

Together and Apart: Your Guide to **Co-Parenting**



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Disclaimer

This book has been provided purely as a guide. It does not take into account your specific needs or circumstances. It does not purport to provide you with any legal advice. Before acting on any of the contents of this book you should seek independent legal advice from a qualified legal practitioner.

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How this guide can help you

If you have just separated from the mother or father of your child, it can be a difficult time. You may feel that a Parenting Agreement is the last thing you need to worry about right now, but the truth is that it is the first thing you need to put into place. A Parenting Agreement sets out how both you and your ex care for and bring up your child, and is the first step towards creating a secure arrangement for them.

You may be feeling relieved, angry, sad, disappointed, or any number of other emotions. Whether or not you initiated the split, it is almost certainly not how you planned for your family to be.

Please bear this in mind as you negotiate the tricky waters of drawing up a Parenting Agreement. The end outcome will never be the ideal outcome for you, just as it probably will not be for your ex. The key to it all is compromise.

The purpose of this guide is to address what should be in your Parenting Agreement. There will be many aspects of bringing up your child that you took for granted while you were together with your ex; now they need to be formalized and thought through in detail. This guide shows you how. It is not here to focus on you or your ex; it is here to help you make your co-parenting relationship as easy as possible in the best interests of your child.

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A couple of formalities

We have done our best to keep this guide as user friendly as possible, but there are a couple of points you need to know before you read it.

1. Once you have reached a Parenting Agreement, it is up to you whether or not it is formalized into a Parenting Plan, a Court Order, or just left as is. To make this decision, we strongly recommend that you seek independent legal advice.
2. Throughout this guide you will see references to the term “notice”. When we ask you the question, “How much notice would you like to receive?” you also need to ask yourself the question “How much notice would I like to give?” What you want and need is just as important as what your ex wants and needs, and vice versa.
3. We refer to “your child” throughout for consistency, but of course this could also mean “your children”.

Why you need a Parenting Agreement

You may be getting on well with your ex and have had an amicable split. If so, that's great. "Why do I need a Parenting Agreement?" you may ask, "Surely we can just sort things out as we go along?"

Whilst you may be getting on well now, what happens if this deteriorates in the future? What if your ex meets someone new with different parenting ideas to your own? What if you want to move away for a job? These are examples of life changes that can cause a breakdown in communications. It is far better to agree now on the details of how you will co-parent your child while you are getting along, than it is to leave it until problems arise.

Here is an example. If you are on good terms with your ex you may both agree that you will each have half of your child's birthday. Simple enough, isn't it? But what happens when a problem arises and you are no longer getting on so well? What will happen when your child's birthday comes around and you are each to have half? Do you agree that you will have the child from 12 midnight to 12 noon, and your ex from 12 noon to 12 midnight? That would be a bit crazy, would not it? What does half a day actually mean? And what happens if you both want the same half? Who gets to make the decision then? This is why your Parenting Agreement needs to be specific. In this example, you need to set out who will have which half and what times that includes. It does not mean that you cannot be flexible if you are getting on well, but it does mean that if your relationship goes downhill, you both have a safety net to fall back on without the need to escalate the conflict even further.

If, as many separated couples find, you are not getting on well with your ex from the beginning then you definitely need a Parenting Agreement right from the start. I'm sure you will agree that it is not good for your child to be in a situation of conflict, so if you can agree up front how you will manage things, it makes it less stressful for everyone.

The number one rule

When you are thinking about what should be in a Parenting Agreement, the key question to ask yourself is, "If one day we cannot agree on something, will this agreement answer that question for us?"



Parental Responsibility – what it is and how it affects you

What do people mean when they talk about “parental responsibility”? You may have heard of “long term care, welfare and development” or “short term care, welfare and development” or maybe “joint custody” and “sole custody”. The truth is most of these terms mean the same thing: they simply describe who has the responsibility for making decisions relating to your child regarding long term matters. They do not necessarily have anything to do with how much time you spend with them.

In legal jargon, Parental Responsibility means: all duties, powers, responsibilities and authority that parents have in relation to children. At times this will include the need to make decisions about major, long term issues. So what does this mean in plain English?

