

Free Parenting Plan Template (UK)

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1. What this parenting plan is (and isn't)

A parenting plan is a written agreement between two separated parents about how you will raise your children. It is not a court order and it is not legally binding. But that does not make it less useful. In fact, many family mediators, Cafcass officers, and family solicitors encourage parents to create one, whether or not there are court proceedings.

This template is based on the frameworks used by Cafcass (the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) and the National Family Mediation (NFM) service. It is designed to be:

- **Child-focused** — every section starts from what your child needs, not what feels fair to you or the other parent.
- **Flexible** — you can update it as your child grows, as circumstances change, or as you learn what works.
- **Practical** — this is not a legal document full of formalities. It is a working agreement that lives in a drawer (or a shared app) and actually gets used.

If you already have a court order (such as a Child Arrangements Order), this plan can sit alongside it. Use it to fill in the day-to-day details that court orders rarely cover, like who buys school shoes, what time video calls happen, and how to handle a sick day.

A note on tone. This is guidance, not legal advice. If there are safeguarding concerns, domestic abuse, or you are already in court proceedings, speak to a solicitor or contact the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (0808 2000 247) before creating any informal agreement.

2. Child and parent details

Start by writing down the basics. This section is simple but important. It means anyone reading the plan (a grandparent, a school, a mediator) can immediately see who it involves.

PARENT & CHILD DETAILS

Parent 1 (full name): _____

Parent 2 (full name): _____

Child 1 (name & DOB): _____

Child 2 (name & DOB): _____

Child 3 (name & DOB): _____

Parent 1 address: _____

Parent 2 address: _____

Child's usual home(s): _____

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Parent 1 mobile: _____

Parent 2 mobile: _____

GP surgery & phone: _____

School & phone: _____

Other emergency contact: _____

3. Living arrangements and schedule

This is usually the section parents spend the most time on. The goal is to create a predictable, stable routine that your child can count on. Children manage transitions much better when they know what is coming next.

Regular weekly pattern (term time)

Write out a typical week. Be specific. Instead of "shared", say "Monday after school to Wednesday morning drop-off with Parent 1; Wednesday after school to Friday morning drop-off with Parent 2; alternating weekends."

WEEKLY SCHEDULE — TERM TIME	
Monday:	_____
Tuesday:	_____
Wednesday:	_____
Thursday:	_____
Friday:	_____
Saturday:	_____
Sunday:	_____

Weekends

If you alternate weekends, note the pattern. For example: "Parent 1 has odd-numbered weekends (using week numbers), Parent 2 has even-numbered weekends. Weekend starts Friday after school and ends Monday morning drop-off." If every weekend is the same, just note that.

WEEKEND PATTERN

Pattern: _____

Weekend starts: _____

Weekend ends: _____

School holidays

Holiday time is often split differently from term time. Common approaches include splitting each holiday in half, alternating whole holidays year by year, or giving each parent specific weeks. Write down what works for your family.

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Half terms: _____

Easter holiday: _____

Summer holiday: _____

Christmas holiday: _____

Special days

Think about the days that matter most to your child and to each of you. It helps to agree these in advance so there is no last-minute confusion.

SPECIAL DAYS

Christmas Day: _____

Boxing Day: _____

Child's birthday: _____

Mother's Day: _____

Father's Day: _____

Other (religious / cultural): _____

Travel and handovers

Handovers are one of the most common flashpoints. Agreeing the details in advance takes the tension out of it. Think about where the handover happens, who does the driving, and what happens if someone is running late.

HANDOVER ARRANGEMENTS

Handover location: _____

Who drives / drops off: _____

If running late (rule): _____

What child should bring: _____

A common arrangement: the parent whose time is starting collects the child (pick-up, not drop-off). This means the child always feels they are being welcomed, not sent away. If one parent always drives, agree a fuel-sharing arrangement or alternate weeks.

Tip: If handovers are tense, consider using a neutral location like school, a family member's house, or a contact centre. Cafcass can help arrange supported handovers if needed.

4. Decision-making

Parenting involves hundreds of small decisions and a few big ones. For the small stuff (what they eat for dinner, whether they wear a coat), whoever the child is with decides. For the bigger stuff, you need a system.

