

A Parent's Guide to Family Court

Keeping the Focus on Children



table of contents

- 5 Introduction**
- 7 Court Procedures**
 - Orientation
 - Mediation
 - Going to a court hearing
- 13 What Children need**
 - What you can do to help your children
 - Special needs of children exposed to violence
 - Children’s developmental stages and needs
- 25 Creating a Parenting Plan**
 - What is Custody and Timeshare?
 - Points to consider when creating your parenting plan
- 31 Taking Care Of Yourself, Taking Care Of Your Child(ren)**
- 35 Directions to the San Francisco Unified Family Court**
- 36 Community Resources**
- 43 Bibliography**
- 45 Holiday Worksheets**
- 51 Parent Worksheets**
- 57 Blank Calendars**
- 61 Notes**



welcome and introduction

On behalf of the Unified Family Court Bench and the mediators of Family Court Services, welcome to the Unified Family Court.

Court can be an overwhelming place, especially when dealing with issues affecting your child(ren). This handbook will address your concerns and questions about the court and its procedures. It has information about what to expect during mediation and court hearings, as well as how to take some control over determining the issues that affect your child(ren).

The most important goal of the Family Court is to create plans that work best for your child(ren). The court firmly believes that parents should make their own plans for their children since parents, more than the court, know their children and their children's needs. Parents are usually the best decision makers. We will explain how parents, like you, can design custody arrangements that address your child(ren)'s social and psychological needs even when you and their other parent may have a difficult relationship with each other.

We've included statements from children about how they experience the changes that come with their parents' breakup: how they feel when their parents don't get along, how family transitions affect them, and how you can help keep things as normal as possible in their lives. We will also give you ideas about how you and your child(ren)'s other parent can work together for the benefit of your child(ren). The worksheets in this handbook can help you think about your child(ren)'s needs and give you a way to organize some of your thoughts before you come to mediation.

Finally, we recognize that this is a very stressful time for you and your family. It's important that you take care of yourself in order to be better able to meet your child(ren)'s needs.

Some sections in this handbook are aimed at helping you develop coping tools, understand the emotional aspects of separation and find referrals for emotional support. At the end of this handbook there is a bibliography listing books that deal with divorce and separation and how they affect children. Some of these books are written specifically for children of different ages and most are available in a local library.

It is all too easy to stay caught up in the negative and difficult feelings about your child(ren)'s other parent. We encourage you to keep a focus on the future and how you can move forward in creating a sense of peace for your child(ren) and yourself. Your capacity to move forward and to focus on the positive aspects of your life will enable your child(ren) to do the same.

court procedures

We begin this handbook with an overview of the court system for people who have any disagreements about the custody or timeshare of their children.

These are the initial steps:

1. Orientation
2. Mediation
3. Court hearing

ORIENTATION

Orientation is a group class that provides parents with an introduction to the court as well as to the emotional process affecting families in court. Both parents must attend orientation before they participate in mediation unless the court determines that either of them is exempt from attending.

The reason for requiring attendance at orientation is to give parents information about what to expect at court and at mediation. It also provides information about the developmental needs of children and tools for focusing on children's needs rather than adult conflicts. This can help improve the outcome for children, who may be experiencing some difficulties as their parents change their relationship with each other.

MEDIATION

What is Mediation?

Mediation is a process that allows parents to talk with each other about their child(ren)'s needs, with the assistance of a person who does not side with either parent. The court provides free mediation services through Family Court Services.

Children are often relieved when they know that their parents have worked together to create a plan for their care.

All of the mediators are trained mental health professionals who are knowledgeable about child development and the effects of separation, divorce, and loss on children.

What is the Purpose of Mediation?

The Family Court's responsibility is to help parents establish plans that allow their children the best of what each parent has to offer them. The court believes that parents should make their own parenting plans, without the court's interference, whenever possible. The court wants you to create your own parenting plan because:

- You know your child(ren) better than any judge
- Children are often relieved when they know that their parents have worked together to create a plan for their care
- Children have much greater success in life when their parents can cooperate with each other
- You know the details of what will work best for your child(ren) and what is realistic within your own schedule

For all of these reasons, the court will not make an order about custody or timeshare issues until you have first done your best to create a parenting plan during mediation. If you are unable to agree about any part of the parenting plan, the court will make decisions on behalf of your child(ren) on your scheduled court date.

What you Can Expect in Mediation

In most situations, you will meet with the mediator and your child(ren)'s other parent for approximately 2 hours. If there is a history of domestic violence, however, the mediator will meet with each parent separately. (See the section below about domestic violence and mediation).

If you have been to mediation before, you will generally meet with the same mediator unless that mediator is unavailable. During the mediation session you will be encouraged to talk about what you think would work best for your child(ren).

The mediator will help each of you focus on your child(ren)'s needs, may give you suggestions on how to improve your communication with each other, and give you the names of community organizations that might be of benefit to you and your child(ren).

When you work out your parenting plan, the mediator will write it up for you and will ask the Judge to sign it. Once the Judge has signed your agreement it is a court order. If your court date is only about custody and timeshare issues and you have worked out all of the issues in mediation, you may not have to come back to court again. Your mediator will let you know if you need to return for your court date or not.

If your mediation discussion is productive but you need more time to meet, you can ask to have a second appointment with the mediator before your hearing date. In some cases, the hearing date will be rescheduled to allow you the opportunity to meet with the mediator again.

If you are represented by an attorney, your attorney may participate in the mediation. This is something for you to discuss with your attorney in advance of the mediation. When attorneys come to the mediation they generally meet privately with the mediator first. The mediator spends most of the mediation session meeting with you and your child(ren)'s other parent.

Tell your mediator if you are having a hard time focusing on your child(ren) because of your feelings toward the other parent.

How to Make the Most of Your Mediation

- Before you go to your mediation appointment, spend some time imagining yourself talking with your child(ren)'s other parent. Think of strategies you can use to keep focused on your child(ren), not on the other parent.
- Before you go to your mediation, think of at least two different ways that you and the other parent can share time with your child(ren). Remember to think about how to share school vacations and holidays.
- Tell your mediator if there are issues of domestic violence. As discussed below, you have the right to separate meetings, or to bring a support person if there has been a history of violence.
- Tell your mediator if you are having a hard time focusing on your child(ren) because of your feelings toward the other parent. The mediator can assist you in dealing with these feelings or refer you to someone who can spend more time working with you outside the court.
- Tell your mediator if there are drug or alcohol issues that affect the best interest of your child(ren). Be frank with your mediator. It is important to your child(ren) that you deal with all of the issues that can affect him or her.
- Focus on what is currently working for your child(ren).
- Don't bring children to the mediation appointment. This is a time for adults to work out a plan for their children. The court, generally, does not want to involve children in creating the parenting plan.
- If you have a new partner, he or she may come to court but cannot participate in the mediation. You and your new partner should act respectfully towards the other parent.
- Calmly express your ideas about what you think your child(ren) need, and why. Realize that the other parent may see things differently. That's OK. The first step toward agreement is understanding someone else's point of view.
- When the other parent is explaining their perspective, try to understand why these things are important to her or him. Although it can be difficult not to react, remember, that understanding is not the same as agreeing. You can write down notes while you listen so that you won't forget what you want to say when it's your turn.
- You don't need to convince the mediator that you're right. The mediator is not a judge. Only a judge has the power to decide whose story is true.
- More will be accomplished if both parents behave respectfully towards each other. Abusive or threatening behavior is not acceptable.
- Remember that your parenting plan will change with the needs of your child(ren). Talk with your mediator about how you can set up a temporary plan and return to mediation to discuss how it's working later on. You can change your court date so that it follows your second mediation.

Mediation in Cases that Involve Domestic Violence

If there has been domestic violence between you and the other parent, the mediator will meet with each of you individually. You may bring a support person with you to mediation if you have been the victim of violence by the other parent. This person may provide moral and emotional support, but cannot speak in the session. The mediator may exclude a support person from a mediation session if he or she disrupts the mediation process.

