A WORKBOOK FOR FAMILY COURT

The Parenting Plan

Two Homes, *One Family.*

A practical workbook for parents building a parenting plan — together, apart, or somewhere in between.



DRAWING ON

Coparenting research

EDITION

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START HERE

A workbook, not a verdict.

You are about to make decisions that will shape your child's daily life for years. That is a heavy thing to do under stress, with someone you may not be on good terms with, on a deadline. This workbook will not solve that. What it will do is walk you through every major decision a parenting plan needs to address, give you language for hard conversations, and help you keep your child at the center while the legal and emotional process happens around you.

STEP 1

Read the early pages first

The mindset, communication, and child-development sections frame everything that comes after. Twenty minutes well spent.

STEP 2

Work the checklist

The detailed checklist on page 7 is the heart of this workbook. Print it, mark it up, take it to mediation or your attorney.

STEP 3

Use it as a living document

Plans get revised. Children grow. Circumstances shift. Come back to this when something is not working.

THE PRINCIPLE THIS WORKBOOK RETURNS TO

A parenting plan is not a contract between two adults who used to be partners. It is a working agreement about how two adults will raise a child across two homes. The question is never "what do I deserve?" or "what is fair to me?" — it is "what does this child need from us?"

WHAT'S INSIDE

- The mindset shift from partners to coparents
- Communication that holds up under pressure
- How children experience the change at each age
- The full parenting plan checklist
- What to do when conflict makes coparenting hard
- Trusted resources for next steps

WHAT THIS ISN'T

- A substitute for legal advice
- A substitute for therapy or counseling
- A guarantee of any outcome in court
- A tool for "winning" against the other parent
- A one-size-fits-all template
- A magic fix for high-conflict situations

A NOTE ON LEGAL CONTEXT

Parenting plan laws vary by state and country. The terms "custody," "residential time," "parental responsibility," and "decision-making authority" mean different things in different jurisdictions. This workbook uses common American terminology. Always confirm the specific requirements of your court with a family law attorney or qualified mediator.

THE MINDSET SHIFT

From partners to coparents.

Coparenting is a different relationship than the one you used to have. It uses the same first names, the same children, sometimes the same schedules — but it is not romantic, not emotional, and not personal in the way it once was. The faster both adults make this shift internally, the better the next ten or fifteen years tend to go.

Children come first

Every decision passes through one filter: *is this what is best for our child?* Not what feels fair, not what the other parent deserves — what serves the child.

Business-like, not personal

Run coparenting like a working partnership: clear, brief, on the record, focused on the task. The personal stuff goes to your friends, your therapist, anywhere but here.

Long game, not winning

You are in this for years. Court victories that humiliate the other parent come back as adolescent resentment. Play for sustainable, not for satisfying.

PATTERNS TO WATCH IN YOURSELF

- × Using the children as messengers between you and the other parent
- × Asking the children questions about the other parent's life
- × Speaking critically about the other parent within earshot
- × Making the children choose loyalties — explicitly or subtly
- × Treating drop-offs as a venue for unrelated grievances
- × Inconsistency between homes that the children must navigate
- × Letting court anger leak into parent-child time
- × Promising children things the other parent has no say in

REFLECT

Which of the patterns above show up in your week most often? Naming it is the first step.

COMMUNICATION

Communicate like it will be read in court.

Because it might be. The texts and emails between coparents end up in front of judges surprisingly often. A useful framework: assume every message you send will be read aloud by someone you respect, in front of a judge, in five years. The **BIFF method** from the High Conflict Institute keeps you out of trouble and on point.

B

Brief

A few sentences. Not paragraphs. Not history.

I

Informative

Just the facts the other parent needs to know.

F

Friendly

Polite tone, even if you don't feel polite. Especially then.

F

Firm

Clear about what you need. No back-and-forth invitation.

DO COMMUNICATE ABOUT

- ✓ Schedule changes and logistics
- ✓ Medical updates and appointments
- ✓ School performance and events
- ✓ Activity schedules and equipment
- ✓ Significant child behavior changes
- ✓ Travel plans involving the child
- ✓ New people becoming part of the child's life

DON'T COMMUNICATE ABOUT

- × Old grievances from the relationship
- × The other parent's dating life
- × Money disputes during child handoffs
- × Court strategy or attorney conversations
- × Your feelings about the other parent
- × Anything you wouldn't want a judge reading
- × Anything when you are emotionally activated

COPARENTING APPS TO CONSIDER

Apps like **OurFamilyWizard**, **TalkingParents**, and **2houses** create a court-admissible record, store schedules, and reduce the temptation to vent in personal texts. Many courts now order their use in high-conflict cases. Even if not ordered, they are worth considering.

PRACTICE REWRITE

Take a recent message you almost sent (or did send) to the other parent. Rewrite it as BIFF.

