



A Guide to Parallel Parenting

Contents

- 3 Introduction
- 4 Definition
- 5 Purpose
- 6 Details
- 7 Arguments
- 8 What's Best
- 9 The Change
- 10 The Letter

Introduction

Let's talk about parallel parenting...

Parallel parenting is a term used more and more in the blended family world.. It bridges the gap between the ideal low to no conflict cases and, in the other extreme, very high conflict ones. The latter leaves very little room for effective communication and co-parenting - enter the parallel parenting plan.

The high conflict cases of which we speak are not just those where the parents have trouble getting along. We are talking about one or both **parent's narcissistic or borderline personality** or hostility that make co-parenting all but impossible. This includes situations where:

- one or both parents still harbor resentment toward the another due to the breakup or separation and that affects communication and the willingness to co-parent;
- one or both parents do not respect the other parent's role and refuse to work with the other;
- one or both parents have related emotional upheaval that doesn't allow for effective communication.

This guide is intended to educate on what Parallel Parenting entails, how it may work in a child custody case, and how to implement it without changes to the parenting plan.

Nothing contained in this guide is legal advice. Your situation is unique. Consulting with an attorney is recommended.

Definition

Parallel parenting is parenting without traditional co-parenting and communication. It allows the parents to detach from each other and not engage in frequent discussions about day-to-day issues. Each parent is in charge of the custodial decisions while the children are under that parent's care. **Parallel parenting gives each parent control over their parenting responsibilities.** It does so without the need for approval of the other parent or even communicate about anything other than an emergency or other serious issues.

Parallel parenting does not mean "no contact."

Parallel parenting minimizes contact and the limits are on issues that are necessary to discuss.

In a parallel parenting plan, the communication is far more direct, with minimal emotion. For example, rather than telephone or face-to-face communication where "hearing the other parent's voice" could cause high conflict parents to react, there is an alternative mode of communication. This alternative suppresses unnecessary opinions or editorial comments.

In high-conflict situations email or text messages are not ideal. Programs like **"Our Family Wizard"** (ourfamilywizard.com) are great alternatives.

Purpose

What is the primary purpose of parallel parenting?

Some believe that parallel parenting avoids conflict altogether. While that is what may eventually occur, that is not the primary goal. **The goal of parallel parenting is to avoid conflict in front of the children.**

Studies have shown that children who witness high conflict between their parents can **suffer from psychological and behavioral problems in their own life.**

The focus of any child custody case is not the mother or father but what is in the best interests of the children. Any parenting plan the family court puts together must have that as its foundation and core intent.

Parallel parenting plans must be specific

Because parallel parenting, unlike a co-parenting situation, cannot rely on regular communication, the child custody order must cut out as much "need for communication" as reasonably possible.

A traditional child custody order may set holidays and vacation schedules for a certain duration and leave much of its details to the parties' agreement.

Details

A parallel parenting plan and custody order should specifically state:

- the start and end time of each custodial segment,
- the specific exchange place, and
- elimination of other issues that could cause conflict if there is miscommunication or the court order is vague.

Typically a parallel parenting plan order would include:

- the specific days of the visits,
- the specific start times and end times,
- the pick up and drop off location,
- specific provisions about cancellation and make up time, if any,
- responsibility for transportation, and
- what happens after a dispute between the parents over the custody schedule.

Arguments

The most compelling argument against parallel parenting is that it gives up on co-parenting. In extreme situations, that is actually a true statement. But, is that really a bad thing for the children if the children are the focus?

In an ideal scenario parents would be able to co-parent and communicate. But it simply will not happen in some situations. **When the problems are self-evident and there is no other way to protect the children, we must explore alternatives.**

Parallel parenting doesn't so much deprive a parent of frequent and continuous contact nor take away any rights as it does change the way parents communicate with one another about those rights.

The best and worst of parallel parenting

At its most efficient, the children avoid seeing conflict between their parents. At its most idealistic, the parents cool down the hostilities and work toward a co-parenting arrangement.

At its worst, it doesn't work and the court makes other orders depending on which of the parents is causing the parallel parenting to fail.

What's Best?

Giving co-parenting and communication a chance....

Should parallel parenting be the first parenting plan? Especially when there has not been a history of unresolvable conflict?

