

Top Ten Ways to Develop a Better Parenting Plan

Because the law in BC now makes the best interests of the child the only consideration when decisions affecting the child are being made

Because the judge and the courts do not ask: "*Is this going to be convenient for the parents?*" when determining a new parenting plan . . . it is helpful for all members of the family to develop a well thought out parenting plan before going to court, or to work with a well trained professional to improve day to day family life after a parenting plan has already been ordered and put in place by the court.

Because you want what is **best** for your children and your family **every day**, regardless of the circumstances

Because **we care** about the well being of you and every member of your family, what follows is a list of ways to help parents develop a **better parenting plan** than the one currently in place, or how to put together a Parenting Plan with well thought out consideration.

The new Family Law Act expanded the best interests of the child to include:

- the **history** and care of the child;
- the impact of possible **threats and family violence** on the child's safety, security or well-being;
- the **child's views**, unless inappropriate to consider them; and
- any civil or criminal proceedings relevant to the child's **safety and well-being**.

Any parenting plan that is prepared **must include all of these factors** to be relevant to the courts (if required) and useful in practical terms for you and your family.

1. To be sure that your children get what they need to become healthy functioning adults, during and after divorce, they need to have procedures in place that protect them from the day to day battles and conflicts which are common in a post separation or divorcing family environment.

One of the strongest predictors of the well-being of children is the amount of conflict between parents that they witness or are involved in.

Conflicts are less likely to occur and more likely to be resolved quickly if they do occur, resulting in a more peaceful post-separation and post-divorce family life for everyone concerned, especially the children, if procedures are agreed upon ahead of time and followed during times of intense emotional turmoil. Mediation, Parent Coordination, or Divorce Coaching can be utilized to develop a Parenting Plan or assist with implementing the terms of an agreed upon plan.

2. A thoughtful and child-focused parenting plan can be more easily developed without having to return to court on numerous occasions for ongoing adjustments, if parents are willing to make use of a skilled and knowledgeable professional.

Besides the adjustments that parents need as families adapt to change, children's needs change rapidly as well. A Parenting Coordinator or Collaborative Mediator can assist with making changes to the parenting plan to assist with the emotional, developmental and temperamental needs according to best interests of a family over time.

3. By thinking through and discussing the existing parenting plan collaboratively, potential issues in categories such as day to day scheduling, health care, discipline, religion, and transitions between homes can be more easily planned for and resolved before problems arise. These types of potential problems can be resolved before they become dramatic issues in a courtroom.

A well developed parenting plan resolves issues before a judgment that neither parent wants is entered into and enforced by the court.

4. Mediation and Parent Coordination creates opportunities for parents to work together and build on their relative strengths, preserving the relationships with children while they redefine parental roles and responsibilities within a separated family. Parents who are able to learn skills for communicating and resolving conflict are able to raise children with better conflict resolution skills as well.
5. Creating a detailed parenting plan with a communication plan assists parents and children in effective communication and facilitates the flow of information between the parents and others, including the children, new partners, and the school. This demonstrates to everyone involved that the preservation of the family well being is a priority and will be maintained effectively, regardless of the schedule conflicts and daily challenges.
6. Because parents typically have different agendas and differing perspectives, a detailed and thorough parenting plan pre-empts the very common back and forth, "He Said/She Said," disagreements with different points of view.
7. It is critical that agreements and communications in a Parenting Plan are appropriately detailed to avoid frustration and misunderstandings. This includes modifications and "interpretations" to a parenting plan, and creating a record, or "paper trail", of what was agreed to when one or both parents were thinking clearly about the issues involved in successful and co-operative co-parenting.
8. A comprehensive and detailed parenting plan sets out methods to resolve differences without going to court in case you need to modify the parenting plan.

Inevitably circumstances will change, and the needs of the children will evolve over time, especially if new partners, or reluctant children, want to influence changes to the existing plan. An effective and well thought out Parenting Plan with contingencies in place, will take into account the developmental needs of the child and the inevitable changes that will be taking place as time moves forward.

9. It is also critical to have contingency plans in place for when a co-parents deviates from the parenting plan, creating disagreements. A detailed parenting plan provides a useful backup plan and a “what to do when” plan that can continue until the parents can return to mediation or find a way to successfully resolve differences between themselves.
10. Parent Coordination and/or Mediation provides both parents the opportunity to explore co-parenting issues with an objective third-party and neutral professional who is well trained in the developmental needs of children and is knowledgeable about the research on children’s adjustment to separation and divorce.

If you would like to know more about how to develop an effective Parenting Plan for your family, please contact me, Gerry Bock, or anyone else on this web site.

I would personally be pleased to send you a free Parenting Plan Template for planning. There is no obligation and your e-mail or contact information will never be shared without your express permission.

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