

PARENTING PLANS DURING DIVORCE MEDIATION



February 4, 2019

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The first item of discussion when couples who have children start a mediation is the Parenting Plan. We work out a comprehensive parenting plan that works for the separating or divorcing family. Remember no matter what direction you take, you will be parents forever.

Unlike the decisions regarding the distribution of the property which would include the marital residence, assets and retirement plans, a parenting plan is an ongoing agreement which the parents and children will live with for a long period of time. It is also a plan which may be changed with agreement as the children get older or if the plan just isn't working out the way it was initially agreed to.

Many times when clients come to divorce mediation they have a good relationship with each other but they haven't considered future issues which may come up. An experienced mediator who is or was also a divorce attorney would most likely have seen issues come up that people would not initially think of.

A couple may recognize that their marriage is over and are ready to move on and start a new life but may need help with suggestions and options as they work out a parenting plan. Very often a couple who do get along may tend to want to be vague and general about their parenting plan. They avoid specific times for arranging parenting time with the children including specific times when pickup and drop off should occur with the children; instead, they talk in terms of "mutually agreeing."

They say they will "be flexible" regarding vacations and holidays instead of identifying specific periods of time and specific holidays. Flexibility is important however, specific times, dates will be helpful for planning and for routines for the children. It is also important if in the future there are other spouses or the blending of families.

Therefore, it is important to be specific and definitive when developing a parenting plan. You can always be flexible if the other parent is willing. There are numerous other issues to go into your parenting plan such as decision-making, communication, education concerns, medical treatment, religious concerns, and disciplinary issues for the children.

Remember divorce is about you, parenting is about the children. Stay tuned for my next blog on joint custody!

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