

Parenting Plans (Part 2): How Do I Create a Parenting Plan?

I'm here to help you create a parenting plan. This series has all the information you need to navigate this court process smoothly. Let's get started.

This video introduces you to two important resources and explains how mediation can help. Finally, we'll discuss specifics about your parenting plan.

The first step is to learn as much as you can about the process.

CHAPTER HEADING: INSTRUCTIONS & TOOL

Maryland has a couple resources that can help you: the *Maryland Parenting Plan Instructions* and the *Maryland Parenting Plan Tool*. Find them at mdcourts.gov/parentingplan. They list topics you might want to include in your plan. Maybe you include how you will make major decisions about your child's medical and mental health care or extracurricular activities. It can address how you will share information, or cover exchanges and childcare. Make a list of topics that apply to YOUR family. What arrangements are the best fit?

Keep in mind that the *Maryland Parenting Plan Tool* is an example of a parenting plan. It is not a requirement. If the tool works, use it to develop your own. It includes options, but you should add provisions important to your family. For example, include religious holidays or significant events. Maybe you add guidance on when your child will get a driver's license. Is the time your child spends with friends, family, and other important people meaningful to your child? Then definitely include that too.

A parenting plan can be reached at any point in the custody process. You can create one together or separately. Or, consider ADR which stands for alternative dispute resolution. ADR refers to a variety of processes for resolving disputes without having a trial. Check with the court to see what ADR options are available.

CHAPTER HEADING: MEDIATION

One popular form of ADR is mediation. A mediator is a neutral third party who helps facilitate a conversation about important issues. Before mediation, review the *Instructions* and *Tool publications* and make a list of topics to discuss. The mediator can help identify additional options and ideas. Keep an open mind about resolving issues. You and the other party or parties may together find new solutions.

Mediation is not appropriate for all situations, for example when there is a history of domestic violence. If you are not able to work with the other party or parties in a safe or productive way, each of you should develop a list of topics that are important. Be prepared to propose solutions

you believe are in your child's best interest on the Joint Statement Form discussed in part 6 of this series. This form will give the court a better sense of your family.

CHAPTER HEADING: IT'S YOUR PLAN

Remember, parenting plans look different for each family. Sometimes, they look different for each child. If you reach an agreement on some but not all issues that are important to your family, that's great! The court can narrow its focus on the other issues.

CHAPTER HEADING: LET'S REVIEW

The best way to start your process is with two important resources: the *Maryland Parenting Plan Instructions* and the *Maryland Parenting Plan Tool*. You can create your plan alone, with the other party or parties, or through an ADR process such as mediation. Finally, it's your plan. Put in as many details as your family needs. Focus on the issues on which you can agree. The court can address the rest.

Remember, you are the experts.