Big decisions

These are the areas where both parents usually need to be involved:

- **Education** — which school, private vs state, SEN support, tutoring
- **Medical** — vaccinations, operations, dental treatment, therapy/counselling
- **Religion** — baptism, faith school, religious observance
- **Passports and travel abroad** — applying for or renewing a passport, taking the child out of the country
- **Change of name** — both parents with parental responsibility must consent
- **Moving house** — especially if it would affect the child's school or the schedule

How to decide

Pick one approach for each category, or use a general rule for all of them:

- **Joint decision** — both parents must agree before any action is taken.
- **One parent leads, the other is consulted** — one parent researches and recommends, the other has a right to object within an agreed timeframe (e.g. 7 days).
- **Mediation if stuck** — if you cannot agree after two attempts at discussion, you will attend a mediation session before taking any unilateral action.

DECISION-MAKING APPROACH

Education decisions: _____

Medical decisions: _____

Religion: _____

Passports / travel: _____

If we cannot agree: _____

5. Communication between parents

How you communicate with each other will shape your child's experience of your separation more than almost anything else. You do not need to be friends, but you do need a system that works.

Preferred channels

Choose one primary channel for day-to-day communication and stick to it. A co-parenting app (like Pick Up) or email works well because it creates a written record and removes the intensity of phone calls or face-to-face conversations. Reserve phone calls for genuine emergencies only.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Primary channel: _____

Emergencies only: _____

Response time (non-urgent): 24–48 hours _____

Response time (urgent): Same day _____

Communication rules

These are not about controlling each other. They are about protecting your child from adult conflict and keeping conversations productive.

- **Business-like tone.** Write messages as if a mediator will read them. Stick to facts, logistics, and what your child needs.
- **Child-focused language.** Replace "I want" with "I think [child's name] would benefit from..." or "Could we try..."
- **No insults, sarcasm, or blame.** If a message makes you angry, wait before replying. You can always respond tomorrow.
- **No rehashing the past.** The parenting plan is about moving forward, not about who did what during the relationship.
- **One topic per message.** This makes it easier to respond and avoids conversations spiralling.

Tip: If direct communication is too difficult right now, that is okay. Consider parallel parenting (see our [guide](#)) where you communicate only about essentials, in writing, with minimal back-and-forth.

6. Communication with your child

Children benefit from being able to contact both parents freely, without feeling like they are being disloyal. Agreeing the basics in advance stops it from becoming a source of tension.

Phone and video calls

CHILD - PARENT CONTACT

How often: _____

Preferred time(s): _____

Video call duration: _____

Who initiates: _____

Some practical points to agree on:

- The child should be able to call or message the other parent without needing to ask permission.
- Keep video calls to a reasonable length (15–20 minutes is fine for younger children, longer for teens).
- The parent with the child should make sure the call happens, even if the child does not ask. Young children often will not initiate but still want to talk.
- Avoid scheduling calls during meals, bedtime, or activities. A quick "goodnight" call is lovely. A 40-minute video call at 8pm when a 5-year-old is tired is not.
- Neither parent should listen in on calls, prompt the child on what to say, or ask the child to report back on the other parent's household.

7. Routines and rules

Children do best when the basics are roughly consistent between homes. You do not need identical rules, but it helps if the big things are in the same ballpark.

Daily routines

AGREED ROUTINES

Bedtime (under 5s): _____

Bedtime (5–11): _____

Bedtime (12+): _____

Homework time / rule: _____

Screen time limit: _____

Chores / responsibilities: _____

Discipline approach

You do not need to agree on every parenting style, but it is worth discussing your general approach so your child does not get completely different messages in each home. Common ground might include: no smacking, consistent consequences, and not undermining the other parent's rules in front of the child.

Health and medical

HEALTH INFORMATION

Allergies: _____

Regular medication: _____

Food restrictions: _____

Who holds medication: _____

Both parents should have a copy of any prescription information. If your child takes regular medication, agree who supplies it, where it is kept, and how handovers work (does the medicine travel with the child, or does each home have its own supply?).

8. Money and expenses

Money is one of the most common sources of conflict between separated parents. A clear, written agreement helps. This section is not a replacement for a proper child maintenance arrangement, but it covers the practical gaps that maintenance often does not.

Child maintenance

In the UK, child maintenance can be arranged in three ways:

- **Family-based arrangement** — you agree an amount between yourselves. Free, flexible, but relies on trust.

