

# Preparing for Your Family Mediation

This packet contains some helpful materials for you to use before and during your upcoming mediation.

Please read and write your own notes on the worksheet describing how you are handling parenting responsibilities now and bring it to the mediation. Review the evaluation form; it shows our goals for working with you. Please let us know during the mediation how we can better meet these goals. Also included are:

- Respectful Communication to Improve Parenting Decisions,
- Blank monthly calendar form to help with scheduling,
- List of current-year school holidays in Montgomery County, Maryland,
- Holidays during the next several years,
- Calendar showing all the days
- Parenting Mediation Evaluation Form.

If you have questions or concerns about the mediation please don't hesitate to contact your mediator by reply email or by calling 240-777-9080. We will try to answer any questions.

Sincerely,  
Family Division Mediators

## How Are We Parenting?

This worksheet can help you before and during your mediation. It asks you to focus on what you are now doing in certain areas for your child(ren) and with the each other. It is not meant to suggest what you should be doing. I hope that doing the worksheet increases opportunities for improving your parenting efforts.

Identify your present ways; note questions and concerns for later discussion. Thoroughly considering these issues will prepare you for dialogue about your parenting plan. Use additional paper or the margins if you need more space.

During the mediation we will discuss what is working for you and what changes you wish to make.

### 1. Our Children

Name \_\_\_\_\_, born \_\_\_\_\_, age \_\_\_\_\_ years  
Name \_\_\_\_\_, born \_\_\_\_\_, age \_\_\_\_\_ years  
Name \_\_\_\_\_, born \_\_\_\_\_, age \_\_\_\_\_ years  
Name \_\_\_\_\_, born \_\_\_\_\_, age \_\_\_\_\_ years

### 2. Our Work Schedule

Mother

Father

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Our Current Parenting Schedule**

Primary residence provided by:  mother  father  both  other family member

The access time I spend with or care for our child:

Weekend(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Weekday(s): \_\_\_\_\_

School breaks/summer: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Our transportation arrangements to assure access with both parents are:**

**5. The holidays that are important to each of us:**

Mother

Father

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6. How we vacation or travel each year/summer with our children:**

With each parent for \_\_\_ weeks

When do we start discussing the summer schedule? \_\_\_\_\_

When do we agree on the schedule? \_\_\_\_\_

Other arrangements and concerns: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. How we are making decisions affecting our child or children:**

*If one parent makes the decisions*—what input does other parent give and how satisfactory is the process?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**If both parents make the decisions**—how do we iron out disagreements? Are certain areas assigned to one or the other parent for decision?

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**If we disagree:**

- We continue to discuss the issue or decision until we agree.
- We have used a mediator or other neutral person to assist us.
- We meet with a parenting coordinator or other professional who listens, helps us to reach a consensus and, if we still cannot agree, makes the decision.
- What other ways do we use for making decisions for our children?

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### 8. Our Family Communications

How, and how effectively, are we communicating with each other on important matters concerning our child or children? We communicate:

- on a regular basis
- only when needed
- we use a schedule for discussing, at these times \_\_\_\_\_
- We use other ways to communicate; for example (circle those that apply), email, internet IM, voice mail, phone, meetings, notes sent with child, meetings with family therapist.
- We are communicating well , or not so well . Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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How do we provide communication time with our children and the other parent?

- on a regular basis
- usually when requested by our child or by the other parent.



- As much as possible, our children's customary activities will be continued while in the care of each parent. Each of us will make every effort not to schedule activities or appointments during the other parent's scheduled time with the children. The parent caring for our children shall make every effort to support the children's interests and activities, including, without limitation, sports practice and games, medical appointments, dancing and music lessons and recitals, church, school, extra-curricular activities, parties and other social gatherings, scouting and club activities. Both parents are encouraged to attend such activities, whether or not scheduled during that parent's time. Each parent will be respectful of the other parent's time with our children.
- When one parent is not available to take care of our children according to this schedule (e.g., business trip, weekend out of town) for more than one day, that parent is encouraged to give the other parent the opportunity to take care of the children rather than placing our children with a third party. Such an opportunity, however, is not obligatory; nor is it to be used by either party to interfere with the other parent's scheduled time.