What the Mediator Is NOT Allowed to Do

- The mediator cannot discuss child support, property, or spousal support issues.
- The mediator will not take sides.
- The mediator is not a judge and will not decide who is right and who is wrong.
- The mediator cannot discuss whether or not a restraining order should be issued.
- The mediator will not tell the judge what he or she thinks your parenting plan should be.

Voluntary Mediation

If you have been to mediation with a Family Court Services mediator in the past, you may be able to schedule a confidential mediation without filing additional court papers if both parents agree to attend the mediation. Call your mediator to schedule a time to meet.

Mediation Is Confidential With Some Exceptions

Mediation in San Francisco is confidential unless you are told otherwise by the court or the mediator. This means that the mediator does not report anything about your family to the court or anyone else, except for any agreements that you make. However, there are some exceptions to this rule.

What Is NOT Confidential

The mediator is required to report the following:

- if there is information that a child may be at risk for neglect or abuse the mediator is required to make a report to Child Protective Services and to let the court know that a report has been made
- if anyone threatens to hurt themselves or anyone else the mediator must take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the person threatened

The mediator may make the following suggestions to the court after meeting with you:

- that an attorney be appointed for your child(ren)
- that a custody evaluation be ordered
- that a restraining order be issued if it's necessary to protect your child(ren)

Think of strategies you can use to keep focused on your child(ren), not on the other parent.

GOING TO A COURT HEARING

If you are unable to create a parenting plan before your court date, you will be expected to attend the court hearing, as scheduled. It is very important that you attend the court hearing because the court can make orders affecting your custody and timeshare rights even if you are not present at the hearing.

Your Court Hearing

If you do not have an attorney the court will expect you to present evidence and information about what you are asking the court to order. Here are some ideas about what you can do to prepare for the hearing and how to participate at the hearing.

Do not interrupt the judge.

Prepare your ideas before you come to court.

These ideas will help you let the judge know what you want and why you want it:

- Prepare your ideas before you come to court so that you can be clear and brief about what you are asking the court to do (the court only has 20 minutes to hear from both sides)
- It can be helpful to write down your ideas before you come to court
- Bring any evidence you want the court to consider. You should bring copies of any evidence you want the judge to see, for the other parent or attorneys
- You should only present evidence that is directly related to what you are asking the judge to do
- If you are in court only about the custody or parenting plan for your child(ren) do not discuss other matters, such as child support or property issues
- Do not interrupt the judge, the other parent or any attorney
- Speak respectfully

The court will listen to each parent's requests and any proper evidence that supports those requests.

Based on what each of you say, the evidence presented, and what the judge may already know about your situation from the past, the judge may:

1. make orders about the custody and timeshare of your child(ren)
2. appoint a lawyer for your child(ren)
3. make a Tier 2 assignment. Tier 2 assignments are not confidential unless the judge says otherwise. A new mediator is generally assigned to complete the Tier 2 assignment: not your confidential mediator. You can request your confidential mediator but there are times when a new mediator will be assigned despite your request.

The court will listen to each parent's requests and any proper evidence that supports those requests.

What is a Tier 2 assignment?

Tier 2 assignments may include:

- a. the mediator will write a report for the judge after gathering specific information. The information in the report may be used by the judge to make a decision about what parenting plan would be best for your child(ren). You, or your attorney, will receive a copy of the report before your hearing date.
- b. The court may order a custody evaluation. The custody evaluator will be asked by the court to answer particular questions related to the well being of your child(ren). A mediator may be involved by providing the names of different evaluators and by conducting a mediation session after the evaluation is completed.
- c. The mediator may help set up services for supervised visits or monitored exchanges if they are ordered by the court.

what children need

Now we want to turn to what matters most: your child(ren)! There has been a lot of research about the effects of family change on children. We encourage you to read some of the books listed in our bibliography.

Some research has found that even though many children experience anxiety and depression when their parents first break up, many of those symptoms disappear within a year's time.

Unfortunately, some children can experience extreme difficulties and may develop mental health problems. The good news is that there are things that you, as a parent, can do to help your child(ren) avoid these problems.

The following are some ideas that parents can use to help their children adjust better to their new situation in life:

1. Children with an easygoing temperament and the ability to make friends, tend to do better because they have more social support. As parents, you can help your child(ren) by encouraging and helping them to learn the skills to develop a broader network of friends.
2. In addition to developing a broad network of friends, children may do better when they feel part of a larger and supportive community, such as religious, social, or recreational groups.
3. Children who feel successful generally feel better about themselves and have an easier time with change. Parents can help by giving their children praise and encouraging them to pursue activities that they enjoy and in which they can excel.

“I hated being in the middle. My parents still say bad things about each other to me and it’s been 7 years.”

—Nicole, 19

4. Continued positive involvement by both parents is particularly crucial to children when parents are no longer together. Not only are parents the most influential people in children's lives, especially at an early age, but children need to experience both parents' support so that they don't feel abandoned.

If you are the only parent involved in your child(ren)'s life, your role is that much more important. In that situation it can help your child(ren) if you can find a mentor for him or her.

5. A peaceful and civil parenting relationship makes a huge difference in the happiness and adjustment of your child(ren). The only thing worse than a child living in the middle of a family with a lot of fighting is to be in the middle of two parents who have separated and are continuing the fight, especially when it involves issues related to the child.
6. Take care of yourself so that you can be emotionally available to your child(ren)'s needs. See the section below on self care.

Parents' actions are the most important factors in a child's well being. Here is a list of things you can do, followed by a list of things you should try to avoid. Your attention to these behaviors can be crucial for your child(ren) successfully coping with this difficult time in their lives.

Your relationship with your child(ren) can be made even stronger if you can remember how they might feel instead of reacting to your own feelings about the other parent.

What you can do to help your child(ren)

- **Explain that you and their other parent love them and that both of you will always be their parents**

Your child(ren)'s world has fallen apart and they need constant reassurance that you and their other parent love them and will always be there to take care of them. Even when you think the other parent doesn't give or care enough, your child(ren) need whatever support is available from each of you.

- **Explain that the separation is an adult decision and that your child(ren) didn't cause the separation.**

Don't overburden your child(ren) with too many details but do reassure them of their importance to both of you. Explain how difficult it was for you, as parents, to make the decision to separate. Children see themselves as being at the center of the world. As a result, they think that they are somehow responsible for what is happening around them. Children may also think that they can make things happen. For example, a child might think "If I had been a better kid, maybe my parents would still love each other."

"I think they would still be together if I hadn't asked for that video game. My mom says it's not my fault but sometimes I still think it is."

—Jake, 11

- **Tell them when they will see their other parent.**

Children live very much in the "present". They need help in understanding that they will still see daddy or mommy even though things have changed. They need specific information about when they will spend time with each parent. With a specific and consistent schedule your child(ren) can relax and use their energy to focus on school and play.

- **Create and maintain a clear and reliable schedule and keep consistent routines at home**

Children need predictability, particularly when their world has changed so dramatically. Having consistency helps them feel more secure. They have just had everything they took for granted changed forever. It helps them to have a consistent routine because then they can have some sense of control and they know what to expect.

- **Keep your child(ren) in the same school, sports programs and other special things they do outside of school as much as possible.**

The more things stay the same in your child(ren)'s life during this time, the better they will feel. If everything in their lives changes at the same time they will feel very insecure, without a center, and have a very difficult time at school and at home.

- Explain that it is all right to express their ideas and feelings and to ask you questions.

Your child(ren) need to know that you can handle hearing all of their feelings, including anger, they might feel toward you or their other parent. They need to know that you and their other parent love them no matter how they might feel. Be sure that you are prepared to deal with whatever might come up. If you need help in dealing with your own feelings there are services to help you. See the resource list at the end of this handbook.

