KNIGHT
MEDIATIONS



THE COMPLETE GUIDE

CUSTODY & PARENTING PLANS IN OKLAHOMA.

How Oklahoma approaches custody, how to choose a schedule that fits your children, and how to write a plan that holds, with the worksheets to build it.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read chapters 01 through 03 first. Then sit down with a calendar and fill in the builder in chapter 04, the holiday table in chapter 06 and the decision table in chapter 07. Bring them to your attorney and to mediation. Most of your parenting plan will already be written.

WRITE THE PLAN FOR THE CHILD YOU HAVE, AND THE ONE THEY'RE BECOMING.

The best parenting plans fit today's family and say how they'll grow as the children do.

01

CHAPTER ONE

HOW OKLAHOMA APPROACHES CUSTODY.

THE STANDARD

Oklahoma courts decide custody based on what appears to be in the best interests of the child's physical, mental and moral welfare (43 O.S. § 109).

THE CHILD'S VOICE

A child 12 or older is presumed old enough to form an intelligent preference, which the court may consider. It isn't the deciding factor (43 O.S. § 113).

UNMARRIED PARENTS

Oklahoma Human Services explains that the mother is presumed to have sole custody of a child born outside of marriage until there's an agreement or court order.

Courts don't ask which parent is better. They ask what arrangement serves this child best. When parents answer that question themselves, in a plan they both sign, the court's job becomes approving it.

TWO KINDS OF CUSTODY

Legal custody is about decisions: school, health care, religion. **Physical custody** is about where the children live and the schedule. Oklahoma's joint custody law covers sharing all or some of both.

JOINT CUSTODY NEEDS A WRITTEN PLAN

When either parent asks for joint custody, the parents file a plan, together or separately. By law it must cover the children's living arrangements, child support, medical and dental care, school placement and visitation, with an affidavit from each parent agreeing to follow it. The court then issues a final plan (43 O.S. § 109).

FREQUENT CONTACT WITH BOTH PARENTS

Oklahoma's policy is for children to have frequent and continuing contact with parents who have shown they can act in the children's best interests. Since November 2021, if a parent asks, the court may provide substantially equal access, unless shared parenting would harm the children (Oklahoma Bar Association).

SAFETY COMES FIRST

When a court finds domestic violence, stalking or harassment, the law presumes that custody or shared parenting with the person responsible isn't in the child's best interest (43 O.S. §§ 109, 109.3). That's why every family mediation starts with confidential screening.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TEN PARTS OF A STRONG PLAN.

Most parenting-plan fights start in a part the plan left out. Check yours against all ten.

1 THE REGULAR SCHEDULE

Who has the children which days and nights, in a repeating pattern.

2 HOLIDAYS AND BIRTHDAYS

Each one named, with exact start and end times, and which schedule wins.

3 SUMMER AND SCHOOL BREAKS

The summer pattern, vacation weeks and a deadline to choose them.

4 EXCHANGES

Where, when and who drives. School is often the easiest exchange point.

5 DECISIONS

Who decides school, health, religion and activities, and how ties are broken.

6 INFORMATION

How school, medical and activity information is shared between homes.

7 COMMUNICATION

One channel, a response time, and what counts as urgent.

8 TRAVEL AND MOVES

Notice for trips, passports, and Oklahoma's relocation rules.

9 MONEY

Child support, insurance, medical and dental costs, child care and activities.

10 CHANGING THE PLAN

How you'll handle the next change: talk first, then mediation, before anyone files.

CHAPTER THREE

CHOOSING A SCHEDULE.

Here are five common two-week patterns, Monday to Sunday. **A** and **B** are the two homes. None is “right.” The best one fits your children’s ages, your work and the distance between homes.

ALTERNATING WEEKS

OVERNIGHTS 7 / 7



Often fits: Older children and teens; parents who live close to school.

Watch for: Seven days is a long time for young children to go without seeing a parent.

2-2-3

OVERNIGHTS 7 / 7



Often fits: Young children, who see both parents every few days.

Watch for: Lots of exchanges. Works best when parents live near each other and communicate well.

2-2-5-5

OVERNIGHTS 7 / 7



Often fits: Families who want the same weekdays every week, for activities and routines.

Watch for: The five-day stretches can feel long for very young children.

3-4-4-3

OVERNIGHTS 7 / 7



Often fits: Families who want fewer exchanges than 2-2-3 with frequent contact.

Watch for: Weekday patterns shift between weeks, so a shared calendar matters.

EVERY OTHER WEEKEND, PLUS A MIDWEEK VISIT

OVERNIGHTS 12 / 2



Often fits: Parents who live far apart, or when one parent’s schedule is limited.

Watch for: One parent misses most school-week life. Midweek time and calls help.

White dots mark a midweek dinner or visit without an overnight. Overnight counts are per two weeks. Oklahoma’s child support guidelines can adjust for substantial parenting time (43 O.S. § 118E); ask your attorney how your schedule affects support.