First of all, major long term decisions include those relating to your child’s:

- health
- education
- religion
- culture
- place of residence, if this affects your ex’s time with them

There is a presumption under the Family Law Act 1975 (as amended) that there will be equal shared parental responsibility unless you fall into an exception (you should seek legal advice concerning this). But what is actually meant when you are told that you have equal, shared parental responsibility? How are you supposed to exercise that responsibility if it is shared?

How to reach an agreement

No-one can force you to come to an agreement with your ex; only the two of you can do that. But it is worth thinking about the outcome if you are not able to agree: you will end up going through the courts, where a judge (who does not know you or your child) will make a decision about something that has a huge impact on your life.

So in law, it is expected that you will consult with each other and try to reach an agreement together, focusing on what is in your child's best interests. In some cases this may be difficult, and if you are in a very tricky relationship you should focus on making sure that the finer details are sorted out now. There is a lot to think about. You need to consider scenarios like these:

- If you have to try and reach an agreement on something, how much notice should you give each other? For example, if you want to change your child's school, it is unreasonable to expect to resolve this with your ex in 7 days
- Once the issue is raised, how long should your ex have to think things over and get back to you?
- What will you do if you cannot reach an agreement?

Although it is tempting, please do not just disregard what your ex has suggested simply because it comes from them; always think about your child and what will benefit them, and focus your reasoning on this when discussing any suggestions.



The key areas of a Parenting Agreement

The sections below cover the main areas of a Parenting Agreement. They are meant as a guide to help you think about the details, but you might have other areas that you would like to include as well. As always, consult your ex, be prepared to compromise; and if there are any questions or concerns please make sure you get independent legal advice.

Living arrangements

This should go without saying, but any agreement you have should include details about where your child is going to live. Sometimes it can be difficult for you to see on paper that they are living with your ex and only spending time with you. If this is you (or the situation applies in reverse) think about whether it will make things easier for everyone if the wording is altered so that your child is living with both of you.



Contact arrangements

This is where you can let your imagination run wild! It might sound odd that we use the word “imagination” but that is really the only thing limiting you.

When you are agreeing on contact arrangements, the number one thing to consider is what you can honestly and realistically accommodate. Do not decide on a changeover time which is 3pm on a school day at a location 15 minutes away from the school; you will clearly not be able to make it there on time.

So what type of arrangements could you put into place? This depends on both of your personal circumstances, but we have set out a variety of different scenarios below to help you get started.



Long distance relationships

If your ex lives a long distance from you and this makes it difficult to maintain frequent or regular contact times, you could think about an arrangement whereby your child spends time with him or her on long weekends, as well as for a greater period over school holidays.

School aged children

How about:

- Week about
- Five days in week one and two days in week two
- Three days in week one and four days in week two
- Four days in one week and an overnight in the next
- Four days in one week and dinner on one or two nights in the following week
- If you or your ex is a shift worker why not try to fall in line with the roster and work your agreement out on a rotation similar to that?

You may have in mind set days, but try not to restrict yourself. For example, if you are prepared to do a Friday to Monday, what difference does it make to do a Thursday to Sunday or a Saturday to Tuesday?

Infants, babies and younger children

Smaller children have special needs, in that they will benefit from more frequent, shorter periods with each of you. This is important for their long term relationship with both of you. Having said this, it is important that you take into account their feeding and sleeping routine and adhere to this as much as possible. You might consider:

- A short period of time four days a week (if not more)
- As they grow and develop you could then increase the length of time and decrease the frequency. Babies thrive on routine and consistency, so when you are changing arrangements always try to maintain a consistent day and time for the visits to take place.

If your partner is violent or abusive

If there are issues of domestic violence or abuse it may be that supervised contact is necessary. If you can, it is always better for your child if you can organize for someone familiar to him or her to supervise this time. This can be difficult, as it is important that whoever is being supervised can trust that the supervisor will be independent, otherwise there may be underlying anxieties and conflict which your child could pick up on during a visit. In addition, the supervisor needs to be able to maintain supervision, but also not interfere in the time that your child is spending with you or your ex.

If an independent person cannot be agreed on you could use a contact centre. There are various contact centres around, but the waiting list may be long. There are also some private agencies that will undertake supervised contact in your home or outside of the centre; you just need to call around and find out what is available in your area, what the waiting lists are like, and how much the supervision costs.