- **Speak respectfully about the other parent**

When children hear negative or nasty things about you or their other parent they may feel that those things are being said about them, too. After all, they have parts of each of you and identify with both of you. Think about how you might feel if someone speaks badly about someone you care about. Bad mouthing can lower a child's self esteem and affect their performance in many areas of life such as school and social interaction.

- **Help make the transitions between you and the other parent calm and peaceful**

Going back and forth between homes is difficult for most children. It reminds them of their parents' separation and can raise feelings of abandonment and insecurity. It is vital that the transitions between you and the other parent are calm and peaceful.

Even if you and your child(ren)'s other parent do not get along, you both need to find a way to make the exchange of your child(ren) as stress-free as possible. Don't talk about any adult issues, especially if there's a possibility of conflict, during the exchange. Avoid any issues that could lead to disagreement. If you have to make a choice between silence or angry confrontation, it's better for your child(ren) if the exchanges are silent.

The more things stay the same in your child(ren)'s life during this time, the better they will feel.

- **Support your child(ren)'s relationship with their other parent.**

Children need to be able to have a loving and supportive relationship with both of their parents. Each of you offers your child(ren) different things. These differences can provide your child(ren) with more than either parent can give alone. It also teaches your child(ren) that people have different ideas, values and ways of doing things and that there is no "right" way to be in the world.

Children whose parents discourage them from having a relationship with their other parent (whether the discouragement is overt or unconscious) can grow up very confused and bitter. The irony is that as they become more independent, they often feel angry and distrusting of the parent who kept them away from their other parent.

- **Manage your own feelings about the other parent**

One of the biggest challenges in creating a parenting plan can be managing your own feelings about the other parent so that you can focus on your child(ren)'s needs. This can be one of the hardest things you have to do as a parent how can you support your child(ren)'s relationship with their other parent when that other parent may have hurt or betrayed you. . . . when you feel no trust and have strong negative feelings about him or her? It's hard and yet your child(ren) need you to find a way to do it.

"When my mom gets mad at me, she always says I'm just like my dad. Why is it bad to be like him?"

—John, 6

Don't ask your child(ren) to:

- **carry messages between you and their other parent**

If you can't communicate directly try using email, a daily log, or notes passed during the exchanges directly between the parents (not through the child(ren)).

- **report to you about their other parent's life**
Children can feel put in the middle and that they are betraying one of their parents if they are asked questions about the other parent. It can make them feel guilty that they must choose to be loyal to either you or their other parent and in the long run they may learn to be careful and calculating about what they say to both of you.
- **choose between you and their other parent**
Children generally love both of their parents and feel very badly that their parents are not getting along. When they are put in situations where they must choose to be loyal to you or their other parent they are put in tremendous conflict. They feel bad no matter what they do because being "loyal" to one parent means that they are "disloyal" to the other.
- **listen to complaints about their other parent, including who's a better parent or who loves them more**
Children will tell each of you what you want to hear because they want to please both of you. This can lead to more conflict between parents and also means that your child(ren) will learn to lie and to lose sight of what their own truth is. When children get older they will form their own independent opinions about each of their parents.

*"I was always the messenger.
It tore me apart that they
couldn't even talk to each other.
I was always in the middle."*

—Barb, 18

- **listen to information related to adult issues, including court-related or financial issues**
Children may already feel responsible for their parents' problems with one another. Hearing about the details of the court case and financial issues only makes children feel more responsible to fix the situation. They can also feel immense stress and fear about economic hardship and upcoming court decisions.
- **keep secrets from their other parent**
Asking your child(ren) to keep secrets from their other parent puts them in the position of acting as a conspirator with you and betraying their other parent. For all of the reasons mentioned above, forcing children to align themselves with one parent against the other can be very damaging to their emotional and social well-being.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE

Children exposed to violence in their own home have many more problems to overcome than other children. Home is supposed to be a place where children can relax and feel safe. If their home becomes a place of violence, children can experience a lot of anxiety, despair and long-term emotional trauma. Home should be a safe haven. When it is not, children will look for safety elsewhere.

What Do We Mean by the Word “Violence”?

It is important to recognize that there are many types of violence, all of which are damaging to children and adults. They include everything from shoving, slapping, kicking and pushing, hitting with objects or hands, threatening to hurt someone or something important to them, threatening to use a weapon, using a weapon and many other actions that can hurt or scare someone else.

Violence isn't just physical, however. It also includes isolating people, withholding money, stalking, making unwanted sexual advances and many other coercive behaviors. Violence can also be verbal. Verbal violence includes saying negative, derogatory, intimidating, humiliating or threatening things. Verbal violence, which some people consider not so serious, can leave very damaging lifetime scars for both children and adults.

Children are often so anxious and focused on the violence that they can't concentrate.

The Impact of Violence on Children

Sometimes parents think that their children are unaware of the violence or conflicts at home because the children are not in the same room where it happens. However, most children are very aware of what's going on because they can hear or sense the violence.

How your child(ren) respond to family violence will depend on a number of things, such as their age, temperament, relationship to the people involved, and whether or not they receive immediate help in dealing with their feelings about what happened.

Here are some specific ways in which children can be affected by family violence:

1. Children can feel emotionally abandoned

During a domestic violence incident neither you nor your child(ren)'s other parent is emotionally available to respond to your child(ren)'s fear because you are both focused on the conflict. As a result, your child(ren) may learn not to trust adults and to put themselves in dangerous situations. Children learn that the world is not a safe place, even in their homes, and that their parents cannot provide them with protection or ensure their safety.

2. Children living in constant fear can become very anxious and distrusting of the world

Children may feel powerless and insecure because they cannot stop the violence. They also cannot predict when there will be violence and, as a result, can feel afraid even when things are peaceful. They also don't know if you or their other parent will survive the violence or be taken away by the police. As a result, they may be afraid that they'll be left alone.

“Mom and dad were screaming at each other. I was really afraid. I pretended to be asleep so that they wouldn’t know that I heard.”

—Shane, 8

3. Violence can affect your child(ren)’s brain development

Repeated exposure to violence can literally exhaust your child(ren)’s central nervous system and can negatively impact proper brain development. (See our bibliography at the back of this handbook). Even when there is no brain damage, children are often so anxious and focused on the violence that they can’t concentrate, which directly affects their school performance.

4. Children learn that violence toward others is acceptable and normal

When children are repeatedly exposed to violence they come to think of it as normal and acceptable behavior. They learn to accept violence as part of an intimate relationship. Some children become abusive themselves and some children learn to accept being abused by others, potentially putting them in very dangerous situations.

Children growing up in violent homes generally don’t learn how to handle conflict in non-violent ways. They grow up without vital skills for functioning well in school, the work place and in relationships with others.

5. Violence can lower children’s self esteem

Children may feel that it’s their responsibility to protect their parents from getting hurt. They can feel hopeless and guilty when they can’t help. This can lead to depression and lowered self-esteem. Their sense of self worth is also diminished when their own needs for comfort during the violence is ignored by their parents. They can feel that they are not worthy of having their feelings tended to.

6. Children can be physically hurt

Children are often very protective of their parents. They may try to get in the middle of a physical fight to break it up and end up getting hurt themselves.

The good news is that you can take steps to make things better. If your child(ren) have experienced violence it is imperative that they receive therapeutic support. Organizations that can help you and your children are listed in the back of this handbook.

If you have been involved in a violent relationship there are programs that can help you find another, less stressful, way to manage your adult relationships. Counseling is an important option to consider. See the list of services at the back of this handbook and ask your mediator.

Children may feel that it’s their responsibility to protect their parents from getting hurt. They can feel hopeless and guilty when they can’t help.

How Are your Children Doing?

One of the ways that you can measure how your child(ren) are doing is to be aware of whether or not their behaviors and feelings fit their developmental stage.

While children are all different, they go through similar stages of development that can be recognized. Problems can come up when children are expected to understand or to do things that they are not capable of doing because of their age. When a child can't perform the expected task, the child's self esteem can be greatly diminished.