## Decisions for Raising Our Children

- **Physical Care and Decision Making**  
The Court will include in our parenting plan our decisions on how one or both of us will make significant decisions on behalf of our children, such as shared decision making or single parent decision making after consultation with the other parent. The Court will also include arrangements for physical care and custody of our children that we work out, such as shared care, or primary care with one parent and a meaningful access schedule for the other.
- **Daily Routine**  
Each of us has the right and responsibility to make decisions concerning our children's daily routine when the children are in our care. Examples of parental day-to-day decisions include treatment of minor health problems and injuries, diet, TV, house rules and discipline, bedtime, etc.
- **Education/Daycare Decisions**  
We agree to share information regarding our children's school and daycare reports and activities. Both of us are entitled to duplicate information from the school and will be kept on the emergency contact list. Both of us will also be entitled to sign our children out of school for emergencies with notification to the other parent.
- **Emergency Medical Decisions**  
Each of us retains the authority to consent to emergency surgery or other necessary medical care for our children while in our care when there is insufficient time to contact the other parent. We agree to notify the other parent from the hospital or treating facility as soon as possible.
- **Routine Medical Decisions**  
We agree to follow the recommendations of the pediatrician. Each of us is legally entitled to access to our children's medical records. We agree to share information regarding our children's medical treatment and appointments, and to share the burden of taking our children to such treatments and appointments. Each of us will be provided with a copy of our children's hospital/medical identification card.
- **Extra-ordinary Medical Care Decisions**  
We agree to share all extra-ordinary medical decisions. A decision to maintain, initiate or terminate medical treatment for our children will be made only after discussion between us. If we are unable to agree on such a decision, the parent with single parent decision-making authority shall make the decision, or, if we share decision making (joint legal custody), we agree to obtain the services of a mediator or family counselor to assist in resolving the issue.

- **Child Care Coverage for an Ill Child**

If our child is too sick to attend day care or school, the parent with whom our child wakes up will be responsible for taking our child to the doctor if necessary, and providing care for our child until the other parent is scheduled to have our child in his/her care. If our child becomes sick or hurt and must leave the school or day care facility, the parent with whom our child will spend that night will pick up our child and provide care.

- **Extra-curricular Activities**

We agree that neither of us will sign our children up for an activity that will interfere with the other parent's scheduled time with our children without first gaining the approval of the other parent. We agree it is important for our children to participate in extra-curricular activities, and we will cooperate to give them such opportunities.

## Family Communications

- **Between Us**

We agree to discuss with each other important issues concerning the children on a schedule or in a manner we have discussed and created to best work for our family. To facilitate these discussions we may speak to one by telephone at a mutually agreed upon time, use email or other methods such as voice mail and beepers. When we do discuss, we will talk about matters involving our children, try to be rested and free from interruptions, and to have privacy while speaking so that our children will not overhear our conversations. Either of us may end the discussion when the subject changes from issues involving the children or when the conversation becomes counter-productive to our ongoing parental relationship.

We agree to not discuss with our children inappropriate topics, including the other parent's personal or financial situation or parenting decisions yet to be reached. Our discussion will not be in the presence of, or within the hearing range of, our children. We agree we will not have our children deliver to the other parent messages, either written or verbal, that have the potential of not being well received by the other parent. We agree not to question our children about the other parent's household or friends, not to induce our children to challenge the authority of the other parent, not to encourage our children to request a change of custody or to resist spending time scheduled with the other parent. We will not ask our child to keep secrets from the other parent. We agree not to say, by word or gesture, anything that may diminish our children's love, respect or affection for the other parent, nor will we allow our friends or relatives to do so.

- **Between Us and Our Children**

Our children will be able to call either of us at any time. We will encourage free communications between our children and the other parent. We will not do anything to impede or resist communications by phone or mail between our children and the other parent.

We agree to keep each other apprised of our respective telephone—home and work— and cell phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and an address where our children may be reached, as well as the name, address and telephone number of any regular child-care provider. Each parent agrees to respond promptly to any recorded message from the other parent or from our children.

We will encourage extended family contacts such as visits, letters, and phone calls to grandparents and other relatives.