Holidays

If your child is not yet of school age, your holidays can be flexible as they do not need to fit in around school terms. In these years, you might want to include a provision that enables you to take them away for a certain length of time, with your ex's time suspended during that period. If you include a provision along these lines, please think about:

- How much notice each of you require for taking your child on holiday
- How far in advance you can both 'book' holidays. For example, you might want to restrict the notification period to only the next 120 days, otherwise you might have your ex giving notice that they will be taking your child away for the next five years at Christmas
- Possibly restricting the holidays to periods that do not include special days, or if they do, it could only be once every two years
- Stipulating how often each of you can take your child away

If they are of school age, the school your child attends will determine the amount of school holidays they receive each year. School holidays can be considered in a number of different ways, and again do not think that it has to be half and half or for four weeks only (because that is the amount of leave one of you has from work). Why not consider school holidays like everything else - there are ways to overcome every issue!

For school holidays there are obvious solutions such as:

- Taking half each. One of you spends time during the first half and the other spends time with during second half. This may then be alternated each year.
- Sharing week about. This really only has the greatest impact over the Christmas school holiday period when there are at least six weeks to consider. You may feel that three weeks away from you and is too long for your child, in which case you may choose to do it so that they only spend a week without each of you at a time.

From here there are various options which are again only limited by your imagination. You might choose that:

- Holidays will be half each if there are plans to take your child away, but if you are at home then week about would be better for them
- Holidays should be taken when one of you has leave from work and can care for your child
- That each of you have the same holiday periods each year (eg, one of you will always have the first half, or might always have Easter)
- One year one of you has all of the holidays during the year and the other has all of Christmas and vice versa



Special days

While these are few and far between, they can cause you and your ex the most angst. But what is a “special day”? Usually these are:

- Easter
- Christmas
- Birthdays
- Mother’s Day
- Father’s Day

Depending on your religion and culture you may have other special days in addition to or instead of the above. Whatever days you celebrate, it is important that your child has the benefit of being able to celebrate them with both of you. So how do you achieve this? There are three ways:

1. Split each day in two so that your child can spend time with both of you
2. Alternate the days so that your child spends the day with you one year and then the following year they spend the day with your ex
3. Do a mixture of both of these. For example, you might choose to alternate if you have family interstate or a long distance away; however if on one occasion you chose not to visit your family and were going to be nearby to your ex, you might then decide to split the day so that your child gets to see both of you.

The most emotional part comes when you discuss the possibility that you might “miss out” on waking up with your child on special days such as Christmas and Easter. You may find it difficult if, for example, during your relationship you had always spent Christmas lunch with one family and dinner with the other, and now post separation your ex wants to change this. This may not be easy to come to terms with, but please remember that co-parenting post separation will bring with it new compromises that need to be made. This time is about your child - allowing them to maintain relationships and establish new family traditions with each of you.

Changeover

Changeover is when you hand your child over to your ex and vice versa. It sounds simple but in practice it can be tricky.

If your child is at school you have a few options:

- Changeover takes place at school
- Changeover takes place with one of you dropping off at school and the other collecting
- Changeover takes place with one of you doing both the drop off and collection

If you do not have children at school, life becomes a little more difficult if you need to keep some distance between you and your ex. You will not necessarily be able to undertake changeovers without coming into contact with them, and some people find this stressful.

To solve this problem, it again comes down to your imagination. What you need to consider when you are discussing changeover arrangements includes (but is not limited to):

- What times you can practically adhere to. For example, if you have to travel 25 minutes to a changeover location, do not agree to undertake changeover any earlier than when you can arrive.
- Whether or not your child finds more support and comfort from you taking them to your ex's place, thereby sending them the non verbal cue that you are happy for them to spend time there.
- Whether or not the changeover needs to be in a public location. If so, try and choose a child friendly location such as a park or shopping centre. Always think of the undertone that the children will receive from any location. What message do you think your child receives, for example, when the changeover is taking place in the foyer of a police station?
- Whether or not there are issues of family violence. If there are, does the changeover need to happen at a contact centre? If so, where is your local one? Is there a waiting list for it? Who will cover the costs of the contact centre facilitating this changeover?