Likewise, a parent can feel frustrated and angry that the child is not following his or her direction and can believe that the child is just being stubborn when, in fact, the child is not capable of following the instructions.

For those of you who have a child, or children, with special needs, whether they be physical or otherwise, such as Attention Deficit Disorder, cognitive deficits or severe emotional issues, the following developmental stages do not apply.

You should consult, instead, with your child(ren)'s physician or therapist so that you can have a clear understanding of what your child is capable, and not capable, of doing. Often, parents of these special children can expect too little or too much of them. Be sure to get specific information on how you can help them reach their full potential with high self esteem.

Problems can come up when children are expected to understand or to do things that they are not capable of doing because of their age or disability.

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND NEEDS

The following guideline is intended to give you information on what can generally be expected of children at certain ages. It is meant to help inform your thinking about what your child(ren) may need at different ages and what signs you might look for that could indicate that your child(ren) are having a difficult time.

From Birth to 18 months

Developmental Tasks:

- Receiving attention and protection
- Allowing physical closeness to, and nurturing by, primary caretakers
- Beginning to adjust to scheduled feedings and sleep time

Signs of Possible Stress:

Any significant change in behavior, such as:

- Sleeping much longer or much shorter; difficulty in getting to sleep
- Difficulty in following feeding schedule that was already in place
- Infant is more clingy than usual
- Infant is non-responsive or pulls away from physical contact
- Infant cries more than usual
- Difficulty learning developmentally appropriate tasks

Possible Reasons for Stress:

- Loss of familiar environment and familiar caretakers
- Predictability and structure lost
- Infants don't understand that parent who is no longer "around" will come back

Ideas to Consider in Developing a Parenting Plan for this Age Group:

- Infants do well when they have a routine. Coordinate their transitions between parents in a way that does not interfere with their normal sleeping and eating times. Try to maintain similar routines in both households
- Infants have very short attention spans. Consider frequent and short visits. Yet consider that too many transitions may be difficult for an infant to manage
- Children do better in a calm and soothing atmosphere
- Infants thrive with physical affection and nurturing, including quiet talking and other mental stimulation
- It helps all children to have familiar things around them, such as toys and their security animal or blanket

Infants do well when they have a consistent routine.

18 Months to 3 Years

Developmental Tasks:

- Becoming more independent
- Learning about their ability to maneuver in the world
- Learning the beginnings of abstract thought and about relationships

Possible Signs of Stress:

Any significant change in behavior, such as:

- Doing things they did at a younger age, for example, a child who has many accidents even though she or he has been toilet trained for some time (regressive behavior)
- Becoming very clingy
- Crying or “acting out” when a parent leaves the room
- More quiet, angry or sad than is usual for them
- Pulling away from physical nurturing

Ideas to Consider in Developing a Parenting Plan for this Age Group:

- Children need routine and predictability
- Children may need to feel reassured while in your care by having contact with the other parent
- Children need to be able to explore in a safe environment. Baby proofing each home is important
- Children need firm and consistent limits, particularly related to safety issues
- Children need a lot of attentive monitoring. Verbal praise and encouragement for the steps they are taking in mastering their bodies and their environment boost their self esteem
- Children need to know that both parents can take care of them physically and emotionally.

3 to 6 years

Developmental Tasks:

- Learning how to control impulses
- Learning routines and consequences of behavior
- Learning how to get along with peers
- “Trying On” adult behaviors
- Learning to express their feelings in words

Possible Signs of Stress:

- Withdrawal and sadness
- Lack of curiosity
- Eating or sleeping disturbance
- Regression
- Unable to be consoled
- Too “good” or “acting out”
- Extreme neediness

Ideas to Consider in Developing a Parenting Plan for this Age Group:

- Children need to be reassured that both parents are available to them
- Extended separation from either parent can be difficult
- A schedule that maintains consistency and meets your child’s scheduled activities
- Ensuring time for your child(ren) to be with other children of their same age

Extended separation from either parent can be difficult for young children.

“When my dad says those bad words about my mommy, my stomach hurts.”

—Annie, 7

6 to 10 Years

Developmental Tasks:

- Learning impulse control
- Developing skills to stay focused
- Developing logical thought and understanding the concept of consequences
- Developing a sense of fairness and the ability to show empathy
- Learning how to work independently and with others

Possible Signs of Stress:

- School problems
- Tantrums, aggression or other disruptive behavior
- Increased anxiety or restlessness (inability to concentrate)
- Intense emotions of anger, sadness, grief
- Withdrawal or emotional “flatness”
- Extreme mood swings
- Sleep disturbance, including nightmares
- Physical complaints with no medical basis

Ideas to Consider in Developing a Parenting Plan for this Age Group

- Children need time to spend with both parents that allows each parent to be involved in school-related activities, meals and play time
- Children need to spend time in their own activities, like sports or art classes
- Children need to be listened to, to have their feelings heard, and to be given explanations, appropriate to their age and maturity level, about what they can expect from their parents
- Children need to be able to love both of their parents and should not hear negative things about their other parent or be used by their parents as spies or messengers
- Support of each parent for the other parent’s authority

Pre-Adolescence; 10 to 13 years

Developmental Tasks:

- To gain a sense of themselves and begin to become more independent with firm limits in place
- To learn how to manage relationships
- To develop true abstract thinking
- Truly understanding cause and effect
- Mastering impulse control

Possible Signs of Stress (similar to 6 – 10 years)

- School problems, including attendance, interactions with teachers and performance
- Tantrums, aggression, other anti-social behavior
- Increased anxiety or restlessness (inability to concentrate)
- Intense emotions of anger, sadness, grief
- Withdrawal or lack of interest
- Change in eating habits
- Substance or alcohol abuse

Ideas to Consider in Developing a Parenting Plan for this Age Group

- Children need to spend time with their friends and to participate in activities more independently
- Children need time to spend with both parents that allows each parent to be involved in school-related activities, meals and play time
- Children need to spend time in their own activities, like sports or art classes
- Children need to be listened to, to have their feelings heard, and to be given explanations, appropriate to their age and maturity level, about what they can expect from their parents
- Good communication between parents becomes even more important as children become more independent
- Support of each parent for the other parent's authority

“My mom always tells me that I don’t have to listen to my dad. My dad tells me that I don’t have to listen to my mom. At first I thought it was cool. Now I get in trouble all the time.”

—Marcus, 13

Teenagers: 13 to 18 years

Developmental Tasks:

- Develop self motivation
- Develop independence from parents
- Develop own sense of values
- Develop sexual identity
- Establish goals and formulate plan for reaching them

Possible Signs of Stress: Same as for Pre-Adolescents

Ideas to Consider in Developing a Parenting Plan for this Age Group

- Adequate, but flexible, control by parents that is consistent between households
- Support of each parent for the other parent's authority
- Acknowledgment of your child's maturity and need to make independent choices as long as they're safe
- Clear limits that are consistent with your child's maturity
- Allowing children to make their own mistakes as long as safety is not jeopardized
- Attention to any needs for school performance, social issues, counseling needs, or any other support your child may need

“I can do whatever I want. I just tell my mom that I’m at my dad’s. And I tell my dad that I’m at my mom’s. They don’t talk to each other.”

—Jessica, 15

Creating a Parenting Plan

The most important goal of mediation will be to create a parenting plan that serves as a guide for co-parenting into the future.

Parenting plans are meant to meet the specific needs of your child(ren) based on their age, psychological development, social and educational concerns and individual temperament. Because each child is different no two plans are exactly the same. Parenting plans provide each parent and child with a clear understanding of what is expected on a day to day basis, as well as during holidays and vacation times.

Cooperation between you and the other parent is generally more important to how well your child(ren) do than the specifics of your parenting plan. When parents can cooperate with each other they can be more flexible as circumstances change, making it easier to take care of their child(ren)'s changing needs. Also, it is very beneficial to children when they see their parents cooperate with each other in areas such as education, health and special activities.

