

# Child Custody Schedules by Age

If you're a parent of a minor child going through a divorce, child custody is probably the most important issue you're facing. When you're first getting started, it can be overwhelming to learn just how many possibilities there are for your child custody arrangement.

There are three basic concepts that go into a custody agreement. First, there's physical custody, which means which parent has the child in their care.

Next, there's legal custody, which refers to who makes important decisions for the child regarding things like education, healthcare, religion, or even extracurricular activities. Families can have either sole or joint legal custody as well as physical custody.

Finally, there are visitation rights, which describe when a non-custodial parent is legally guaranteed an opportunity to spend time with the child. Of course, under that umbrella, there is both supervised and unsupervised visitation, the latter of which might even include overnight visits.

# What is The Most Common Child Custody Arrangement?

Once upon a time, it was the norm for mothers to be awarded sole custody, which sometimes caused emotional devastation for fathers and their kids. Thankfully, nowadays, divorce is much more likely to preserve the relationship between a parent and child.

What does that usually look like, though?

Well, one study out of Wisconsin showed that as of 2010, just over half of families who had been through divorce ended up with joint physical custody, in which each parent spent a minimum of 25% of the time acting as their child's primary caretaker.

The prevalence of joint custody has been trending upward, so it's likely that by now, an even more significant percentage of families are opting for shared parenting time.

While this is terrific news for the well-being of children of divorce, every parent knows that parenting simply shouldn't have a one-size-fits-all approach. So, let's explore the best child custody arrangements by age so that you can be better informed about what parenting plan is right for your kids.

One note to keep in mind as you read on: a standard visitation schedule for school-age children usually includes additional parenting time for the noncustodial parent during every school break. Thus, these parenting plans represent a family's regular routine, which may or may not be applicable year-round.

## Choosing an Appropriate Visitation Schedule

Joint custody, also known as split custody, is when a child lives with each parent part-time. In these cases, both parents are involved in the decision-making concerning the child's well-being.

### 1. The Best Custody Arrangements for Infants (0-12 months)

When it comes to designing a custody schedule for an infant, there are basically two competing needs that parents must do their best to balance.

First of all, a baby's first year of life is an essential opportunity to bond with each parent, so you and your ex will want to do your best to make sure that your baby is never away from either of you for more than a few days. After all, your baby is only going to be this age once!

On the other hand, a consistent routine is extremely important for the health and well-being of your baby, so you'll also want to make sure that your infant son or daughter isn't being passed around in such a way that disrupts his or her sleep and feeding routine.

As a result, the best arrangement for most new babies consists of living solely with Parent A and having frequent daytime visits with Parent B. Once your baby gets to the age where they are a little more adaptable, then you can begin overnight visitation.

Every child develops at their own pace, so it will be up to you and your co-parent to figure out when your child is ready for this new adventure.

## 2. Best Custody Arrangements for Toddlers (1-3 years)

At this age, younger children will begin to form lasting memories of their family life. As a result, it becomes crucial to get your custody plan right so that they feel safe, comfortable, and cared for.

Chiefly, this means sensitively managing your child's ever-complexifying emotional needs. One of your greatest concerns should be preventing separation anxiety, so you'll want to come up with specific provisions about handing your child off between parents.

For example, it's generally recommended that children exclusively get dropped off rather than picked up so that it never feels like one parent is interrupting the quality time that they are having with the other.

On the plus side, toddlers are significantly more adaptable than infants, so they're almost universally mature enough for overnight visits. This opens up a whole world of parenting schedule possibilities, which now can take the parents' needs and work schedules into account as well.

That is not to say that keeping a regular routine is no longer important, though, so you'll want to communicate extensively with your co-parent about what each day should look like for your young child.

## 3. Best Custody Arrangements for Children (4-11 years)

Now that you're the proud parent of an older child, you have to worry a lot more about working around school and extracurricular activities.

Your family now has three packed schedules to contend with, so you might have no other option than to design a more fragmented custody schedule that keeps your kid conveniently located for every event of the week. This can get very complicated very quickly!

It only works, however, because your child is a whole lot more flexible than they have ever been before. They can tolerate longer stretches of time away from each parent, or they can tolerate switching off between households every single night. It all depends on what works best for each of you as individuals and as a family.

If you and your ex live in different parts of the country (or even the world), this is when it first becomes appropriate for a child to live with one parent during the school year and the other for entire school breaks. On the older end of this range, they might even feel confident enough to travel unaccompanied.

As always, it's ideal for a child to have consistent contact with both parents, so you'll really want to encourage them to fill in the gaps with FaceTime.

Children in this age group also have a greater theory of mind, which means that they understand that other people have needs, desires, and just as rich of an internal life as they do. As a result, your child understands that co-parenting presents unique challenges and can often be reasoned with when they aren't getting their way.

You still want to make sure that you're never placing the burden of co-parenting on your child. There is a difference between explaining that they have to stay with your ex for a full two weeks because you have a business trip and constantly complaining about said ex. Aim to be more open with your child and solicitous of their input without compromising their boundaries.