04

CHAPTER FOUR · WORKSHEET

BUILD YOUR TWO WEEKS.

Start with your children's real fortnight: school, practices, church, the nights each parent works. Shade or initial each overnight. Then fill in who handles mornings, pickups and activities. Try it in pencil. Most families sketch two or three versions before one feels right.

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
OVERNIGHT WITH														
MORNING / DROP-OFF														
PICKUP														
ACTIVITIES														

What does each parent's work week look like?

How far apart are the homes, and from school?

What routines matter most to the children?

What would make exchanges easier?

The test: live a "normal" Tuesday under this schedule from the children's point of view. Who wakes them, who drives, where they sleep, who helps with homework. If it works on a Tuesday, it'll usually work.

CHAPTER FIVE

AGE CHANGES EVERYTHING.

A schedule that works for a ten-year-old rarely works for a ten-month-old, or a sixteen-year-old. Write the plan for your children's stage, and say how it will change as they grow.

BABIES & TODDLERS

0 TO ABOUT 3

- Shorter, more frequent time with each parent
- The same routine in both homes: naps, feeding, bedtime
- A shared log of sleep, meals and milestones
- Plans for feeding, including nursing
- A step-up schedule with dates or ages for longer stretches and overnights

SCHOOL AGE

ABOUT 5 TO 12

- The school calendar drives the plan
- Homework, bedtimes and screen rules close in both homes
- Both parents at conferences and games
- Activities agreed in advance, with costs shared
- Longer stretches often work well, including alternating weeks

TEENAGERS

ABOUT 13 TO 18

- A framework with room to flex around jobs, practices and friends
- Agreements on driving, cars, insurance and curfews
- Room for the teen's voice, without putting them in the middle
- In Oklahoma, a child 12 or older is presumed able to form a preference the court may consider

SIBLINGS DON'T ALWAYS NEED THE SAME SCHEDULE.

A plan can keep siblings together most of the time while giving a teenager more flexibility or an infant shorter stretches. Just write it clearly.

CHAPTER SIX · WORKSHEET

HOLIDAYS, BIRTHDAYS AND SUMMER.

Write every day that matters, with an exact start and end. Holiday time usually overrides the regular schedule; say so in the plan, and say whether the regular rotation picks up or restarts afterward.

HOLIDAY	STARTS	ENDS	EVEN YEARS	ODD YEARS
Spring break				
Easter / Passover				
Mother’s Day				
Memorial Day				
Father’s Day				
July 4th				
Labor Day				
Halloween				
Thanksgiving				
Winter break, first half				
Winter break, second half				
Children’s birthdays				
Our family’s days				

SUMMER

Pick a pattern, then set a date each spring by which parents choose vacation weeks, and a tie-breaker.

TRAVEL

Notice before overnight or out-of-state trips, an itinerary, and calls with the other parent while away.

PASSPORTS

For a child under 16, both parents generally must approve a U.S. passport application. Say who keeps it.

CHAPTER SEVEN · WORKSHEET

DECISIONS, INFORMATION AND MONEY.

Day-to-day choices belong to whichever parent has the children. Major decisions need a plan. Mark who decides each one, and what happens if you disagree.

DECISION	TOGETHER	PARENT A	PARENT B	IF WE DISAGREE
School and education				
Non-emergency health				
Counseling				
Religion				
Activities				
Phones and driving				

INFORMATION

Oklahoma law makes certain records available to both parents. Agree on how report cards, appointments and activity schedules are shared, and use one shared calendar (43 O.S. § 109.6).

MONEY

Child support follows Oklahoma's guidelines. The plan should also say who carries health insurance, how uncovered medical and dental costs, child care and activities are split, and how reimbursements work.

A TIE-BREAKER ISN'T A POWER GRAB. IT'S HOW A DISAGREEMENT ENDS BEFORE IT REACHES A JUDGE.

Common tie-breakers: talk within a set number of days, then a short mediation session, or a parenting coordinator for families who need ongoing help (43 O.S. § 120.1 and following).

CHAPTER EIGHT

TALKING, EXCHANGES AND THE RULES OF THE ROAD.

COMMUNICATION RULES THAT HOLD UP

ONE CHANNEL.
An app, a shared calendar or email. One place, every time.

A RESPONSE TIME.
Non-urgent messages answered within a day.

URGENT MEANS A CALL.
Emergency room, missed pickup, a child who isn't where they should be.

ABOUT THE CHILDREN.
Brief, informative, friendly. Old arguments go elsewhere.

NO MESSENGERS.
Children never carry notes, money or questions between homes.

THE READ-ALOUD TEST.
If you wouldn't want a judge to hear it read aloud, rewrite it.