Cooperation between you and the other parent is generally more important to how well your child(ren) do than the specifics of your parenting plan.

Finally, when making your parenting plan remember that what is most important to your child(ren)'s well-being and mental health is not the exact time that is spent with each parent. Rather, it is the quality of the relationship with each parent, the level of cooperation and peace between the parents, and the attention given to the child(ren)'s needs by each parent that makes for the best possible outcome. Research shows that children do well when they have an emotionally healthy relationship with both parents and their parents work well with each other.

Parenting plans are meant to provide your child(ren) with a safe and stable way to have consistent, positive contact with you and their other parent.

What is Custody and Timeshare?

A parenting plan has two different components: custody and timeshare

1. What is Custody?

There are two separate kinds of custody rights: legal custody and physical custody

A. Legal Custody is about who has the right and responsibility to make decisions about your child(ren)'s medical, educational, religious and other major life issues.

(1) Sole Legal custody means that one parent has the right and the responsibility to make all of the major decisions for your child(ren).

(2) Joint Legal custody means that you and your child(ren)'s other parent each have the right and the responsibility to make major decisions for your child(ren). You can also choose to specify which of you will make particular decisions. For example, you might have the right to make all educational decisions and your child(ren)'s other parent might have the right to make all religious decisions. Good communication between you and the other parent is important if you are to share joint legal custody.

B. Physical Custody is a term that has to do with the relative amount of time your child(ren) spend with you and with his or her other parent.

(1) Sole Physical custody with you or the other parent means that your child(ren) live most of the time with that parent and has a schedule of time that he or she is with the other parent.

(2) Joint Physical custody means that your child(ren) spend a lot of time with you and their other parent. You can have a joint physical custody order even if your child(ren) are not spending an equal amount of time with each of you.

2. What is Timeshare?

A timeshare plan outlines when your child(ren) are with you and when they are with their other parent.

It is important that this timeshare be done with the greatest sensitivity to your child(ren)'s needs and not to the needs and the desires of the adults.

Timeshares will change over time as children go through different developmental stages.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING YOUR PARENTING PLAN

Parenting plans are meant to provide your child(ren) with a safe and stable way to have consistent, positive contact with you and their other parent. Here are some practical questions to ask yourself when making this plan:

General Questions about how you see your children

- What common goals do you and the other parent have for your child(ren)?
- What values do you both share as parents?
- What are your child(ren)'s special abilities?
- How are they doing in school?
- How do they handle change?
- Are there common household rules you wish to share for raising your child(ren) no matter what custody you decide to have?

Questions about schedules

- What have your child(ren)'s schedules been in the past?
- Do they have a hard time going back and forth between you and their other parent?
- If they are very young, how can they be helped to handle an overnight away from where they have usually slept?
- Would it be easier on your child(ren) to take graduated steps towards overnight visits?
- Are there some specific things you can do to make the adjustment easier?
- Does the schedule you suggest give your child(ren) adequate rest?
- What kind of activities do your child(ren) participate in and how can you find ways to support them continuing?

“Holidays were always the worst. My parents would fight about who I’d be with. When I got older, I’d pick who I’d be with by who was feeling the loneliest.”

—Doug, 15

- What is each parent’s schedule?
- Whose schedule is more flexible?
- Who is available to help with homework?
- What are the family traditions you wish to maintain for your child(ren) ?
- How flexible can you be with the schedule?
- Think about how you want to handle the situation if the other parent, or you, are running late for a pick up or drop off

Be sure to include holidays in your parenting plan

It’s important that your parenting plan include where your child(ren) will spend holidays and vacation times. Family traditions make for lasting memories and a true sense of belonging. Children should be able to spend holidays and vacation time with each parent, as may be appropriate. It’s also a great opportunity for children to spend time with their extended families.

Use the holiday worksheets at the end of this handbook to help you organize your ideas about holiday and vacation time. There is no right way to share holidays. If you get stuck, however, consider alternating holidays. For example, Thanksgiving with one parent and Christmas with the other. The following year switch which holiday is spent with each parent.

Questions about decision making

- How is the communication between you and the other parent about matters relating to your child(ren) (Not about personal issues between you)?
- How would you like to share responsibilities such as taking the child(ren) to the doctor, attending parent-teacher conferences, or taking your child(ren) to their various activities?
- If one parent is going to make the decisions, such as religion, education, health and extracurricular activities what will be the role of the other parent?
 - Will the other parent be consulted?
 - What if after consulting with the other parent, there is no agreement?
 - How will the other parent be informed about decisions in a timely fashion?

Questions about handling future disagreements

- How will you resolve future disagreements?
- Is there somebody who can help you talk things out before taking matters to court?

Parenting plans for specific types of situations

1. Creating a plan when there has been a history of violence

If you and the other parent have a relationship that includes either physical or emotional conflict, you should put together your parenting plan in a way that protects you and your child(ren).

In general, parents who have had conflict with each other should consider exchanging their child(ren) with the help of a neutral person, such as a mutually agreed upon friend or family member.

There are also professional services to help you exchange your child(ren) safely, such as the Rally Program in San Francisco.

Even in those cases where there has been a history of violence in the family, children generally benefit from having a relationship with both parents as long as they are physically and emotionally safe. This can be a challenge for the parent who has been a victim of violence and who may be feeling anger, fear and sadness. Again, one of the most important and difficult tasks for any parent is to separate their own feelings from what their child(ren) might need.

Violent incidents are very hard on children as well. They may show signs of fear and stress and may say that they don't want to see the violent parent. This will be another challenge to the parent who was a victim of violence. It would be easy to agree with your child(ren)'s request because it matches your own feelings.

However it's important to remember that your child(ren) have very complicated and conflicted emotions. We have all experienced having more than one feeling at the same time

about another person. Children, even more than adults, need help in sorting out these contradictory feelings, particularly when there has been violence in the past.

There is no bigger task required of a victimized parent than to have to help a child manage these feelings. Added to that challenge is the difficulty involved in supporting a safe relationship between the child and a parent who has been abusive in the past.

In order to help heal damaged relationships, counseling services are critical. Counseling can help both parents and children express and manage their feelings. There are services that specifically work with families who have experienced violence. (See the back of this handbook for more information.)

2. Creating a plan when there has been a lot of conflict and disagreements

If you and the other parent have a difficult time communicating without fighting, you should consider how you are going to minimize your contact with each other. It is important that necessary parenting communication be done out of earshot of your child(ren) or be done indirectly through email, FAX or a neutral third party.

If communication is bound to lead to arguments or to non-productive discussion then some parents choose to parent without much direct communication, at least, on a temporary basis. They approach their co-parenting by simply respecting the other parent's parenting time and parenting decisions without interference unless the child is being harmed. Even though you may not agree with what the other parent does, it is more important that your child(ren) have peace than for the two of you to agree on all decisions.

Yet another challenge in co-parenting is accepting that you cannot control your child(ren)'s other parent any more than he or she can control you.

3. Creating a plan when children have not seen a parent in a long time (or don't know the other parent)

In those situations where a parent has been absent from a child's life for a long time, there are professional services that help children and parents find a comfortable way to begin, or re-establish, their relationship with each other. Depending on the child's age, there are different ways to introduce, or reintroduce, children and their parents.

- If it is appropriate, your presence at the visit will help your child(ren) feel comfortable while getting reacquainted with their other parent.
- The Rally program in San Francisco offers "facilitated visits". The facilitator guides parents who have not seen their child(ren) in a long time with ideas about what to say and how to relate to their child, including information about their developmental needs.
- If your child(ren)'s therapist is unable to assist directly, he or she can often refer you to counselors who can facilitate visits.

4. Creating a parenting plan when a child's safety is a concern

If one parent is concerned for the safety of a child while in the care of the other parent due to that parent's lack of parenting skills or a lack of appropriate parenting due to substance abuse or mental health problems, parents can set up supervised visits for a limited period of time. After a period of supervised visits parents can return to mediation to discuss what changes might be made to the parenting plan.