# Spending Time with Our Children During Holidays and Vacations

- Holidays**

We understand that holidays take precedence over the daily schedule and will interrupt the regular parenting schedule. After the holiday observance, the schedule will resume at the point where it was interrupted. We have agreed to the following holiday schedule. *A holiday alternating or sharing arrangement that is worked out by you is inserted here.*

Mother

Father

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- Vacations**

Each of us may spend with our children uninterrupted vacation time each summer or year. We agree to participate in preliminary discussion of plans for our children's summer and vacation plans, including camps and other activities and these plans will be finalized in time for our child to make any needed sign-up deadlines. Each parent agrees to furnish the other travel plans, dates and times, carriers, hotels, and telephone numbers (when they become known to the traveling parent), etc. Each parent will telephone or will have our children telephone the other parent within twenty-four hours after arrival to the travel destination and at least once each week thereafter while on vacation. We understand that vacations interrupt the daily schedule, which resumes after the vacation. One of us may not schedule a vacation to include holidays assigned to the other without approval from the other.

## Relocation Outside the Area by a Parent

In the event either of us contemplates moving a distance that makes the current parenting schedule difficult or impossible to maintain, the parent who is moving will notify the other immediately. We agree to change our parenting agreement so that each of us may continue spending time with our children, that each of us can provide meaningful input into parenting decisions and in a way that maintains the close relationship between each of us and our children. We agree to use a trusted third party, family counselor or mediator to assist us in working out changes if we are not able to do so by ourselves.

Under Maryland law, a move out of state with our minor children may be such a significant change in circumstances that the court would reconsider our parenting arrangements to safeguard our children's best interests. So, we will give each other advance notice of at least forty-five days before any contemplated move (and more notice, if possible). We will also cooperate to work out a new parenting schedule better tailored to our circumstances. In the event that we cannot agree upon a new parenting schedule, we shall promptly submit the issues raised by relocation to mediation or to the court.

## Respectful Communication to Improve Parenting Decisions

We agree to share our concerns about the children in an effective and respectful way. We will approach an issue by trying to understand the other parent's concerns and feelings before making or expressing our own judgments. We hope to avoid feeling negatively toward each other, and to improve the quality of our discussion and our decision-making to benefit our children. We wish to reach good decisions for our children's welfare, while restoring and practicing civility toward each other.

We agree to practice respectful communication concerning our children, using these steps:

- 1. Starting Our Conversation.** When there is a need to consult on an issue the parent bringing the subject up, the "initiating parent", describes to the other parent the issue at hand, mentioning important background information, as well as his or her feelings and reasons underlying the issue or a proposed course of action. The initiating parent notes the time period in which some action should take place, if any, and the reason for that. The initiating parent asks if the other parent has questions, and answers them. During this time, the other parent being asked to consider an issue, the "listening parent", listens and observes the underlying feelings and understands what it is that the other parent wishes to communicate. The listening parent does not interrupt, voices no judgments or comments, pro or con, and tries to focus on what the initiating parent is saying, rather than his or her own thoughts and feelings. When the initiating parent has finished introducing the topic he or she will ask the listening parent for questions and will answer them.
- 2. Mutual Acknowledgment Before Analysis.** Then the listening parent "acknowledges" to the initiating parent, describing the initiating parent's feelings concerning the problem or issue, and repeating back as accurately as possible the initiating parent's viewpoint, including any specific course of action being suggested. The listening parent asks whether his or her acknowledgement was accurate and listens for clarification, correction or additional detail. Only after this acknowledgment has been given does the listening parent consider his or her views. Then the listening parent may express his or her own underlying feelings toward the issue and state her or his viewpoint.  
  
Then the initiating parent acknowledges the other parent's feelings, summarizes the other's viewpoint, and asks whether his or her understandings are accurate. Only after giving this acknowledgment does the proposing parent consider her or his views in response, and then may comment on or evaluate the views of the other parent.
- 3. Obtaining Needed Information.** Before ending our initial discussion we will consider what additional information could help us and how the needed information will be obtained. We will share the burdens involved, and check in with each other to share and consider any new information. We will decide together when further discussion or action will take place and move our process toward a conclusion.
- 4. Resolving Disagreements Between Us.** If we face a serious disagreement concerning a problem or a proposed solution, we may seek resolution by:
  - Meeting with a neutral person, such as a mediator or counselor, to help us move forward;
  - In spite of our reservations, one of us may defer to an approach suggested by the other parent for various reasons, such as, one parent has more expertise or experience handling the area being discussed, or one parent, who functions as the children's primary care provider, has a better sense of what is needed, or for some other reason; or
  - We may find several good options for our child and choose to implement a proposed solution on a trial basis, to be reviewed by us after an agreed learning period, providing to us valuable information to assist in our child's development.