



GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY MICHIGAN

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Our Philosophy :

We believe the decisions that parents freely and voluntarily make concerning the custodial and parenting time arrangements for their children should be respected. We are committed to helping parents make those decisions, as opposed to imposing a particular plan upon families.

However, when parents cannot agree on these issues, it is our duty to make recommendations to the Court on a parenting time plan for the family.

Our recommendations are based upon our assessment of what parenting time schedule will work best for the children and both parents. We structure parenting time schedules with the following precepts in mind:

*Every child has an inherent right to the love,
affection and financial support
of both parents.*

*Every child has a right to spend time with both parents
and it is the responsibility of both parents
to insure this right of their children.*

Toward A Parenting Time Schedule

Every family is unique, and that is why we prefer that parents devise their own parenting time schedule. Some parents may choose to share physical custody of their children. In other situations, the children spend more of their time with one parent (the custodial parent) and have regular parenting time with the co-parent. In these situations, absent special circumstances, where the parents are unable to work out a parenting time schedule on their own, they can expect that the Friend of the Court will generally recommend a schedule similar to the following:

The co-parent shall have parenting time with the children alternate weekends from Friday afternoon until Sunday evening and one weeknight evening visit each week of three hours in duration. In the event parents cannot agree on the day and times of these visits, the Friend of the Court will establish the days and times.

The children shall spend Christmas/Holiday school break in odd numbered years with the co-parent and in even numbered years with the custodial parent. The alternating weekend schedule of parenting time shall continue during the Christmas/Holiday school break.

The children shall spend Spring school break in odd numbered years with the co-parent and in even numbered years with the custodial parent. The alternating weekend schedule of parenting time shall continue during the Spring school break, provided the parent having parenting time does not have out-of-town vacation plans for the Spring school break.

(NOTE: The weeknight visit shall be suspended during Christmas and Spring school break times and shall not be made up.)

Each parent shall have extended parenting time during the summer school break. The recommended extended summer parenting time may be from three to five weeks. Alternating weekends of parenting time shall continue in the summer, provided however, that each parent will be afforded an opportunity to take the children out-of-town for vacation for a period not greater than two weeks. Out-of-town vacations shall be scheduled and communicated, in writing, to the other parent at least 30 days in advance and shall not interfere with holiday or birthday parenting time. Any weeknight parenting time missed as a result of the exercise of vacation parenting time shall not be made up.

Holidays shall be alternated. The holiday schedules take precedence over all other scheduled parenting time.

In even numbered years the custodial parent will have the following holidays: Easter; Fourth of July; Thanksgiving; Christmas Day; child's birthday.

In even numbered years the co-parent will have the following holidays: Memorial Day; Labor Day; Christmas Eve and Halloween.

In odd numbered years the custodial parent will have the following holidays: Memorial Day; Labor Day; Christmas Eve and Halloween.

In odd numbered years the co-parent will have the following holidays: Easter; Fourth of July; Thanksgiving; Christmas Day; child's birthday. The children shall spend each Mother's Day with Mother and each Father's Day with Father. Parenting time shall be from 9:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.

(NOTE: Holiday Hours are 9:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. for Easter, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and the child's birthday. Holiday Hours for Fourth of July are 9:00 a.m. July 4th to 9:00 a.m. July 5th. Christmas Eve shall be from 7:00 p.m. December 23rd to 9:00 p.m. December 24th. Christmas Day shall be from 9:00 p.m. December 24th until 9:00 p.m. December 25th. Halloween night visits shall be from 5:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m.)

(NOTE: If a holiday falls during a weekend that the parent is to have weekend parenting time, that parent shall have the children for the holiday and the weekend, and shall not be entitled to additional time. If a holiday falls on a weekend that the parent would not have parenting time, the holiday shall be spent with the parent having the holiday, but the balance of the weekend shall be spent with the parent who would normally have the children for the weekend. If a holiday immediately precedes or immediately follows a weekend that the parent would have weekend parenting time, the weekend shall be extended to include the holiday.)

Co-parents are encouraged to cooperate with each other and to be flexible. Agreed-upon deviations from the court's order, however, should be in writing and signed by both parents to be enforceable.

Special circumstances, such as those involving substance abuse, child neglect/abuse, very small children, the absence of an established parenting time relationship with the child, or parents who live at considerable distance from one another, require a schedule of parenting time that differs from the above.

Parenting Time Expectations:

Transportation.

If parties are unable to agree on transportation of the children for parenting time, the parent exercising his or her parenting time shall pick the children up. Parents may designate a third party to provide transportation, provided the third party is known to the children and has a valid driver's license. It is recommended that the parent exercising parenting time provide advance notice that a third party will be transporting the children. Co-parents, teachers and day care providers are not expected to turn children over to people who are strangers.

Be Timely.

The parenting schedule shall be exercised in a prompt manner. In the event of unforeseen circumstances, a thirty (30) minute delay is allowed for picking up and returning the children.

Communication.

If the parent exercising parenting time will not be at their usual residence, then he or she shall provide the other parent with a general itinerary and phone number where he or she and the children can be reached.

Other Activities.

Unless the parties otherwise agree, in writing, a parent shall not schedule the child in activities that will prevent the scheduled parenting time from occurring. When a child, however, regularly participates in an activity, such as music lessons, dance, sports or scouts, parents are encouraged to attend that activity with their child during their respective parenting times.

Parenting Time Enforcement.

In the 13th Circuit, all provisions of the Court's orders are uniformly enforced. The parenting time provisions of the Court's order are as important to your children as the financial provisions. If you believe that the Court order has been violated, the first step in enforcement is to provide the Friend of the Court with a written complaint outlining the dates, times and circumstances of the alleged parenting time violation. You must submit your written complaint promptly or the Friend of the Court may choose not to proceed with enforcement.

Long Distance Parenting Time.

When parents are geographically distant from one another, the parenting time schedule outlined in this brochure may not be practical. The Friend of the Court will work with such parents to arrive at a plan that allows the children to spend time with both parents. The parents should expect, however, that for school-age children, this will generally result in the co-parent having extensive parenting time during most, if not all, of the school breaks.

Child Support Credits

Most court orders provide for abatement of child support after the children spend 6 or more consecutive overnights with the co-parent. Child Support Parenting Credit forms to claim this credit are available at the Friend of the Courts office or through our website. There are no abatements in shared custody arrangements.