If distance is involved and there is the possibility (even in the future) that your child might travel by some other forms of transport, it is worth considering the following:

- If it is air travel where is the closest airport?
- Who will be responsible for the cost of the travel?
- If they fly, take a bus or train, where will changeover take place? At the airport, station or at someone's home?
- Who is responsible for getting your child to, and collecting them from, the airport or station?
- If your child is flying how much notice would you like to receive concerning the date and time of their flights?
- When would you like to send and receive a copy of the ticket itinerary?
- If you choose to drive instead of taking another form of transport, where does changeover happen then?
- Who is responsible for the cost of petrol there and back?
- Would you like to know how they are travelling? If so, how much notice would you like to receive?

Finally, please bear in mind that other people, for example a new partner, may attend the changeover. Sometimes this is just a practicality. Your ex may be going on to something else straight after the pick up or drop off, and other people will be in their car. At other times, you may feel that you need support and have someone with you. If you can, always encourage this person or people to remain in the car; there is no need for them to get out.

If you cannot make the changeover for some reason and need to send someone else, please try to send someone who is familiar to your ex. Put yourself in their shoes: if a stranger turned up to collect your child from you, would you feel comfortable if you did not know them (even if your child did)? Also, please try not to send someone whom your ex does not get along with, as this may inflame the situation. We all have family and friends who are ready to fight our cause, but sometimes they only generate more trouble.

The main thing that you do not want is for the changeover to become a hostile space, full of awkward and high tensions, making it difficult for your child to say goodbye and hello. This is a time when your child will get to witness first hand how you interact with your ex. Children are just like us, in that they are able to sense how people feel about each other without words being said.

Conduct of parents

What do people mean when they refer to the “Conduct of Parents”? This covers issues such as:

- non denigration, eg, not calling each other names
- discipline
- alcohol
- drugs
- being respectful of each other

These are all things which right now may seem like common sense, but this Parenting Agreement needs to be your fallback position: your safety net if something goes wrong.



Medical matters

Unfortunately there may come a time when your child falls ill, or is diagnosed as suffering from an illness or condition that requires medication. You or your ex may not always agree with the diagnosis or treatment. In these circumstances you may find it necessary to discuss issues such as:

- Ensuring that your child is given all medication which has been prescribed by their treating medical practitioner
- Only having the one doctor that they attend unless in emergencies



Specialty clauses

So above we have listed the main points that you will need to consider when drawing up your Parental Agreement. Here, though, are some other issues that you might want to think about.

Travelling

We are lucky here in that we have so many places we can explore and yet remain within Australia! What does that mean for you? If you have orders made under the Family Law Act they can be enforced no matter where you are in Australia. This can give you great peace of mind when you or your ex plan your next family holiday.

Some people, though, like to have the extra security of putting into place notification clauses that cover if either of you want to take your child out of your state. But please be realistic. It would not make sense to say that you or your ex could not travel with your child from Brisbane (QLD) to Tweed Heads (NSW), which is just over one hour away, but that it would be ok to travel from Brisbane (QLD) to Cooktown (QLD), which is almost 24 hours away. When you get down to the core, interstate travel may not actually be the issue; maybe what you want to think about is putting into place a provision of how far they can travel (in distance or time) from your home or their school.



Overseas travel is becoming more and more popular and available to many families. In a separated family, though, it does raise issues of trust and concern that are not there at other times. You may be thinking, “what happens if my ex goes overseas with my child and does not return?”

If you are lucky enough to want to consider taking your child overseas there are various points you need to remember. To start off with, why not ask yourself the question, “If my ex wanted to take my child abroad, what would I want to know?” This is a great place to start. Here are a few pointers:

- When are you going and coming back?
- Where are you going?
- Where are you staying?