HELPING KIDS COPE

Children read your face before they read your words.

Children of separating parents do best when they are kept out of adult conflict, given consistent routines, and allowed to love both parents without guilt. The specifics depend on age — the underlying needs do not.

AGES 0–5

Toddler & Preschool



WHAT THEY NEED

- Predictable routines and rhythms
- Comfort objects between homes
- Short, simple explanations
- Calm transitions, no rushing

WATCH FOR

- Clinginess, sleep regression
- Tantrums around drop-offs
- Loss of recently-gained skills

AGES 6–11

School Age



WHAT THEY NEED

- Permission to love both parents
- Consistent rules across both homes
- Open conversation, age-appropriate
- School routines kept stable

WATCH FOR

- Self-blame ("Did I cause this?")
- Stomachaches, school refusal
- Trying to "fix" parents

AGES 12–17

Tween & Teen



WHAT THEY NEED

- Voice in the schedule (not the deciding vote)
- Privacy and space to process
- Adults who don't lean on them emotionally
- Friendships and activities preserved

WATCH FOR

- Withdrawal, anger, "I don't care"
- Risk-taking, substance use, slipping grades
- Aligning hard with one parent

What helps at every age

- ✓ **Tell them together if possible.** Same words, same time, both parents present.
- ✓ **Keep routines tight.** Same bedtime, same school, same activities.
- ✓ **Allow grief and confusion.** "It's okay to feel sad and mad. I do too sometimes."
- ✓ **Get them a therapist.** Even a few sessions. Especially around transitions.
- ✓ **Reassure them it isn't their fault.** Young kids need to hear this many times.
- ✓ **Don't badmouth the other parent.** Ever. To the kids, in front of the kids, in earshot.
- ✓ **Don't ask them to spy or report.** They are not your eyes in the other home.
- ✓ **Watch sleep, appetite, school.** The body shows what the words can't.

THE PLAN, AT A GLANCE

What a parenting plan covers.

A thorough parenting plan addresses three categories of decisions. The detailed checklist on the next page walks through each item — but it helps to see the whole shape first. Most courts will not finalize a plan that leaves any of these areas vague.



Time

- Regular weekly schedule
- School year vs. summer breaks
- Holidays and special days
- Extended vacations
- Birthdays (child's and parents')
- Right of first refusal

Decisions

- Legal custody (joint or sole)
- Education choices
- Medical and mental-health care
- Religious upbringing
- Extracurricular activities
- Travel and relocation

Logistics

- Exchange location and time
- Transportation responsibility
- Communication during other's time
- Information sharing (school, medical)
- How the plan can be modified
- Dispute resolution before court

SPECIFICITY IS KINDNESS

The vaguer the plan, the more conflict it creates later. "Reasonable visitation" is a recipe for fighting. Pick up at 6:00 PM at the school front office on Fridays — that's a plan.

THE MAIN EVENT

Parenting plan checklist.

Use this list as a working draft. Check off items as you decide them; circle items that need more discussion. Bring it to mediation, your attorney, or your coparent's table. **Not every item applies to every family** — but a thorough plan addresses most of them.

DECISION-MAKING (LEGAL CUSTODY)

- [ ] Joint or sole legal custody specified
- [ ] Education decisions (which parent, or both)
- [ ] Non-emergency medical decisions
- [ ] Mental-health care decisions
- [ ] Religious upbringing
- [ ] Extracurricular activities approval
- [ ] Tie-breaker process if parents disagree

REGULAR RESIDENTIAL SCHEDULE

- [ ] Weekday schedule specified by day
- [ ] Weekend schedule (e.g., alternating, 2-2-3)
- [ ] Exchange times — exact, not "around"
- [ ] Exchange location (neutral spot if needed)
- [ ] Who provides transportation
- [ ] School-day schedule vs. non-school

HOLIDAYS & SPECIAL DAYS

- [ ] Major holidays — alternating or split
  Thanksgiving, Christmas/Hanukkah, etc.
- [ ] School breaks (winter, spring, mid-winter)
- [ ] Three-day weekends and federal holidays
- [ ] Mother's Day with mother, Father's Day with father
- [ ] Child's birthday — alternating or shared
- [ ] Parent's birthday with that parent
- [ ] Religious or cultural holidays

SUMMER & VACATION TIME

- [ ] Summer schedule (different from school year?)
- [ ] Vacation block lengths (e.g., 1 week × 2)
- [ ] Notice required to schedule vacation
- [ ] Vacation priority (alternating odd/even years)
- [ ] Out-of-state travel notice
- [ ] International travel — passports, consent

COMMUNICATION DURING OTHER'S TIME

- [ ] Phone/video call frequency and time
- [ ] Reasonable text/messaging access
- [ ] No interrogation about the other home
- [ ] Privacy of child's communication respected

