



Parenting Time (Visitation) and Parenting Plans

What is parenting time?

When parents are separated, the court usually wants both parents to be involved with their children. Parenting time is the time that each parent spends with a child. It does not matter who has custody or what kind of custody. Parenting time is the same as visitation.

Divorce and custody cases are complicated and affect important legal rights. It is best to get legal advice from a lawyer.

How is parenting time set?

Parenting time can be set by the Court. Even if one parent is granted sole custody, the other parent (also called the “noncustodial parent”) can be awarded parenting time. The Court can also establish a parenting time schedule when parents share custody. Parenting time must be in the child’s “best interest.” To set parenting time, the court looks at things like the child’s age, the child’s safety, and the child’s past relationship with the noncustodial parent. There are 12 “best interest” factors the Court must consider. See our fact sheet [Paternity and Child Custody](#) for the list.

In general, a noncustodial parent gets at least 25% of the parenting time. This is calculated by counting the number of overnights in a 2-week period. For example, 25% equals about every other weekend and one day a week. If one parent does not spend overnights with the child, the court may look at other long time periods that the child spends with that parent.

Sometimes, the court gives “reasonable parenting time” without getting specific. In this case the parents have to figure out a schedule on their own. But, if either parent asks, the court sets specific dates and times for parenting time.

The court may give more parenting time to one parent to care for the child while the other parent works. If you ask for this, the court looks at how well the parents cooperate, how well the parents work together on visiting issues and if there has been family violence.



Parenting Plans

Parents can agree to use a “Parenting Plan.” They work on writing a plan that states the time each parent spends with the child and how they are going to make decisions about the child. You can make a parenting plan even if you were never married or living together. There is more info on parenting plans below.

What about limits on parenting time?

The court can limit parenting time for the noncustodial parent to less than 25% if it is likely to harm the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health or safety, or their emotional growth and development. It can also limit parenting time if the noncustodial parent breaks the court’s order on parenting time without a good reason.

The court can limit parenting by:

- Not allowing overnight visits.
- Ruling it must be **supervised** by the other parent, a supervised visitation center or a relative.

The court can also put **conditions** on parenting time, like making the noncustodial parent be sober for a certain period before and during parenting time. The court can order drug or alcohol treatment.

If the person who wants parenting time has been convicted of certain crimes like:

- murder, manslaughter
- assault
- kidnapping
- depriving someone else of custodial or parental rights
- soliciting, inducing, or promoting prostitution involving a minor
- criminal sexual conduct
- incest
- malicious punishment of a child
- neglect
- terroristic threats
- domestic assault by strangulation



They have to prove that spending time with the child is in the child’s best interest. This rule applies only to certain degrees of some crimes and only in certain circumstances. Like if the victim of the crime was a household or family member or if the conviction happened in the past 5 years. If the court finds there has been domestic abuse in the family, they are likely to decide against legal custody.

What is a parenting time expeditor?

The court may appoint a parenting time “expeditor.” This is someone who helps parents when they have a disagreement about parenting time. The expeditor listens to both sides of a disagreement and makes a decision.

Sometimes the court orders that the decision is “binding” (has to be followed) unless one side goes to court and the court changes it. In other cases, the decision is “non-binding” and does not have to be followed unless the judge orders that it be followed.

There is a cost for a parenting time expeditor. The Court can’t require parties to use a parenting time expeditor if either party claims to be a victim of abuse, or either party can’t afford the expeditor.



How can parenting time be changed?

Parents can agree to change parenting time. For example, either parent can ask the other parent to skip a visit and make it up another time. If the parents don’t agree, a parent can ask the court to change parenting time if it is best for the child. The Court can look at any changes since the last order and see if a new order is needed for the child’s best interest.

Can the parent with custody deny parenting time?

In general, no. If there is a problem, that parent must get the parenting time order changed. A parent can’t deny parenting time if the other parent isn’t paying child support. The court changes it if there is a danger to the custodial parent or the child, or if the other parent has constantly broken the parenting time agreement. Before going to court, you can’t deny parenting time unless you or the child is in **immediate** danger.