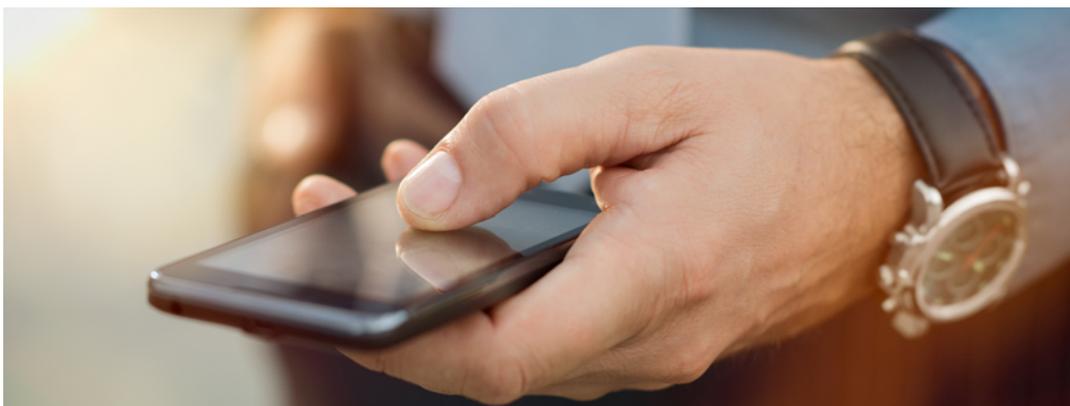
Now that you are thinking about what information you would want to know, you are also probably thinking, “What if my ex wants to go somewhere that I do not want my child going to?” With this in mind you probably need to think of some fallbacks.

Naturally, you should always put in place a provision to be able to say no if you do not agree. However you also do not want travel being refused just to be vindictive or for no proper reason. So here are some examples of times when it might be reasonable to say no:

- If there is a travel warning issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs
- If the Country to which they are going is not a signatory to the Hague Convention (you should seek independent legal advice if you do not know what this is).

You and your ex may have other reasons you can come up with, but always try to stipulate the reason why you or they can say no.

Having said this, if there is a genuine or real risk that you feel should prevent any and all overseas travel, you may need to consider an Airport Watchlist Order. This is an order preventing your child from leaving Australia. If this is the case, you should speak to your lawyer immediately.



Passports

If you are going to include a clause about overseas travel you need to also consider your child's passport. Do they currently have one? If so, who is responsible for holding it?

If they do not have one, then what do you need to think about?

- When can it be issued?
- Who will pay for it?
- Who will keep it?
- When will it be released to your ex?
- Who is responsible for ensuring you child always has a valid passport?

When thinking about these issues, please do not forget that you need think about the details. For example, how long do you have to sign the application when it is provided? How long do you have to get a completed form to your ex for signing? If your ex is travelling with your child overseas, how long before the trip do you release the passport to them? Do you provide them with a copy prior to the trip so that they have passport numbers? And so on.

Babysitting

Now you may think, “Why in the world do I need to think about babysitting?” But consider this: if your child is with your ex and for some reason they cannot look after them for an extended period, would you want to know? Would you want to be able to have the first option of caring for them?

If you do want to consider a clause about babysitting, please think about:

- The period of time. What should be the minimum? For example, it would be impractical for you to inform each other if you are just running down to the corner shop for bread and milk. On the other hand, going to work for a whole day may be different.
- Whether your clause will be one that requires your ex to look after your child if you cannot, or whether it will just be one that they are given the opportunity in the first instance to say yes or no.
- If it is just the opportunity, how long do they have to get back to you, and how long before the event do you need to ask them?



Provision of items

This is something you might want to consider especially if your child is a baby or infant. They may have a special comforter that they need to travel with; if this is the case you could consider a clause which stipulates what items will be provided and be returned.



Information sharing

You will be gathering by now that freely sharing information about your child is fundamental to a successful Parenting Agreement. As parents, it is vitally important that you both have access to any information that you need regarding your child. This would include doctors' appointments, medical diagnoses, school newsletters, report cards - the list really can go on.

But the tricky thing about being separated is, who is responsible for providing this information to each or both of you? Does the responsibility fall to the provider of the information (for example the doctor or school) or will it fall on one of you? These are difficult questions.

If the sharing of information is left to the provider such as the doctor or school, not only does this place an additional burden on them, but also you may often assume (sometimes wrongly) that you have both received information. This can leave one of you feeling left out and as if your role as your child's parent has been lessened, which in turn can increase tension and conflict in your co-parenting relationship.

So when preparing a Parenting Agreement, please consider including a provision about who is responsible for this. Not only do you need to decide who will provide the information, but also who will tell you or your ex who the information providers are? Let's face it, neither of you can source the information from the appropriate providers if you do not know who they are!



Parental communication

In general, this can be one of the most difficult challenges for all separated parents. Although it is hard, it is important to recognize that you need to examine your communication habits and assumptions so that you can move forward more effectively.

