

Your Parenting Plan

Guidance notes for legal professionals, educators and others who work with parents and children.



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Parenting Plans are widely acknowledged as a helpful tool to improve outcomes for the children of parents who live apart.

This leaflet will help you understand: how to use the *Your Parenting Plan* guide in your area of practice; when it may be appropriate to raise the topic of making a Parenting Plan with parents; and how to do so sensitively and responsibly.

Legal professionals

Parents often seek legal advice when there is unresolved conflict. Creating a Parenting Plan can help avoid formal legal disputes and is, in many cases, better for any children involved.

If you do not have prior experience of this kind of work, refer onwards to a specialist family lawyer with expertise in this area or to a family mediation service (see page 36 of the *Your Parenting Plan* guide).

Health professionals

The process of making a Parenting Plan outlined in *Your Parenting Plan* includes guidance on making arrangements relating to children's health and wellbeing.

Parenting Plans and the Plan-making process can also be useful where the child has ongoing health problems, and especially around issues of consent to medical treatments and information sharing.

Teachers and early years workers

Those who work in educational settings with the children of parents who live apart may become aware of conflicts and confusions around information sharing, parental consent, childcare arrangements, drop-offs and pick-ups, parent-teacher consultations and school events. You may also become aware that a child is experiencing distress relating to changes or uncertainties at home. Agreeing a Parenting Plan can help support parents in these areas.



Duty of schools to involve non-resident parents in children's education

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 sets out the duties on education authorities to promote the involvement of all parents in their children's education.

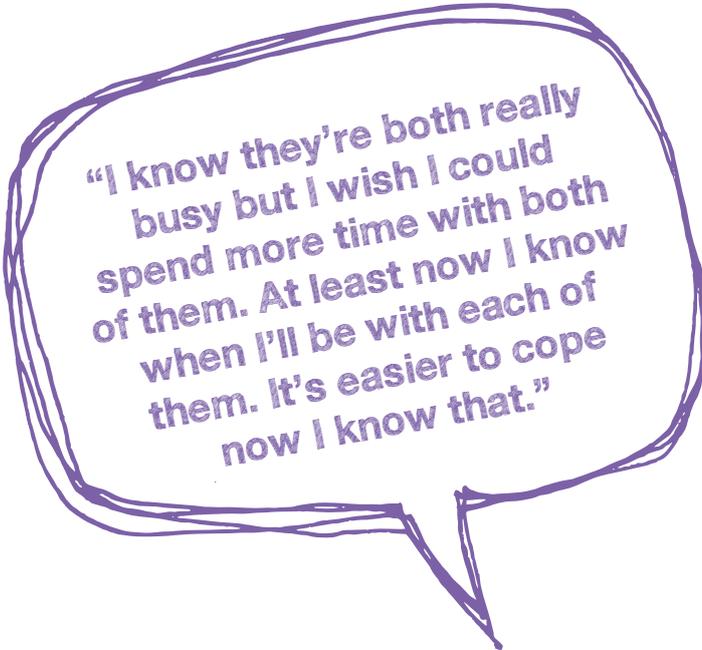
Children's education and development can suffer if they are upset over their parents' separation or disagreements between parents who live apart. But adverse effects on children can be greatly reduced if parents are able to maintain a positive interest in their child's education and welfare.

It is important that education authorities and schools do as much as they can to support the continued involvement of parents who don't live with their children. As part of this, schools should provide relevant information and reports to parents who don't live with their children unless there is a specific legal order preventing them from doing so.

In doing so, authorities and schools must be sensitive to the needs and wishes of both parents, who may not always agree. It is also important that education authorities and schools pay particular regard to the views of the child or young person in such circumstances.

For further guidance on schools' and local authorities' responsibilities on parental involvement in education, please see the statutory guidance for the 2006 Act:

www.gov.scot/Publications/2006/09/08094112/0



“I know they’re both really busy but I wish I could spend more time with both of them. At least now I know when I’ll be with each of them. It’s easier to cope now I know that.”



Other professionals in contact with parents who live apart and their children

There are many people in other professions who have regular contact with parents or their children and may become aware of conflicts over matters relating to childcare and other arrangements.

Encouraging parents to work through a Parenting Plan can help them reduce these areas of conflict and the stress they might cause for the whole family.

When making a Parenting Plan is not appropriate

Using *Your Parenting Plan* is not recommended if there is a history of violence or abuse, if one person is fearful of another, or if one of the adults involved has made threats or other attempts to control one of the other people involved.

Where there are any safety concerns, either about children or any adults involved, it is vital to seek further advice. Ask your local Social Work Department, a solicitor, or one of the agencies listed under “Support for Families” at the rear of the *Your Parenting Plan* guide.

For more guidance on when making a Parenting Plan is appropriate, see the “First Steps” section of *Your Parenting Plan*.

Making the guide available

Your Parenting Plan is a comprehensive, self-contained guide to the Plan-making process. As such, it can be made generally available to pick up, for example in waiting areas and information stands.

You may also wish to highlight the availability of *Your Parenting Plan* via general communication such as newsletters, organisational websites or e-mail updates, either as a printed document that can be picked up at your service locations or as a downloadable PDF.

Support everyone can offer

Everyone can offer general support for parents by being available to listen to their concerns and by being ready to provide details of specialist help and information. Contact details for many useful organisations can be found at the rear of *Your Parenting Plan* on pages 36-40.

Support for the Plan-making process itself

While some parents will complete a Plan without help, supporting parents directly with the Plan-making process is a specialist task most usually facilitated by trained family mediators or lawyers experienced in family law, family mediation or collaborative practice.

Details of how to find these are listed at the rear of *Your Parenting Plan*.

You will naturally want to avoid any chance that a conversation you have with a parent about making or updating a Parenting Plan may adversely affect your primary reason for working with them. However, this should not prevent you from promoting the benefits of making a Parenting Plan.

How to approach the topic of making or updating a Parenting Plan

When broaching the topic in the first instance:

- Ask 'have you and your child's other parent ever thought about making a Parenting Plan?'
- An existing Plan may simply need to be updated.

If a Plan has been made but seems not to be working:

- Reassure the parent that having a workable Plan in place improves outcomes for children of parents who live apart.
- Suggest that it may be time to revisit their Plan and that, as situations change and children grow, most Parenting Plans need to be updated.
- Offer copies of *Your Parenting Plan*.
- Suggest it could be useful in helping adapt and update an existing Plan.
- Indicate that *Your Parenting Plan* is a new and improved guide to the process with up-to-date advice and information.
- Highlight the availability of expert help and support for revising an existing Plan.
- Draw attention to the helpful organisations listed at the rear.

If no Plan has been made or previous attempts at agreeing a Plan failed:

- Emphasise the practical benefits for the child of agreeing a Parenting Plan (i.e. by ensuring their needs are met and helping them have a say in what happens to them).
- Suggest that agreeing a Plan can also make things easier for parents by improving communications and clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Highlight the availability of expert help and support for the Plan-making process.
- Offer copies of *Your Parenting Plan* and promote it as a source of useful guidance and information for all parents, whether or not they make a formal Plan.
- Draw attention to the services and organisations listed at the rear of the *Your Parenting Plan* guide and especially family mediation services.

Copies of *Your Parenting Plan* and supporting materials can be downloaded or paper copies requested at www.mygov.scot/parentingplan