SCHOOL & EDUCATION

- [ ] Which school district / school the child attends
- [ ] Both parents on emergency contact list
- [ ] Both parents access to records and grades
- [ ] Parent-teacher conferences — both attend or split
- [ ] School events (concerts, games) — both welcome
- [ ] Tutoring and academic support decisions
- [ ] College planning and financial agreement

MEDICAL & HEALTH

- [ ] Health insurance — who provides
- [ ] Out-of-pocket medical cost split
- [ ] Both parents access to medical records
- [ ] Notification process for appointments
- [ ] Emergency notification — within X hours
- [ ] Medication administration consistency
- [ ] Therapy choice and continuity

ACTIVITIES & DAILY LIFE

- [ ] Sign-up authority for activities
- [ ] Cost-sharing for activity fees
- [ ] Who attends games, recitals, events
- [ ] Equipment travel between homes
- [ ] Screen time / social media policies
- [ ] Driving privileges (older teens)

PEOPLE & RELATIONSHIPS

- [ ] When new partners are introduced (timing)
- [ ] Overnight rules with new partners
- [ ] Extended family time (grandparents, etc.)
- [ ] Childcare provider continuity
- [ ] Right of first refusal — threshold and process

PLAN MAINTENANCE

- [ ] Modification process specified
- [ ] Annual or periodic review
- [ ] Dispute resolution before court (mediation)
- [ ] Relocation notice (typically 60–90 days)
- [ ] Coparenting app or communication channel
- [ ] Plan signed, dated, and filed with court

WHEN IT GETS HARD

High conflict needs a different toolkit.

Cooperative coparenting is the goal. But for some families — sometimes for a season, sometimes for years — the other parent is unable or unwilling to be a true partner. In those cases, the strategy is not to keep trying to cooperate harder. It is to move to *parallel parenting*, a different approach that protects the children by reducing parent-to-parent contact.

Cooperative coparenting

The standard model. Two parents who can talk, problem-solve together, and stay flexible. Most plans assume this.

- ✓ Frequent friendly communication
- ✓ Shared school and medical decisions in real time
- ✓ Easy schedule swaps when needed
- ✓ Both parents at school events and games together
- ✓ Children move easily between homes

Parallel parenting

For high-conflict situations. Parents disengage from each other while remaining engaged with the child. Communication is minimal and structured.

- ◆ Communication only through an app or written record
- ◆ Each parent runs their household their own way (within reason)
- ◆ No schedule changes outside the written plan
- ◆ Separate attendance at events when possible
- ◆ A parenting coordinator or therapist handles disputes

WHEN TO BRING IN A PROFESSIONAL IMMEDIATELY

Some situations are not just "high conflict" — they are dangerous, and the parenting plan needs to reflect that. Talk to a family law attorney, a therapist, and (when appropriate) the police if you observe:

- ! Physical violence toward you or the children
- ! Threats, intimidation, or stalking
- ! Substance abuse around the children
- ! Severe untreated mental illness affecting safety
- ! Attempts to alienate the children from the other parent
- ! Any sign of physical or sexual abuse
- ! Refusal to follow court orders
- ! Removing the child without consent

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

High-conflict coparenting drains people. Therapy, support groups, exercise, sleep, friends — these are not optional extras. They are how you stay regulated enough to parent well.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

You don't have to figure this out alone.

Below are trusted resources for the work ahead. None of them replace a family law attorney or a therapist who knows your specific situation, but all of them have helped many families build steadier ground after separation.

BOOKS FOR PARENTS

- **Between Two Homes: A Coparenting Handbook** *Bradley S. Craig*
- **BIFF: Quick Responses to High-Conflict People** *Bill Eddy*
- **The Coparenting Survival Guide** *Thayer & Zimmerman*
- **Mom's House, Dad's House** *Isolina Ricci*

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

- **Two Homes** *Claire Masurel (ages 3–7)*
- **Was It the Chocolate Pudding?** *Sandra Levins (ages 4–8)*
- **Dinosaurs Divorce** *Marc & Laurene Brown (ages 5–10)*
- **The Divorce Workbook for Teens** *Schab (ages 13–17)*

COPARENTING APPS

- **OurFamilyWizard** *Often court-ordered; comprehensive*
- **TalkingParents** *Court-admissible record-keeping*
- **2houses** *Calendar, expenses, journals*
- **AppClose** *Free option with key features*

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

- **Family law attorney** *State-specific guidance, court filings*
- **Family mediator** *AFCC.net to find a credentialed one*
- **Parenting coordinator** *For ongoing high-conflict disputes*
- **Child & family therapist** *Psychology Today directory*

The relationship you build with your coparent now is the family your child grows up inside of. Not the marriage that ended — the partnership that comes next. Build it carefully.

This workbook is for educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice. Parenting plan laws vary by jurisdiction. Always consult a qualified family law attorney about your specific situation.

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