## 4. Best Custody Arrangements for Teens (12-17)

At this point, your kid isn't such a kid anymore, which means giving them the freedom to make some of their own decisions regarding how you and your ex-spouse co-parent. In many states, this is even the legal standard -- depending on where you live, it might be up to your child to decide the parent with whom they want to reside starting at age 14 or so.

What remains in your hands is how you react to their decision. You have to remember that it is almost certainly in their best interest to have a rich and comprehensive relationship with both parents, so you never want to guilt them if they choose your ex's house or celebrate when they choose yours.

Hopefully, you already learned this lesson during your divorce. If not, there is no time like the present to begin protecting your child from any conflict between their two parents.

One last note about co-parenting teens: just because they're more independent doesn't mean that communication between you and your ex is less necessary than before. While there is loads of conventional wisdom about rules and boundaries for younger children, disciplining teens tends to be a lot more individualized. If you and your ex do not find a way to get on the same page about what behavior is acceptable and what to do when it's not, then you are creating a recipe for chaos and rebellion.

### How should you agree on a custody arrangement?

Usually, this conversation should begin with an accounting of each relevant party's schedule. That way, you'll know where your child needs to be at all times and which parent is likely to be available to make sure that they get there.

Next, you'll want to have an open and honest discussion with your ex about what you each want and can handle. This will include everything from broad-stroke custody percentages to individual holidays. As you get more and more granular, you might find that you are able to build a comprehensive parenting schedule from the ground up.

If this proves impossible, there is an infrastructure in place that can help. When you take a custody dispute to court, you give up a lot of agency, but you are also guaranteed to come out of it with an equitable and workable plan.

# What are some typical custody arrangements?

## 1. 50/50 Child Custody

50/50 custody is when each parent has an equal share of parenting time. Usually, this simply means alternating between parents at consistent intervals, two days long, a week-long, or two weeks long, depending on the specific needs and circumstances of the family.

There's also a popular 50/50 schedule known as 2-2-5-5, which we'll discuss later.

## 2. 60/40 Child Custody

If you and your co-parent have decided on a 60/40 custody arrangement, then you've probably already noticed that this doesn't correspond with the calendar very easily. In order to facilitate one parent having the child 60% of the time and the other 40% of the time, you'll need to pay more attention to drop-off times.

For instance, if your child is dropped off at one parent's house at 9:00 AM every Friday and dropped off at the other parent's house at 3:00 PM every Monday, then you'll end up with one parent having 60% weekday custody and the other having 40% extended weekend custody.

The other option is to use special occasions like holidays and school breaks to make sure the math works out correctly. In any case, a 60/40 schedule requires a little bit of creativity, but offers enough time to maintain meaningful relationships with both parents.

## 3. 70/30 Child Custody

A 70/30 custody arrangement roughly equates to one parent having the child on weekdays and the other having the child on weekends. Technically, this is actually about 71/29 custody, so maybe the weekend parent will also have the child on an additional holiday or two.

## 4. 80/20 Child Custody

Remember the "extended weekend" arrangement we discussed in relation to 60/40 custody? Well, doing that every other weekend is a great way to institute a simple, streamlined 80/20 schedule.

Like all the other custody percentage breakdowns, there are plenty of different creative ways to accomplish an 80/20 split. You also might want to consider extended weekend visits on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th weekend of the month, for example. The world is your oyster!

## 5. 2-2-5-5 Child Custody

A lot of parents lament missing out on weekends with their children but also don't want to ever have to go a full week without seeing their kids. This 50/50 schedule was designed to solve that problem.

Under this arrangement, the child spends 2 days with each parent, then 5 days with each parent, then the schedule repeats. As a result, parents end up alternating weekends and never have to go more than 5 days without seeing their kid.

# What is the best custody arrangement for a 1-year-old?

One of your greatest concerns should be preventing separation anxiety, so you'll want to come up with specific provisions about handing your child off between parents. For example, it's generally recommended that children exclusively get dropped off rather than picked up, so that it never feels like one parent is interrupting the quality time that they are having with the other.

## When are you entitled to full custody of your kid?

Nowadays, courts really favor some kind of shared custody. Sole custody is usually only awarded if the other parent has been shown to be abusive or neglectful to the child.

### FAQ

#### **What are legitimate legal reasons to deny overnight visitation?**

Basically, overnight visitation can only be denied to a parent if it is shown to be against the best interests of the child. This applies to situations of abuse, neglect, or a refusal to adhere to a previous court-ordered custody arrangement.

A custody evaluation by a social worker can determine if and when denying overnight visitation is appropriate.

#### **What are appropriate overnight visitation rights and schedules for infants?**

As we discussed above, overnight visitation can be really hard on very young infants. This is even more complicated if the baby is being breastfed.

In most cases, it is a good idea to wait until a child is at least a few months old before they begin switching off between households.

#### **How does school enrollment work with children in joint custody?**

If two parents share custody and reside in different school districts, then the child has the option of enrolling in either school district.

#### **How do child custody schedules affect child support payments?**

Every state has its formula for calculating child support, but the rule of thumb is that the more parenting time you have, the less support you will be responsible for paying.

In case you're wondering, yes, a child's primary caregiver might still be responsible for support payments if they also happen to be the primary earner.