Supervision can be done by anyone that you and your child(ren)'s other parent agree on. However, you should consider:

- Can the person doing the supervision adequately control, or set boundaries for, the supervised parent if necessary?
- Can the person doing the supervision remain neutral?
- If you are the parent being supervised, will the person providing supervision be able to properly report back to the court about how you're doing at the visits?

There are professional visitation centers, like the Rally program in San Francisco, that can provide a place for visits to be supervised. The visit supervisors are highly trained professionals who only report what they see or hear. They will provide reports to the court. This can be helpful to both parents by providing a neutral, professionally trained observer. The parents, and the court, will have information to help them determine if the visits should be changed to unsupervised time.

Parenting plans that include supervised visits can also include specific things the supervised parent can do in order to have the visits changed to unsupervised, such as participation in a substance abuse program, drug testing or anger management class.

Taking Care Of Yourself

You and your child(ren) deserve to live without anger, bitterness, and sadness.

If you're reading this handbook, you are more than likely in a dispute with your child(ren)'s other parent. This can be very stressful. This section addresses:

1. issues related to loss and grieving,
2. why it's important to your child(ren) (not to mention, to you) that you find some tools for taking care of yourself, and
3. some ideas about how you can relieve some of the stress that naturally follows when parents who share children in common are not a couple.

1. Stress, Loss and Grieving

There are countless stresses in our lives. Losing a significant person in our lives, whether to death or separation, is one of the most stressful situations we encounter.

There is loss caused by the ending of a relationship that you wanted to continue. Even when it is a relief that the relationship has ended, there is still the loss of the hope that things could have worked out in the way you would have liked: that you would be loved, protected and happy.

In addition to the feelings of loss, there can also be tremendous stress. It can be caused by the mere fact that you are suddenly a single parent, or are having to find a way to co-parent with your ex, when you'd rather not have to deal with her or him at all.

Separation often also causes financial strain and sometimes social support can be lost when mutual friends or family "choose sides".

There is a grief process that accompanies significant change and loss. This process includes the same emotional journey that is involved when someone we love passes away. As overwhelming as these feelings can be at times, you should remind yourself that they are normal. With time and support, you can get through this.

If, however, you find yourself unable to function or to move on with your life, you should consider finding some help to get "unstuck".

You and your child(ren) deserve to live without anger, bitterness, and sadness.

The ending of the relationship with your child(ren)'s other parent is an opportunity to learn from the past. It's also an opportunity to change your relationship with the other parent for your child(ren)'s sake, as well as for your own.

If you focus on how to create a new life for you and your child(ren) you can have a more peaceful life. Trying to get back at the other parent for whatever wrongs he or she may have committed only keeps you locked into the past and in continuous drama.

One of you needs to be the "bigger" person in order to protect your child(ren) from continuing conflict.

When parents are feeling stressed or out of control, children may feel the tension and imitate their parents' reaction to the stress.

2. Children benefit when their parents are doing well

As we've all experienced, children imitate their parents. They pay very close attention to everything their parents do. Children are very aware of their parents' moods and feelings. When parents are feeling stressed or out of control, children feel the tension and imitate their parents' reaction to the stress.

When you and your child(ren)'s other parent's relationship has ended, it can be very difficult for you. It is even harder on the children because they do not understand all of the adult issues that are involved in the decision to move apart.

As discussed earlier, children often feel very frightened, abandoned, and without direction when their parents are not together, especially if their parents are fighting with each other. They have very little control over their lives and may feel that they are responsible for your feelings of sadness or anger.

Children count on the adults they love to let them know that everything will be OK, especially when things have changed or are difficult. If you are able to provide a feeling of security and calm, your child(ren) will have a much easier time. They will be less likely to act out which, in turn, will help your stress level as well. Finding a way to maintain a sense of peace, while still dealing with your own feelings, is not necessarily so easy, but it can be done!

Focus your energy on yourself and your child(ren); not on your child(ren)'s other parent.

3. Ideas for taking care of yourself

Taking care of yourself physically

During very stressful times it can be very easy to forget to eat or to not feel like eating. Yet, without healthy, nurturing food, you can actually aggravate the stress that you feel. Some people, under stress, do the opposite: they tend to overeat and drink. Be careful about eating too much fattening food or drinking alcohol in excess. Overeating and drinking can cause you to feel more depressed and can drain your energy.

Exercise can help you feel better. There have been many studies that demonstrate the connection between exercise and feeling better emotionally. Even walking for 10 to 20 minutes a day can help take the “edge” off. If you’re feeling angry, hitting a ball, boxing or doing exercise with more physical exertion can help release some of that energy.

Breathing is another very powerful tool for reducing stress. It may sound a little strange at first, but, research shows that most of us do not breathe deeply and we deprive our bodies of oxygen. If you breathe deeply and consciously, especially when you’re feeling overwhelmed, it can help to calm you down.

Breathing technique:

Sit somewhere where you feel comfortable and safe. Close your eyes. Breathe in slowly and deeply and try to bring the breath in through your abdomen. Let the air out slowly, through your abdomen. Do this three times. Repeat this three more times while thinking about someone you love. After the last breath open your eyes slowly.

When you feel stress, consciously breathe deeply and slowly. It can help to calm you down.

Taking care of yourself socially

Some people tend to isolate themselves when they have a lot of stress. If you have this tendency, you should pay special attention to making sure that you socialize with other people. Even if it’s difficult to talk about your feelings, it is important that you spend time with people you enjoy and trust. Just going out for a walk or to a movie can help lift some of the stress by distracting you for a short time. If you can share how you’re feeling, that will be even more helpful to you.

Think about any personal goals you might have put aside. Consider taking classes, learning new skills, or developing a plan for work advancement.

It’s important to your child(ren) that you take care of yourself.

Taking care of yourself spiritually

For some people, maintaining or developing a spiritual practice can be very helpful in dealing with stress. No matter what your beliefs, spirituality can be a source of strength in overcoming the challenges you're facing and help you keep things in perspective.

Taking care of yourself emotionally

There can be a lot of suffering when a relationship ends. People can experience tremendous stress and emotional upheaval. Although there is no way around having to go through this stressful process you can take steps to make it easier for you and your child(ren).

You deserve to have peace in your life. Keep in mind that what has happened to you is what most people experience at some time in their life.

The vital question is how you can find a way to stop having your life revolve around the loss you have experienced and, instead, have it revolve around you and what's fulfilling for you. It's not always so easy to let go of the anger and sadness that accompanies grief.

But if we allow our lives to stay centered on how unfair we have been treated we can imprison ourselves in a life that is no longer about us: instead, our life can become filled with anger, bitterness and sadness, with little room for love, peace and happiness.

You can create a new life that is positive and stress-free for your child(ren) and yourself by accepting what you can change and what you cannot.

Some ways you can refocus your energy away from your loss and toward feeling better are:

- Focus your energy on yourself and your child(ren) not on your child(ren)'s other parent
- Spend time with people who care about you and on whom you can rely
- Find help for dealing with difficult feelings such as depression and anxiety that are common in the middle of family change. They are important to deal with because they can contribute to making bad decisions. Sometimes professional assistance can help you feel better more quickly
- Look for a support group where you can talk with other people who are going through a similar situation as you
- Give yourself a break. Allow yourself permission to feel your emotions.
- Pamper yourself!
- Breathe!

Although you can never control how other people behave you can, at least, control how you react to whatever is thrown your way. Even though it can be a significant challenge to do so, you can create a new life that is positive and stress-free for your child(ren) and yourself by accepting what you can change and what you cannot.

The court can provide you with referrals to help you through this process and we encourage you to take advantage of our staff's knowledge.

