

How to Prepare Yourself to Mediate Your Parenting Plan:

A. “Guideline Support”

Most couples do not have both an equal income and an equal ability to share time with their children and therefore in most families with children who have not yet graduated from high school child support will have to be calculated. The purpose of child support is to ensure the child(ren) can have the same or similar lifestyle regardless of which parent they are with. All California judges and courts follow the same guidelines when calculating child support; this is called Guideline Child Support. Because the formula used to determine what Guideline Support is, is so complicated, the court depends on a few computer programs authorized by the Judicial Council to calculate monthly child support owed. You and your spouse are responsible for providing me with the information I input into this program. We will do this together in my office. To perform the Guideline Support calculation for you I need the following information:

- 1.If you have worked out a timeshare plan for the child(ren) we will input the percentage of time the children will spend with each parent. If you have not come to an agreement yet we will work on your parenting schedule before we begin any calculations of child support.
- 2.You will need to each bring in your completed Income and Expense Declaration, the FL-150, with attached paystubs, or if you are self-employed your Schedule C from your last tax year and/or you current P & L.
- 3.Your pay stubs will contain the information we need to input the available tax deductions you are each entitled to such as: health insurance and mandatory retirement contributions.
- 4.If you own a home I will need your monthly interest payment(s), and your annual property taxes.
- 5.If you have other sources of income: rental, trust funds, royalties, irregular bonuses, disability, retirement income or any other source of taxable or non-taxable income bring the details.

Guideline support continues until each child attains the age of 19 or graduates from High School (whichever occurs first) or emancipates, marries or dies. Guideline support remains subject to changes in the factors listed above that we input to calculate it. We'll discuss this in more detail when we meet.

B. Child Support Add-ons

In addition to Guideline Support that is determined by inputting all your data into the Guideline Calculator, there are child support add-on's. Two are mandatory, some are discretionary and up to you to negotiate.

These two are mandatory pursuant to **Family Code §4062**:

1. Childcare so each of you can work 50/50*
2. Uninsured medical/dental/orthodontia/counselling costs 50/50

*Whether summer camp is considered "child care" makes a big difference in child support obligations. The primary factor considered by the courts is whether summer camp a child-care expense that must be shared 50/50? If both parents are working, summer camp is essentially taking the place of necessary childcare expense so both parents can work or go to school fulltime. Summer camps can get costly, they may be a cost you will want to specifically negotiate into your Marital Settlement Agreement.

You can also agree to negotiate discretionary items to help share the responsibility of raising your children some examples are:

1. Most parents also agree to a 50/50 cost sharing for "agreed upon" extra-curricular activities. If you have one or more children with very expensive lessons you may wish to consider a proportionate cost sharing that is more closely aligned with your net available incomes. You will want to discuss the scope of "extra-curricular activities."
2. Pet care, veterinary expenses, boarding and misc. pet expenses for a pet that moves with the child(ren)
3. Purchase of capital expenditures and who pays the ongoing related account expenses for maintenance, repair, account expenses for larger purchases used at both houses such as: computers/tablets, cell phone, car and associated expenses
4. Will your children have an allowance, how much, who pays?
5. College fund: do you have or want one. How will it be funded?
6. Requirement that each spouse be allowed to insure the other's life, so that in the event of premature death the surviving parent can manage the child rearing expenses on their own
7. In the event your children go to college do you do you want child support to continue beyond graduation from high school?
8. Do you currently have a college fund or allocated savings and/or how college will be funded? What will happen to the fund if your child(ren) do not go to college?
9. Do you want your child to go on optional school trips? How will they be funded?
10. Life insurance so support is protected in event parent dies prematurely?

C. Non-financial Parenting Guidelines You May Want Included in Your Parenting Plan:

Some parents like to include non-financial matters in their parenting plan too. Here are some parenting decisions, some of you may want to negotiate now, so they are included in your Marital Settlement Agreement:

1. What constitutes an “extra-curricular activity”?
2. How will extra-curricular activities be chosen?
3. Who will get the children to the chosen activities?
4. Will children be driven by others? What criteria?
5. Do you need an expert tie breaker if the two of you disagree on medical treatments, counselling or other discretionary care?
6. When will you allow your children to get a driver’s license? Will you require a minimum GPA or some other standard of performance from your child?
7. What will be your policy as to when your child has his/her own cell phone and other electronics? Will they be shared between households? Whose account?
8. Tutoring, language classes, religious studies?
9. If your child has special needs how will you address his/her needs after age 19/or graduation from high school?
10. Is vacation with each parent out of the Country okay? How much notice? Who will arrange for passports and who will be the keeper of the passports?
11. If you have family out of State, do you want a holiday schedule that includes visits with them?
12. If you observe religious/cultural holidays/events how do you want to share those times?
13. Can either parent move away with the child? If so how far and what are the pro-conditions to a move away?
14. Will each household stock sufficient clothing for each child?
15. Are there any people your child should not have contact with?
16. Are there family members who will provide childcare?
17. In the event either of you starts a new relationship do you want to agree that you will tell the other parent about the relationship before introducing the child(ren) to the new relationship?
18. How do you want to communicate about parenting: emails/quarterly meetings or on some other schedule of meeting?
19. Do you want the first right of refusal to offer childcare if the other parent is not available to do so during their parenting time? If so how long of a period must a parent be busy before they should offer the time to the other parent?

20. Do you have a family pet or pets, and if so does their care and movement need to be included in the parenting plan?

This is not an exhaustive list of considerations, but it should help you to think through how you'd like these anticipated costs to be shared and how much detail you want in your family plan.