- **Child Maintenance Service (CMS)** — the government calculates a figure based on income. There is a £20 application fee. You can use CMS Collect (they handle payments, 20% surcharge for the paying parent, 4% deducted from the receiving parent) or Direct Pay (CMS calculates, you pay each other directly, no ongoing fee).
- **Consent order** — a family-based arrangement made legally binding through the court.

MAINTENANCE ARRANGEMENT

Type (family / CMS / court): _____

Amount: _____

Payment frequency: _____

Payment method: _____

Extras and shared costs

Maintenance covers day-to-day living costs, but there are always extras. Agree in advance how you will handle these to avoid arguments when the bill arrives.

SHARED EXPENSES

School uniform: _____

School trips: _____

Clubs / activities: _____

Childcare / wraparound: _____

Medical / dental (not NHS): _____

Birthday / Christmas gifts: _____

How to split (50/50, proportional, other): _____

How to request / approve: _____

A simple approach: anything over a set amount (e.g. £30) needs agreement from both parents before the money is spent. Under that amount, whoever signs up pays. Track shared costs in a co-parenting app or a shared spreadsheet and settle up monthly.

Tip: Pick Up includes built-in expense tracking so you can log shared costs, attach receipts, and see who owes what — without the awkward text messages.

9. New partners and wider family

At some point, one or both of you will start a new relationship. This can be difficult for everyone, especially the children. It helps to agree some ground rules in advance, while you are both thinking clearly.

Introducing new partners

There is no perfect timeline, but most child psychologists suggest waiting until a relationship is stable and serious (typically 6–12 months) before introducing a new partner to your children. Discuss and agree:

- Will you give the other parent a heads-up before introducing a new partner to the children? (Most plans say yes, as a courtesy, not as permission.)
- New partners should not be involved in handovers in the early stages.
- New partners do not replace a parent. They should not discipline the children or make parenting decisions without agreement.

Wider family and other adults

- Grandparents and extended family are important to children. Both parents should support the child's relationship with family on both sides.
- Do not use children as messengers between households. If you need to tell the other parent something, tell them directly.
- Do not bad-mouth the other parent in front of the children, and do not allow others (grandparents, friends, new partners) to do so either. Children internalise this. They are half of each of you.

NEW PARTNERS & FAMILY

New partner introduction rule: _____

Overnight stays with new partner: _____

Grandparent contact: _____

10. Reviews, changes, and disagreements

A parenting plan is a living document. What works when your child is three will not work when they are nine or fifteen. Build in a review process so the plan evolves with your family.

Regular reviews

- Review the plan every **6–12 months**, or when there is a significant change (starting school, moving house, a new sibling, a child's expressed wishes changing).

- Set a specific date for the review. Treat it like a meeting: have an agenda, stick to facts, and focus on what is and is not working.
- Either parent can request an earlier review if circumstances change significantly.

REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review frequency: _____

Next review date: _____

How reviews happen (in person, video call, via mediator): _____

When you disagree

You will disagree. That is normal. What matters is how you handle it. Agree on an escalation process:

1. **Direct discussion.** Try to resolve it between yourselves first, in writing, sticking to the communication rules above.
2. **Mediation.** If you cannot agree after two attempts, either parent can request a mediation session. You can find an accredited mediator through the [Family Mediation Council](#) or [National Family Mediation](#). Many offer a free initial meeting (MIAM).
3. **Legal advice.** If mediation does not resolve it, either parent may seek independent legal advice or apply to the court. This should be a last resort.

11. Safety and safeguarding

This section is important. A voluntary parenting plan is only appropriate when both parents are able to cooperate safely. If there are concerns about domestic abuse, child abuse, substance misuse, or any other safeguarding issue, an informal plan may not be enough.

- If you have a court order (including a non-molestation order, occupation order, or prohibited steps order), that order takes priority over anything in this plan.

- If you have concerns about your child's safety with the other parent, contact Cafcass, your local authority children's services, or speak to a family solicitor.
- If you or your child are at immediate risk, call 999.
- The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is available 24/7 on 0808 2000 247.

Where safeguarding concerns exist, professional advice should always override any informal arrangement. This template is not designed for situations involving abuse or coercive control.

SIGNATURES (OPTIONAL)

Signing is optional. This is not a legal contract. But writing your names and the date can help both parents feel committed to making it work.

Parent 1 signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent 2 signature: _____

Date: _____