If the parent with custody denies parenting time without a good reason, the court can:

- Let the other parent make up the missed parenting time.
- Find them in contempt of court which has fines up to \$500.
- In very serious cases, use the unfair denials of parenting time as a factor in changing custody.



It is never unreasonable to deny parenting time to keep a child safe from immediate danger.

If your child is in immediate danger by having parenting time with the other parent, you can bring an emergency motion to the court. An emergency motion is called an Ex Parte motion and is reviewed by the court more quickly than a regular motion. But the court only grants an Ex Parte motion in a true emergency.

Enforcement of Parenting Time

Enforcing a parenting time order can be hard, especially if the child is older and doesn't want to visit the other parent. But a parenting time court order can be enforced until the child turns 18.

If the parent thinks this may happen in the future, they should ask the court to put language in the parenting plan that says law enforcement may act "with full force" if the order is not followed. If they already have an order and are having problems, they could choose to ask the court for help.

If there is evidence that the non-custodial parent does not offer a safe or appropriate environment for the child, the custodial parent can ask the court to change the order.

Can a custodial parent move out of state?

If a custodial parent wants to move out of state, they have to get permission from the parent who has parenting time. This can sometimes be true for in state moves also. The permission has to be in writing. If they leave without permission, it is a crime, and they could lose custody. If the other parent does not agree to the move, the parents have to go to court.

The parent with custody has to show the court that the move is in the child's best interests. The only time they don't have to show this is if that parent was a victim of domestic violence by the other parent. The court looks at several things, like parenting time agreements, the emotional needs of the child, and if the move is a plan to keep the other parent from seeing the child. Then the court decides if the parent and child can move.

If the other parent doesn't have court set parenting time, the custodial parent can move any time.



Can grandparents get visitation?

Yes, if they meet certain requirements. It can be complicated. See our fact sheet, [Grandparents and Visitation](#).

More Information

There is [more information on Parenting Time and forms](#) you can use at: www.mncourts.gov.



- Click on Help Topics
- Click on Child Custody & Parenting Time

More on Parenting Plans

Do I have to have a parenting plan?

No. You and the other parent decide if you want to make a Parenting Plan. You don't have to, and sometimes it is not a good idea. Sometimes the court makes one for you, but they won't if one parent has committed domestic abuse against the other parent or the child.

Remember, you can make a parenting plan even if you were never married or living together.



What has to be in the parenting plan?

The Plan must have

- A schedule of the time each parent spends with the child
 - Who makes certain decisions about the child
- AND**
- A way to settle arguments

What other things can be in the parenting plan?

The Plan may use terms other than “physical” and “legal custody.” But it must also clearly state if the parents have joint legal custody or joint physical custody or which parent has sole legal custody or sole physical custody.

You can tell the court how you would like it to make the decision about moving a child's place of residence from Minnesota. For example, you could tell the court to use the “best interests of the child” factors to make the decision. But only if:

- Both parents have a lawyer when the court approves the Plan
- OR**
- The court order says both parents were fully informed, the Plan was voluntary, and the parents understand it.

The Plan can explain which expenses each parent pays for the child so long as it agrees with the Minnesota child support guidelines.

You can be as detailed as you want in your Parenting Plan. For example, you can make specific communication plans or goals for parenting. Your plan can explain the amount of phone and email contact with the child or the child's participation in activities such as sports and music. A parenting plan can often have more details than a typical parenting time schedule.

A sample Parenting Plan can be found online at <http://www.mncourts.gov/documents/Parenting-Agreement-Worksheet.pdf>

What if there has been domestic abuse?

If one parent has committed domestic abuse against the other parent or a child

- the court cannot make a Parenting Plan for you
- the court cannot order the Parenting Plan to provide joint legal custody

AND

- the Parenting Plan's way to settle arguments can only be through the court

What if I want to change the parenting plan later?

You can change the Parenting Plan if you and the other parent agree. But to enforce the change, you must have a court order. Sometimes you have to go to mediation before filing anything in court to change the plan. Check your parenting plan to see if it says you have to go to mediation before making any court filings.



Fact Sheets are legal information NOT legal advice. See a lawyer for advice.

Don't use this fact sheet if it is more than 1 year old. Ask us for updates, a fact sheet list, or alternate formats.

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