EXCHANGES
Name the place, the time and who drives. Keep handoffs short, polite and on time, with no adult conversations. School or daycare makes many exchanges disappear entirely. If face-to-face exchanges stay tense, use a neutral public place.

NEW PARTNERS
Many plans include a simple understanding about introducing new partners to the children: when, how, and with notice to the other parent. It prevents some of the most painful surprises.

FIRST OPTION
If a parent can't be with the children for more than a set number of hours, the other parent is asked first. Agree on the number: four hours, six, overnight only.

TWO HOMES, CLOSE RULES
Parents don't need identical homes. Agreeing on a few basics, like bedtimes, homework and screens, takes away the incentive to play one house against the other.

CHAPTER NINE

SPECIAL SITUATIONS.

MOVING AWAY

In Oklahoma, moving a child's principal residence more than 75 miles for 60 days or more is a relocation. The moving parent generally must give written notice by mail at least 60 days ahead, and the other parent has 30 days to object (43 O.S. § 112.3). Long-distance plans rebuild the school year, summers, travel and video time.

SHIFT WORK

Nurses, first responders, refinery and airline crews: tie the schedule to the rotation instead of weekdays, set rules for posting schedules and swaps, and plan exchanges around shift change.

UNMARRIED PARENTS

An Acknowledgment of Paternity establishes the legal father, and either parent can cancel it within 60 days. It doesn't create a schedule. A court-approved plan does.

MILITARY FAMILIES

Oklahoma's Deployed Parents Custody and Visitation Act covers parents called to service, including temporary orders and visitation during deployment (43 O.S. § 150 and following). Ask your attorney how it applies.

HIGH CONFLICT

Separate rooms or video, staggered arrivals, written proposals and very specific terms. The more specific the plan, the fewer chances for the next fight.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Screening comes first. If someone can't negotiate freely or safely, mediation may not be appropriate. Oklahoma also has a supervised visitation program for families who need it. If you're in danger, call 911.

Children with special needs: plans can address therapies, medical routines, school supports, equipment that travels between homes, and support that may continue past 18 for a disabled adult child. These plans deserve extra time in mediation.

EVERY FAMILY IS A SPECIAL SITUATION. THE PLAN JUST HAS TO SAY HOW YOURS WORKS.

If something about your family doesn't fit a standard schedule, that isn't a problem to hide. It's the part of the plan most worth writing carefully.

CHAPTER TEN

WHEN THE PLAN NEEDS TO CHANGE.

THE LEGAL STANDARD

Parents with joint custody can agree to modify their plan; the court approves changes that serve the child's best interests (43 O.S. § 109). To change custody over a parent's objection, courts generally look for a significant, lasting change in conditions.

Children grow, jobs change, people move. When a plan stops fitting, most families do best updating it together: a conversation first, then a mediation session, usually a half day. Oklahoma also allows courts to appoint a parenting coordinator for families who need ongoing help resolving day-to-day disagreements.

Build the next change into today's plan: a step-up schedule for a young child, a review when a child starts middle school, a clause that sends disagreements to mediation before anyone files.

IS YOUR PLAN READY?

- ☐ A repeating schedule, with exact times
- ☐ Summer, vacation deadlines and travel
- ☐ Decisions, school placement, and a tie-breaker
- ☐ Communication rules
- ☐ Relocation and passports
- ☐ Every holiday named, start and end
- ☐ Exchanges: where, when, who drives
- ☐ Information sharing and one calendar
- ☐ Support, medical and dental, shared costs
- ☐ How the plan will change

The stranger test: could someone who has never met your family read the plan and know exactly where the children are at 3 p.m. on December 24? If not, keep writing.

WORDS YOU'LL HEAR

Legal custody: the right to make major decisions for a child.

Physical custody: where the child lives, and the schedule.

Joint custody: parents share all or some aspects of custody under a court-approved plan.

Parenting plan: the written plan for time, decisions and responsibilities.

Parenting coordinator: a neutral appointed to help parents resolve ongoing disagreements.

Relocation: a move of a child's home that triggers Oklahoma's notice rules.

Step-up schedule: parenting time that expands as a young child grows.

First option: the other parent is asked first when a parent can't be with the children.

ONE LAST THING

YOUR CHILDREN WILL REMEMBER HOW IT FELT, NOT WHAT THE PLAN SAID.

The schedule, the holidays and the decisions all matter. But what children carry with them is whether their parents could find a way to work together. You don't have to like each other to do that. You only have to keep putting them first. A good plan makes that easier on every ordinary Tuesday for years to come.



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Sources: Oklahoma Statutes, Title 43, §§ 109, 109.3, 109.6, 112.3, 113, 118–119, 118E, 120.1–120.7, 150–150.10 (Oklahoma Senate compilation, oksenate.gov); Oklahoma Bar Association, "Is Divorce the Answer for You?"; Oklahoma Human Services, Paternity FAQ; U.S. Department of State, passports for children under 16.

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