., becoming a parent to a parent.</p> <p>As a peer, the children stop their own growth and development and the parent's growth and development also ceases. This may be seen by the child becoming increasingly concerned about a parent's well being.</p>	<p><b>Holidays</b></p> <p>Brief holidays are spent at alternate residences. School vacations longer than three days are divided with 50% of the child's time spent at each residence, depending on the child's developmental age.</p> <p>If the children have siblings in the same age category, the siblings follow the same schedule. If siblings are under three years a separate schedule is maintained for them until the younger children reach the age of three years. Then the children follow the same schedule.</p>	<p>Christmas break is divided equally.</p> <p>At least one half of the summer or longer when the child reaches 8 or 9 years of age.</p> <p>Both parents should have the right to take the child on vacation during the summer months.</p> <p>Scheduled phone calls will be on a consistent basis to contact the non-residential parent during the school year and the residential parent during the summer and school breaks periods.</p>

	Developmental Tasks & Risks	Suggested Residential Guidelines	Distance Parenting
<b>Early Adolescence (12 – 15) years)</b>	<p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> Early adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood. Parental support and guidance are important as children learn to develop social skills and personal identification. They will be exploring autonomy from the important people to whom they have been attached. Their bodies are changing and as the changing awareness of their sexual self unfolds they need moral values to assume a sense of responsibility for their own behavior. Their need to belong to a peer group is the bridge between true autonomy and their parents. They are learning and practicing maintaining committed adult relationships. Parents need to stay connected to their children at this age since the perception of abandonment can be devastating to a young teen. The schedule can be similar to the 9-12 year olds, but an older child's activities may warrant more flexibility in scheduling. The importance of parents being aware of their young teens' activities by talking to each other is essential. A young teen may be put under tremendous pressure by peers and needs adult supervision and guidance.</p> <p>Children at this age should not be pressured to decide where they would live. Their input is important, yet the final decision needs to be made by the parents.</p>	<p><b>Primary Considerations for Early (12-15) and Later Adolescence (16-18)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect for school schedule and social, recreational activities</li> <li>▪ Respect for connection with each parent barring any evidence of physical, sexual, substance, or emotional abuse.</li> <li>▪ Consistent schedule, yet need to allow flexibility for their schedule.</li> <li>▪ Use school free days, holidays and summer to promote the bond with the nonresidential parent.</li> </ul> <p>Washington State has no specific age of determination. Therefore, to prevent manipulation or pitting the parents against one another, it is imperative that parents co-operate with their different freedoms and discipline.</p> <p>Given the developmental tasks of early adolescence 12-15 (group identity) and of later adolescence 16-18 (identity formation), parental expectations for visitation must recognize that developmental needs will change prior visitation routines. Often parents equate this need to alter routine with simply allowing adolescents to choose when and where they want to reside. This "choice" can become a major trigger for regressive and anxiety based behaviors with resulting regret.</p> <p>Exposure to both parents for role modeling during adolescence is critical (unless addiction or abuse exists) regardless of likeability. Parents must share the role of contending with rebellious behavior and emotional upheaval. Accountability is most often achieved with one parent assuming residential custody. Most important at this stage is the willingness of both parents to adopt a similar structure of expectations and privileges.</p>	<p><b>Long Distance Parenting, 12 years to 18 years</b></p> <p>The child's needs along with parental desire must be considered.</p>
<b>Later Adolescence (16-18 years) years)</b>	<p><b>Developmental Risks:</b> Excessive stress due to parental conflict, or pressure by one parent put on children to judge the other parent, or the feelings of being abandoned by parents can cause developmental delays in this age child. Children feel torn by the conflict and may assume responsibility and experience guilt believing they are the cause. Chronic stress will increase the chances of young teens turning to drugs, alcohol, sexual relationships, excessive rebellion, anger and negativity. Problems in school and with peers are major symptoms. Also, excessive isolation, depression and complacency are symptomatic of this age group signifying they need help.</p> <p>Parents provide security by setting clear limits, structure and emotional support for their children. Clear and firm limits allow a child to experience autonomy within a framework of responsibility.</p> <p>For the older teens, their time with both the residential and the nonresidential parent will not be as consistent. Yet this age group needs to know they can count on their parents. Time with the nonresidential parent can be negotiated between children and parent as long as the primary residential parent is informed. Brief contact on a weekly basis with the nonresidential parent is strongly recommended. Although Washington State does not have a legally designated age at which children have the right to choose with whom they will live, listening to the older teens, being aware of their activities and contact with both parents is important. Older teens may feel grounded if they have to spend an entire weekend with one parent or the other.</p> <p><b>Developmental Tasks:</b> Older teens continue to need guidance, but more latitude for them to make their own decisions while encouraging responsibility helps them to develop a sense of competence and independence. Older teens can spend the summer away from the residential parent with minimum contact. Contact with the nonresidential parent should be predictable and established for specific times.</p> <p><b>Developmental Risks:</b> Children given responsibility beyond their competency and ability will develop pseudo-maturity and they will become overly dependent on peers and peer-culture. The major symptoms seen in this age group will be depression and withdrawal, becoming too good or compliant, perfectionist behavior, or rebellion and antisocial behavior in the forms of abuse, i.e. drugs/alcohol/sexual promiscuity or violence.</p> <p>It is not uncommon a child this age will resent the complications of the divorce and may have accompanying fear and mistrust of intimacy.</p> <p>It is important that parents maintain their proper role, communicate and agree on limits. For them, parents should keep rules consistent, yet not overly restrictive. This provides children with a solid and secure base from which to launch their independence.</p> <p>Adolescents may assume a greater degree of emotional independence as a way of dealing with their feelings about the divorce. Angry feelings may be turned into aggressive antisocial behavior. Adolescents may worry about the financial and emotional effects of divorce on the family.</p>		