



WHAT'S BEST FOR MY CHILD? (AGES AND STAGES OF CHILDREN)

When creating a parenting plan, the age, needs, and personality of each child must be considered. The amount of time a parent spends with a child is in no way a measure of how much they love their child. You will both continue to be parents. Children struggle with changes and need support on how to cope with them. One of the biggest changes for children is having parents who live in two different homes.

Things to Consider When Developing a Parenting Plan

- Conflict between parents makes it hard for children to adjust to their new situations. The greater the conflict, the harder it is for the children.
- Children's needs come first.
- Children and all family members have a right to be safe.
- Life may be less complicated for parents and children when there are fewer transitions.
- Many children do better with a "home base" with one parent, and frequent contact with the other parent, although other arrangements can also work well.
- As children get older, they usually can handle longer periods away from either parent.
- Each child is unique. Consider temperament, personality, and needs when creating the parenting plan.
- All children have a right to love, care, and commitment from their parents.
- Detailed parenting plans may be more useful for some parents.
- Consistency and predictability are important for most children.

What's Best for My Child? Ages and Stages of Children

Their age	Their “jobs”	Their needs	Signs of distress: (especially if it goes on for a long time)
Birth - 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop trust • To attach to one or more healthy adult (parent, extended family, caregiver) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predictability, consistency, and routine • Stable and secure relationships • A healthy attachment to at least one adult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive crying • Feeding or sleeping problems • Withdrawal • Irritable and depressed
1 -3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore the world • To develop language • To develop control (this is when they say a lot of no's) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that they can't remember people who they don't see very often • To know a loving adult is always available • Predictability, routine, and structure • Security, love, and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal • Crying, clinging that lasts more than twenty minutes after a separation • Changes in eating and toileting • Delay in development
3 -5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage with outside world • To develop relationships with other children • To be able to better understand limits set by their parents or caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to “hold” another person in their memory • Continued predictability, routine, and structure • Consistent discipline between parents when possible • Freedom from direct conflict • May benefit from blocks of time with each parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regression in toileting, sleeping, and eating • Irritability, clinging • Anger and behavior problems

Their age	Their “jobs”	Their needs	Signs of distress: (especially if it goes on for a long time)
5 -8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase understanding of the difference between fantasy and reality • To deepen attachments with other people (parents, teachers, etc.) • To notice gender differences • To believe in fairness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be reminded that the divorce/separation is not their fault • Structured and consistent time with each parent if appropriate • Parental support at school and sport activities • Support for exploring and expanding interests and relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical complaints (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, etc.) • Sleep problems • Expression of anger and behavior problems with parent most connected to • Bed wetting, baby talk
9-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To feel good about relationships and their physical development • To develop and test values and beliefs • To be connected to their school and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency and predictability in schedules and routines • Parent support in school and sports activities • Encouragement and permission to love both parents • Reminders that the divorce/separation is not their fault • More open communication with their parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of interest in friends and other relationships • Isolate themselves • Become “too good” • Depression and extreme rebellion
Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop greater independence and separation from family • To develop a sense of moral values (these may change) • To express resistance and rebelliousness while forming their identity (much like two year olds) • To be naturally self-centered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility and understanding from parents regarding their time with friends and activities • Reminders that the divorce/separation is not their fault • Many teens want a say in the parenting plan • Positive role models • Reasonable, firm, and fair guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive anger and negativity • Excessive isolation, depression • Trying to be “too good” • Difficulty with school or peers • Alcohol and drug use, sexual promiscuity

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