Directions to the Unified Family Court

400 McAllister Street, 4th Floor (at Polk)

From BART/MUNI Metro:

Exit the Civic Center station on the corner of Market and Hyde Streets, walk two blocks north on Hyde to McAllister, then turn left and walk two blocks west. The building entrance is at the corner of McAllister and Polk Streets. OR exit the Civic Center Station at Grove Street behind the Main Library and turn left, walking one block west to Larkin Street, then turn right and walk two blocks north to McAllister, then turn left and walk one block west.

Bus Lines

5, 7, 9, 21, 45 and 47 also take you close to the Civic Center area.

Parking

No parking is available in the building. Directly across the street from the building is the Civic Center Plaza Garage at 355 McAllister Street. Other public lots and limited metered street parking are available in the Civic Center area.

Community Resources

This list of community resources includes only some of the many services available to Bay Area families.

The organizations below are put into categories that they are most known for, but many of them offer a wide variety of services. They are located in San Francisco unless otherwise indicated.

Please feel free to ask your mediator for referrals to services that you think your children and family could benefit from.

Parenting Classes and Education

Infant Parent Program

(415) 206-5270

SF General Hospital

2550 23rd St., Building 9, #130

A mental health program for children under 3 years and their parents when concerns exist about the child-parent relationship or the child's emotional functioning. Parents and children seen together, usually in the family's home.

Kids' Turn

(415) 437-0700

1242 Market Street, 2nd Floor

Programs for families in transition. Classes for parents and children related to how to cope with parents' separation. Children attend their own group and learn that they are not the only ones feeling loss and grief: gives children a place to express their feelings and ways to cope with their stress. Assists parents in understanding how their children think about these changes and how to help them. Classes also address how violence affects children. Offered in Spanish and some Asian languages. Call for locations and class schedules.

Good Samaritan

(415) 401-4247

1294 Potrero Avenue

A full family resource center for immigrant families; primarily for Spanish speakers. Parenting and support groups for parents and children. Kids Turn programs are conducted in Spanish. After school programs for teens, English and computer classes.

Visitation Services

Bay Area Children First

(415) 929-2344, 751-1086

999 Sutter Street

Provides supervised and facilitated visits between parents and children. It also provides parenting and anger management classes, as well as classes on understanding domestic violence. Sliding scale available for services.

Rally Project

(415) 353-6595

St. Francis Hospital

900 Hyde Street

Provides services related to parents' visits with their children. Rally provides a safe place to exchange children, as well as professionally supervised visits. Rally also provides visits for parents who have not seen their children for some time to help parents and children get to know each other again. Sliding scale fee.

Legal Services

Asian Pacific Island Legal Outreach

(415) 567-6255

1188 Franklin Street

Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach (formerly Nihonmachi Legal Outreach), is a community-based, social justice organization serving the Asian and Pacific Islander communities of the Greater Bay Area. They provide legal, social, and educational services in more than a dozen languages and dialects including Cantonese, Chiu-Chow, Hindi, Ilocano, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Mandarin, Spanish, Tagalog, Taiwanese, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

Bay Area Legal Aid

(415) 354-6360

50 Fell Street

(Alameda 510-250-5270)

www.baylegal.org

Offers free legal services in the priority areas of housing, domestic violence, public benefits and health access. Full legal representation is limited to eligible clients who live in the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, Santa Clara, San Francisco, and San Mateo.

CROC (Cooperative Restraining Order Clinic)

(415) 864-4722

Assists women seeking restraining orders. CROC will help fill out paperwork, get papers filed, and accompany client to court.

La Raza Community Resource Center

(415) 863-0764

474 Valencia Street

Provides services including family support groups, educational groups (English, literacy and others), immigration assistance, food distribution and referrals to other agencies for job placement and training, health services, legal advice and translating services.

Legal Services for Children

(415) 863-3762

1254 Market Street, 3rd floor

www.lsc-sf.org

Provides free legal and social work services to children and youth in order to stabilize their lives and help them realize their full potential.

SF Bar Association

(415) 989-1616

(415) California Street

www.sfbar.org

Provides a free or low cost lawyer referral and information service.

Counseling Services

Access Institute

(415) 861-5449

110 Gough Street

Individual counseling for children, teens and adults, family therapy, couple therapy, group sessions, assessments, and other therapeutic services. Counseling services offered on a sliding scale.

Asian Family Institute

(415) 668 5998

4020 Baolboa Street

Provides counseling services.

Bayview Hunters Point Foundation

(415) 822-7500

5815 Third Street

Provides outpatient methadone maintenance, outpatient 21-day detoxification program, substance abuse programs, acupuncture, individual, family, and group counseling, mental health services, school-based health services, and a youth services program that includes supervised, structured, educational and recreational activities on weekdays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Center for Special Problems

(415) 292-1500

1700 Jackson Street

The Center for Special problems is an adult outpatient clinic that is focused on working with mental health issues related to violent impulses, trauma, gender identity or HIV/AIDS disease. Individual and group counseling, case management, and psychiatric medication services are provided.(sliding scale fees, Medi-Cal, Medi-Care) (Spanish, English, Cantonese)

Community Mental Health Clinics

There are mental health clinics throughout San Francisco that charge according to income. Each clinic has therapists that can provide counseling for individuals or families. Here is a list of some of the clinics:

Mission Mental Health Team

Mission and 24th Streets 401-2700

South of Market Outpatient Services

760 Harrison Street 836-1700

Sunset Mental Health Services

1990 41st Ave. 753-7400

Team II Outpatient Services

298 Monterey Blvd 337-4795

Chinatown Child Development

720 Sacramento St 392-4453

Mission Family Center

759 So. Van Ness Ave 695-6955

Southeast Family and Child Therapy

4527 Mission St 337-4800

And 100 Blanken 330-5740

HELPLINK**(415) 808-HELP**

An information and referral line that provides referrals aimed to assist individuals and families in San Francisco, San Mateo, Contra Costa, Solano and Napa counties (for Alameda county referrals call Eden at (510) 537-2552). Assists with a variety of needs such as food, shelter, clothing, legal assistance, therapy/counseling, and housing/rental assistance.

Instituto Familiar de la Raza**(415) 647-4141****2919 Mission Street**

Provides outpatient counseling services for families, individuals, couples and groups. Also provides psychological evaluation and treatment, medication, information and referral and home visits.

Jewish Family and Children's Services**(415) 359-2454****1710 Scott Street**

Individual, couple and family counseling, parenting classes. Serves all groups, non-sectarian. (Sliding scale fees, Medi-Cal and some private insurance).

Korean Center Inc**1362 Post Street****(415) 441-1881**

Provides counseling services.

New Leaf**(415) 626-7000****1390 Market Street****www.newleafservices.org**

A nonprofit multi-purpose counseling center for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities of San Francisco and the surrounding Bay Area.

RAMS**(415) 668 5955****3626 Balboa Street**

Provides individual and family counseling, as well as many family services, particularly for the Asian community.

TALKLINE**(415) 441-KIDS****1757 Waller Street**

This is a 24-hour, 7 day a week support line for parents with children under age 18. Parents can call this number to discuss any concern or issue. Parents can meet with a staff member during the drop-in crisis times, Monday - Thursday between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. They also have an attached playroom and provide childcare services so parents can have a break from their child(ren), enjoy a pastry/coffee, and receive support from staff persons. Talkline also provides case management services, individual therapy, and children's therapy. There are also various support groups such as groups for single parents, parents of children under 5 years old, parents of children over age 5, and Alcoholics Anonymous groups.

Counseling Services Specifically Related to Violence

Asian Perinatal

(415) 616-9797

730 Commercial Street

Asian Perinatal Advocates' mission is to promote healthy Asian/Pacific Islander children and families by providing family in-home support services to prevent child abuse and domestic violence.

638 Clay Street

SF (415) 617-0061

Counseling and Network Center provides in-home services to families with children under 12, as well as counseling for parents and children. Parenting classes also available.

Asian Women's Shelter

SF (415) 751-7110

AWS- Asian Women's Shelter is a comprehensive shelter program in San Francisco that provides safety, food, shelter, advocacy, and other resources to assist women in rebuilding violence-free lives for themselves and their children.