You really do not have a choice about this; as parents, it is vital that you communicate well regarding your child. Both of you need to be in a position where you know what is going on in their life at all times. This is essential not only for their own health, but also for consistency, so that your child knows what to expect. They also need to know that both of you are well informed about their life and have placed them in the centre of your world.

So how can you communicate? In a perfect world you could sit down and have a conversation, but, as we know, sometimes this is not as simple as it sounds. You do not want to create any more tension or conflict, so if you cannot have an in-person conversation without getting that horrible feeling in the pit of your stomach, then here are some other options for you to consider:

- texting
- emailing
- communication book which travels with your child
- online communication portal where you enter all the information online
- mediation
- parenting co-ordinator who helps you to manage your relationship

As this is such an important area, let's look at the pros and cons of each method above.

Texting

This is great for short term and ad hoc communications, although it is obviously not adequate for anything needing a lot of explanation. And please remember that it is very easy to misinterpret the tone of a text and take offence, even when none is intended. So texting is ideal for certain occasions but no more.



Email

Emails are better than texts for putting across longer form information, but they are not always read immediately, so please do not use them in urgent circumstances in order to avoid talking direct. However, they are great for storing information for a later date, for communicating in a more detailed way, and for copying in other parties when necessary. Remember though prior emails can be edited.



Communication book

This is a notebook which your child keeps with them, and in which you and your ex can write notes to keep the flow of communication alive. This can be handy, but there will be times when you do not want your child to see the notes, and the book can become torn and lost. If your relationship with your ex is not good, then you could even suspect them of losing it “on purpose”.

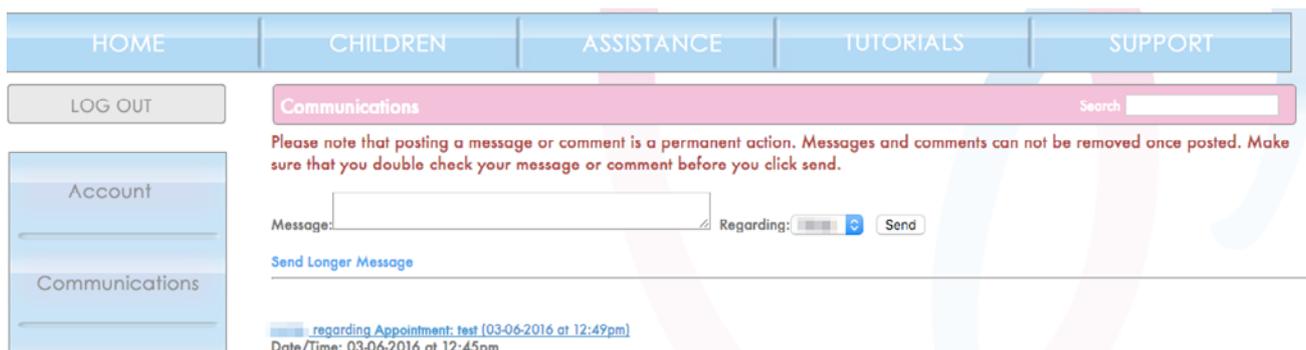


Online communication portal

You may not have heard of one of these, but they can be an excellent solution to the above problems. You and your ex enter the information about your child on the website, and both of you can view it. It is a safe, neutral space which gives you the flexibility of email, but with the added benefit of being able to store details such as passport numbers, doctors' addresses and so on, in such a way that you can both access them equally. You can even put your Parenting Agreement on there. No more accusations of losing information, or of one of you claiming that they told the other one something when they did not. It is all on the portal.

A subscription to this kind of system isn't free, but it is a secure, low cost solution to a big problem.

One such provider is www.ourchildren.com.au



The screenshot shows the user interface of the 'Our Children' online communication portal. At the top, there is a navigation bar with five tabs: HOME, CHILDREN, ASSISTANCE, TUTORIALS, and SUPPORT. Below this is a 'LOG OUT' button and a search bar. The main content area is titled 'Communications' and contains a warning message: 'Please note that posting a message or comment is a permanent action. Messages and comments can not be removed once posted. Make sure that you double check your message or comment before you click send.' Below the warning is a form with a 'Message:' input field, a 'Regarding:' dropdown menu, and a 'Send' button. A link for 'Send Longer Message' is also present. At the bottom, there is a message preview: 'regarding Appointment: test (03-06-2016 at 12:49pm)' with a 'Date/Time: 03-06-2016 at 12:45pm'.

