Tips to make your parenting plan successful:

- Communicate. Keep each other Informed of your child's needs.
- Make your best effort to create similar routines in both households.
- Allow your child to take a favorite blanket or teddy bear when going between the households.
- Shield your child from any conflict between you and the other parent.

These examples serve as a reference and may not fit all families.

For copies of other brochures in the “Creating a Parenting Plan” series or to schedule a mediation appointment, contact Family Court Services at (213) 974-5524, press 3.

For the Parents And Children Together (PACT) schedule, please call (888) 889-9900.

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Los Angeles Superior Court
www.lasuperiorcourt.org

Creating a Parenting Plan:

Children under three

How to plan for a child under three

As infants, children learn to trust and love through developing attachments to those who care for them. Consistent responses from their caregivers in the day-to-day activities of feeding, changing, bathing and holding foster this sense of security which is the cornerstone for later development. Parents who have participated in these routines are also more attuned to the child's needs and cries and are more able to soothe and comfort the child when distressed.

When parents separate during a child's early years, it is especially important for them to consider the patterns of caregiving prior to the separation when planning for custody. If one parent has been more involved in an infant's care, the parents may wish to maintain that arrangement in the short term, but ensure that the other parent has frequent contact as suggested in the sample schedules below.

For families where both parents have been highly involved in the hands-on care of the child, these patterns of care should be maintained as much as possible and may include overnight time for the child in both parents' homes. Maintaining a regular sleeping and feeding cycle in both homes will help the child feel more secure. It is critical that an infant be afforded ample opportunity to maintain and develop reciprocal attachments to both parents through these measures.

Infants and young children have not yet developed a sense of time so have a limited ability to recall persons not directly in front of them. An infant should not be separated from either parent for long periods of time. At some points, infants may show little resistance to transitions between caregivers, while at other points, they may cry or cling to the caregiver. These behaviors are typical and not necessarily indicative of problems in the relationship with either parent.

While protecting children from exposure to parental conflict is important for all ages, this age group is especially vulnerable to physical injury and emotional trauma if exposed to domestic violence. Often parents are unaware of how deeply affected these very young children are by exposure to tension and arguing between their parents.

Consider these factors when creating a parenting plan for children in this age group:

- Provide your child the opportunity to bond with both parents.
- Protect your child from exposure to adult conflict.
- Learn how to soothe your infant when he or she is distressed and especially at the transitions between caregivers.
- Create a parenting plan that ensures both parents the opportunity to participate in the child's day-to-day care.
- Maintain a similar sleeping and feeding schedule in both homes.

Sample schedules

Assuming the infant is being cared for primarily in one parent's home, the following are some examples of contacts By the non-residential parent.

BIRTH THROUGH AGE 6 MONTHS:

- Three non-consecutive days per week for two hours each day.

Many infants take multiple naps and require feeding every three or four hours during the day. If at all possible, time with the non-residential parent should aim at not disrupting the infant's nap and feeding pattern.

AGE 7 MONTHS THROUGH 12 MONTHS:

- Three non-consecutive days per week for three hours each day.
- Overnight, if appropriate.

If a parent has not been involved in care-giving previously, these short and frequent visits will help to develop a mutually secure relationship and allow the parent to master the tasks and sensitivity required to care for an infant. As the care-giving skills are mastered, the parent-child bond strengthens and the time with the infant may increase.

AGE 13 MONTHS THROUGH AGE 18 MONTHS:

- Three non-consecutive days each week for three-four hours each day.
- One weekend day for up to eight hours.
- Overnight, if appropriate.

Children at this age still require a predictable and consistent daily routine. Communication between the parents about the infant's routine and any new developments is essential to enhance the infant's adjustment.

AGE 19 MONTHS THROUGH 36 MONTHS:

- One weekend day for ten hours.
- One mid-week for three hours.
- Overnight, if appropriate.

Children of this age go through many changes, such as weaning from the bottle, toilet training, beginning pre-school, and adjusting to new siblings. Parents should avoid choosing a plan that requires the child to change routines frequently.