BECKY TAYLOR FAMILY MEDIATION

FREE GUIDE · CHILD ARRANGEMENTS

Child Arrangements Guide

Creating a parenting plan that works for your children.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- What child arrangements are and why they matter
- Legal vs. informal arrangements
- How to create a parenting plan together
- What courts look for when making decisions
- Common co-parenting challenges and solutions

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What Are Child Arrangements?

Child arrangements are the decisions you make about where your children will live, who they will spend time with, and how major decisions about their upbringing will be made after separation or divorce.

These arrangements typically cover

- **Where they live** — their primary residence and any shared care arrangements
- **Contact schedule** — time with the other parent (weekends, weekdays, overnight stays)
- **School holidays** — how Christmas, Easter, summer, and half-terms are divided
- **Special occasions** — birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, religious holidays
- **Communication** — how children stay in touch with the other parent
- **Major decisions** — schooling, healthcare, religion, surname changes, travel abroad

> "The best child arrangements are the ones parents create together — not the ones a judge imposes."

Legal vs. Informal Arrangements

You do not automatically need a court order to make child arrangements. Many separated parents create informal agreements that work perfectly well. Understanding the difference is important however.

Informal Arrangements

- Made between parents without court involvement
- Flexible — can be adjusted as needs change
- No legal fees or court delays
- Relies on trust and good communication
- May be harder to enforce if one parent stops cooperating

Formal Court Order

- Made by a judge after court proceedings
- Legally binding and enforceable
- Provides certainty and security
- Can be expensive and time-consuming
- Requires court application to change

Where most families start

Most parents start with informal arrangements and only pursue a court order if agreements cannot be reached or kept.

Creating a Parenting Plan

A parenting plan is a written agreement that sets out how you will share care of your children. Creating one together — ideally with a mediator — helps ensure both parents feel heard and reduces future conflict.

Key elements to include

- **Living arrangements:** Where will the children live during the week and weekends?
- **Handover details:** When, where, and how will children move between homes?
- **Holiday schedule:** How will you divide school holidays and special occasions?
- **Communication:** How often can children contact the other parent?
- **Decision-making:** Who makes decisions about school, healthcare, extracurriculars?
- **Financial support:** How will you handle child maintenance and shared expenses?
- **Review process:** When will you review and update the plan as children grow?

> "Your plan should work for your family, not an ideal family. Be realistic about work schedules, distances, and your children's ages and needs."

What Courts Look For

If you cannot agree and the matter goes to court, a judge will make a Child Arrangements Order based on what is in the child's best interests — known as the welfare principle.

The court considers

- The child's **wishes and feelings** (appropriate to their age and understanding)
- Their **physical, emotional, and educational needs**
- The **likely effect of any change** in circumstances
- Their **age, sex, background**, and any relevant characteristics
- Any **harm** they have suffered or are at risk of suffering
- How **capable each parent** is of meeting their needs

> **No automatic preference**
>
> Courts do not automatically favour mothers over fathers, or vice versa. The focus is entirely on the child's welfare.

Common Questions

Can my child choose which parent to live with?

Children do not have the legal right to choose, but courts will consider their views — especially as they get older (typically from age 10-12 onwards). The final decision is always based on their best interests, not their preference alone.

What if my ex won't stick to the arrangement?

If you have an informal agreement, you may need to return to mediation or apply for a court order. If you have a court order that is being breached, you can apply to the court for enforcement — but this should be a last resort.

Can arrangements be changed?

Yes. Informal arrangements can be changed by agreement at any time. Court orders can be varied by agreement or by applying back to court if circumstances change significantly.

Ready to create your parenting plan?

Book a free, no-obligation call to discuss how mediation can help you reach agreement.

BOOK A FREE 30-MINUTE CALL

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