Mediation

If sharing of communication is becoming all too difficult; or there are other aspects of a Parenting Agreement that you are both struggling with you might want to consider mediation.

Mediation can be a great tool to help you resolve differences you are currently facing without escalating the conflict even further.

An experienced mediator will help you to work through conflict and produce solutions which work for you and your family. You will be able to reach an agreement that you and the other parent are in control of.

If you need to or want to attend mediation www.mediateit.com.au is able to assist you with this.

Parenting co-ordinator

This is someone who will help you communicate with each other. It can be very helpful to have a neutral third party to do this job, and you may find it useful on occasion, but consider the cost and ongoing inconvenience of this solution. Also, your child will see that you are not able to communicate with your ex without someone helping you, which is not a good message to give to them.

There are pros and cons to each method above, but whatever method you choose please make sure that it is one that works for both of you. It is difficult, but remember that respect and compromise is the key to any successful co-parenting relationship.

Putting it into practice

We hope that this guide has opened your eyes to the possibilities that can be addressed in your Parenting Agreement. Having these discussions is hard, we know that, but in our experience having them up front is the best thing that you can do. We have set out the main points for you to think about, but the tricky part for you is putting this into place. Realistically, no agreement will cover all of the “what if” scenarios life will throw at us, but what it can do is make most of the journey smooth sailing. Then, when the unexpected happens, you will be able to handle the situation as adults and as parents of your child, as opposed to using it as a need to return to court time and time again.

Good luck!



Who can help



DA Mediation:
www.damediation.com.au



DA Family Lawyers:
www.dafamilylawyers.com.au



Freedom Law:
www.freedomlaw.com.au



Armstrong Legal:
[www.armstronglegal.com.au/
family-law/divorce/children](http://www.armstronglegal.com.au/family-law/divorce/children)

About the Authors

Lorrie Brook

Lorrie Brook is the Founder and Director of Our Children Australia.

Lorrie is passionate about protecting children in all walks of life; ensuring that they have a loving and stable upbringing free to love, explore and learn. Even as a child growing up, Lorrie always had a soft spot for the children who were isolated, bullied and tormented.

Lorrie started her career as a Family Lawyer, doing her best to help as many children as possible. While she loved helping families through this time, Lorrie had a strong desire to help families before conflict became so entrenched that the children were already embroiled in disputes, and were the 'messenger' and pawn in their parents' conflict. As a result of this, Lorrie's passion lies with helping families find an alternative means of communicating, so that the children are not required to become entwined in parental arguments. .

To make this easier, Lorrie has developed a system for parents who need a place to discuss and store all of their children's information; and by doing this she has developed a service that provides separated families with the tools they need to ensure that their children do not have to be involved in these discussions. Lorrie has many more hopes and dreams about how she can expand Our Children Australia, all in the aim of helping our children.

When she's not working, she's a wife and mother to a beautiful girl. Watching her daughter grow, learn, explore and discover new things every day is a wonderful gift.

About the Authors

Joanna Lezanski

Joanna is the Owner and Principal Mediator at 'Mediate it'.

Joanna began her career working predominately as a Family Lawyer. Over the years she saw many clients struggling with how to parent in a positive way following the breakdown of their relationship. She would spend considerable time with her clients encouraging them to move forward in their parenting relationships despite the separation they were going through.

Joanna became adept at working with her clients to produce creative solutions that worked for the individual family. As a result Joanna found a passion for out-of-the-box thinking and the ability to assist families in developing strategies and outcomes that suit their lifestyle.

Having spent many years working in a litigious environment, Joanna decided to shift focus and apply her efforts to assisting families in resolving their conflicts before they were faced with expensive and time consuming Court proceedings.

Joanna has worked hard to develop a mediation service that truly listens to and engages with parents. During and after separation, parents can experience roadblocks when it comes to moving forward and co-parenting their children. Sometimes these roadblocks seem immovable. Joanna's approach provides flexibility and allows parents to deal with issues in a way that remains child focused.

Her passion for helping families extends beyond 'Mediate it'. Joanna hopes to leave a lasting impression on the way in which families resolve conflict and co-parent post separation.

Outside of work Joanna spends her time learning French and dreaming of her next European holiday.