

50/50 Parenting After Separation

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When parents separate, children are angry and sad because they deeply want the love of both parents. One way people address the children's wants is to do 50/50 parenting where the children are with each parent half the time. This seems like the fairest solution to the parents because they get equal time. That doesn't mean it is always in the child's best interest.

When looking at the best interests of the child, minimizing the disruption during the separation is a factor. Look at their current relationship the children have with each parent and with one another. What are its strengths that can be built upon?

A child's temperament is an important consideration during the separation transition. Some children handle change better than others.

The age of the child is also a factor in parenting plans. Small children don't always understand when one parent is away that they will be coming back. A rule of thumb in 50/50 parenting is basing the transition days on the age of the child (i.e. a four year old transitions every four days).

Where the children live is sometimes also where they go to school and have all their friends and activities. How might moving back-and-forth between parents affect these things?

Looking at things from the child's perspective is a good place to start however the parent's reality completes the picture. What are the parent's work schedules and how much flexibility do they have?

Some people think that by doing 50/50 parenting, it eliminates the need for one party paying child support to the other. Canada's Child Support Guidelines specifically state that the children should "continue to benefit from the financial means of **both** spouses after separation." If one parent makes more money than the other, their responsibility is to support their children accordingly.

One couple I know had the children stay in the family home and the parents moved in and out based on their parenting schedule.

As a mediator, I've heard people talking about valuing parenting time higher than childcare time. They sometimes write into their agreements the "first right of refusal." This means if one parent needs childcare during their normal time with the children, they contact the other parent first who has the option to accept or refuse before other childcare providers are considered.

In parenting time, the best interests of the child should be the biggest consideration.