Cameron House

920 Sacramento Street

(415) 781-0401

Provides counseling for parents and children, co-parenting and couples counseling, particularly for families who have experienced domestic violence. Also provides tutoring and after school programs depending on age of child. Provides services in a number of Asian and Southeast Asian languages.

Child Trauma Project

1001 Potrero Street, Building 20

San Francisco General Hospital

(415) 206-5979

This service provides assessment and treatment for parents and children under the age of 6 in those cases that involve family violence.

La Casa De Las Madres

(415) 503-0500

1850 Mission Street, Suite B

Offers shelter, advocacy and support services for women and children victims of domestic violence. 24 hour crisis phone line, Emergency Shelter Program, Police Department Direct Response Unit, Drop-In Counseling Center, Teen Program, Transitional Housing Program, Community Education and Outreach. Crisis Line: 1-877-503-1850; Teen line 1-877-923-0700

MANALIVE

(415) 861-8614

3338 17th. St., Suite 202,

A national non-profit violence prevention program which trains male batterers to stop violent behavior. Court approved program. Also has programs in high schools for dealing with teenage violence. (Sliding scale fees) (English, Chinese and Spanish)

POCOVI

(415) 552-1361

474 Valencia Street

Educational and support group program primarily for Hispanic men who have been involved in domestic violence.

SF Safe Start

(415) 565-7283

Provides referrals for children and parents who have been exposed to violence, particularly for children 0 to 6 years old. Referrals include services for counseling, child care, housing and food, parenting education and other services as needed.

WOMAN Inc.

(415) 864-4722

333 Valencia Street

Provides services for female victims of domestic violence. Priority to SF residents. Provides counseling, 24 hour crisis line (864-4722) and drop in advice and referrals.

Substance Abuse Counseling

Glide

(415) 771-6300

330 Ellis St., Fourth Floor

Web: www.glide.org/ourwork/health.asp

Recovery programs, as well as medical clinic, family support, job and computer training.

Homeless Prenatal Program

995 Market St, Suite 1010

(415) 546-6756

Housing referrals, pre-natal program, legal assistance for homeless, drug treatment, domestic violence program, mental health services, job training, computer classes, childcare. All services offered in English and Spanish.

Substance Abuse Programs

A Woman's Place

(415) 487-2140

1049 Howard Street,

Emergency housing and transitional shelter, counseling, drug recovery groups, case management, HIV support groups, Inpatient substance abuse program for woman age 18 or older English speaking only.

Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic Substance Abuse Programs

(415) 565-1927

529 Clayton Street (main clinic)

Provides detox, outpatient and residential treatment for drug and alcohol issues, as well as general medical assistance. Services are provided in different communities in San Francisco and in different languages. Call for drop in clinic hours and location.

Iris Center – Women's Counseling and Recovery Services

(415) 864-2364

(415) 864-0116

333 Valencia Street

Provides drug and alcohol services, HIV services, counseling and mental health services particularly to women of color, single mothers and lesbians ages 18 and up. Hrs. 9 am to 5:30 pm. Call or drop in.

Mission Council Family Day Treatment

474 Valencia Street Suite 135

(415) 864-0554

(415) 826-6774

Individual and group counseling, family and couple therapy, English and Spanish. No one will be denied services.

Hrs: 9:30 am - 5:30 PM M-F,

10:00 am - 5:30 PM Sat.

Call for appointment.

Mission Council on Alcohol Abuse for the Spanish Speaking

(415) 864-0554

(415) 826-6769

820 Valencia

Day treatment for monolingual and bilingual clients with primary diagnosis of alcohol or drug abuse dependence. Individual and group counseling, community services and 12 -step groups.

Hrs. 9 am – 5 pm. Call for appointment.

Ozanam

(415) 621-6458

(415) 252-5305

1175 Howard Street

Drop-in detox center for the homeless and/or drug addicted. Shower, bed, referral to inpatient treatment program, 12 step program. Drop in 7:30 am to 1:00 pm. Can stay from 4 hours to 72 hours.

Walden House Adolescent

SF (415) 355-2518

520 Townsend Street

Mental Health counseling and psychiatric services, substance abuse recovery program inpatient and out patient for youth under the age of 21. Call for appointment.

Walden House Adult Residential Services

(415) 554-113

(415) 701-5100

1899 Mission Street

Inpatient substance abuse recovery program, room and board, counseling, psychiatric treatment, education, parenting classes, vocational training, legal and social services, health and fitness activities. Call for appointment.

Walden House mental health

1885 Mission Street

(415) 554-113

(415) 934-3451

Miscellaneous Services**A Woman's Place**

(415) 487-2140

1049 Howard Street

Emergency housing and transitional shelter, counseling, drug recovery groups, case management, HIV support groups. Inpatient substance abuse program for women age 18 or older English speaking only.

Child Abduction Recovery Unit

(415) 551-9551

Part of the SF District Attorney's Office, the Child Abduction Recovery Unit enforces child custody and visitation orders. The Unit will also attempt to locate and return children who have been taken in violation of court orders.

Victims of Crime Project

(415) 553-9044

850 Bryant Street

Provides assistance to people who have been the victims of crime that took place in California. Will help with some funds to recover for wage loss, out of pocket medical and dental expense, counseling for those effected. Assists victim in getting reports and going to court, as well as any needed restraining orders. Specific funding depends on the case and current funding available.

Bibliography

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Lansky, Vicki. *It's Not Your Fault Koko Bear: A Read Together book for Parents and Young Children During Divorce*. 1998

Royko, David. *Voices of Children of Divorce*. 1999

Staal, Stephanie. *The Love They Lost: Living With the Legacy of Our Parents' Divorce*. 2000

Wallerstein, Judith and Blakeslee, Sandra. *What About the Kids? Raising Your Children Before, During and After Divorce*. 2003

holiday worksheet

Put a check mark next to the holidays that are important to you and which you think are important to your child(ren)'s other parent. The list below is just a guide you can use in preparing for mediation. This list may include holidays that you don't celebrate and may not list some of the holidays that are important to you. Ignore what you don't need and add what's missing. Think about times of exchange if you plan to share, for example, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

	My preference	Other Parent's Possible Preference
New Years Eve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Years Day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kwanzaa	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese New Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Passover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mother's Day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father's Day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
July 4th	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rosh Hashana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yom Kippur	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Halloween	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thanksgiving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hanukah	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christmas Eve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christmas Day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your child's birthday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

School Vacations (write in the specific school breaks if you know them)

Spring Break _____

Summer Break _____

Christmas Break _____

Other _____

Day long school holidays

There are many school holidays on Mondays and on some Fridays. In putting together your parenting plan, you should think about how you will handle those days when there is no school.

For example, if your child spends the weekends with one parent and is usually dropped off to school on Monday morning, should your child stay with that parent until school on Tuesday morning or be returned on Monday to another location?

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parent worksheet

(to help you prepare for mediation — for your use only)

You can use separate sheets for each child

How would you describe your child?

What's his or her personality like?

What are his or her favorite activities?

What things does your child enjoy doing with you?

What things does your child enjoy doing with his or her other parent?

Have you noticed any changes in your child's behavior or expression of feelings? Yes No

What changes have you observed?

How does your child deal with being upset, angry or frustrated?

List what you do to help your child with these feelings.

How is your child doing in pre-school or school?

List two positive things you offer your child

1 _____

2 _____

List two positive things your child's other parent offers your child

1 _____

2 _____

What can the other parent do to have a better co-parenting relationship with you?

What can you do to have a better co-parenting relationship with the other parent?

Focus on who your child is and what helps him or her to be comfortable and happy.

Now, write down at least two different parenting plans for your child. The next couple of pages have blank calendars that you can use to mark out your plans.

1 _____

2 _____

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1 _____

2 _____

MONTH _____

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

MONTH _____

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

MONTH _____

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

MONTH _____

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

Notes

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