The short answer in my opinion is no. If there is a history of conflict that validates the plan or co-parenting and communication has clearly failed in the child custody proceeding, parallel parenting makes more sense.

Elements such as limiting communication, except through specific means, are a starting point. We can add other elements of parallel parenting when necessary, including something as extreme as dividing joint legal custodial decisions.

Can you move to Parallel Parenting without changing the parenting plan?

Yes. As stated, a huge part of Parallel Parenting is the ways in which you communicate, and separating the expectations between houses. This can be done by communicating clear boundaries with the other home. It's often helpful to educate the other home what Parallel Parenting is before you lay out your expectations.

The Change

Ready to make the transition?

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- 1) The shift to Parallel Parenting is an effort to establish a boundary. In many cases, the situation is so high conflict having a respectful discussion with the other house is not realistic (If you could, you probably wouldn't be here!); therefore, you do not need the approval of the other home in order to move forward.
YOU ARE NOT ASKING FOR PERMISSION.
- 2) Be prepared for backlash and defensiveness. Remember, this is an effort to enhance the quality of life within your home and blended family. The other side may respond negatively due to the loss of control. Be ready to defend those boundaries.
- 3) If you won't be involving the courts/changing the parenting plan, still gather any documentation you have as evidence that your efforts to "co-parent" have been unsuccessful. TIP: Check out the Court Book also available as a FREE resource.
- 4) Decide what your expectations are moving forward and be prepared to communicate them clearly.

I have provided an email template to help guide you.

The Letter

Sometimes switching to Parallel Parenting is more of a mental and emotional shift—perhaps you’ve been doing it all along and you didn’t know it. In those cases, it’s not really necessary to make any sort of announcement to the other home. OR—if you feel sharing this change will cause more conflict with the other home it may be best to move forward without an announcement.

However, if you feel the changes will be drastic or the boundaries need to be more formally addressed, it may be beneficial to reach out to the other parent and explain what to expect moving forward. I’ve included a sample letter of what that might look like.

What You’ll notice:

- **Stick to the facts**
- **Keep opinions/emotions out of it**
- **Avoid defensiveness**
- **State clear expectations**
- **You’ll notice the word “we”. It may be safe to assume this letter would be coming from your significant other. It is based on your individual**

BM's Name,

We are writing out of courtesy to inform you of the change in approach as we move forward in our parenting arrangement.

((Describe your reasoning for the change with facts/examples))

We were hopeful in believing that the weekly emails and updates would establish consistency and stability for **CHILD**. Despite our openness and collaboration, it is apparent you don't have an interest collaborating in this partnership. Evidenced by **CHILD'S** diet, potty issues, who is entering and exiting **CHILD'S** life and how you want to move forward (or rather, not move forward) with his social skills and behavioral needs. You've continued to "hope he grows out of it" while we attempt to proactively move forward by getting him the help and resources that have been suggested and provided to him. This back and forth has been frustrating and is no longer sustainable for this arrangement.

((Introduce the concept of Parallel Parenting))

As we move forward, we'll be parallel parenting. If you're not familiar, I encourage you to research it further. Essentially, parallel parenting as opposed to co-parenting is a strategy in which we focus our energy away from our own engagement and keep it on our own individual parenting. This means each household may maintain different routines, rules, and expectations. This will allow us to re-focus our efforts on our own home instead of trying to be cohesive in both homes, when it's clear both functions differently.

((How the Child(ren) will be affected))

CHILD will continue to see that his parents can be cordial when around each other, and he will always know we all love him. This change in the arrangement will not change **kiddo's** view of his parents working together. If anything, this will make the arrangement stronger as there will be less tension and conflict behind the scenes.

((Be Clear in what can be expected – establishing boundaries))

What you can expect moving forward:

We will continue to abide by the parenting plan and all necessary decisions will still be discussed. What will change is the frequency in which we communicate and the content of our communication. We will not be providing weekly emails with all the updates of our week; Emailing could be once a month and be effective. We will also not be attending appointments together unless necessary.

Any attempts to negate this change will not be entertained. Perhaps after time we can get to a place where we can co-parent effectively. Until then, please respect our decision as we move forward.

Respectfully,

The best parents ever ☐:)

Good Luck

I hope you found this guide helpful. Change isn't easy, and neither is establishing boundaries. Remember, you're doing this for the health and sanity of your family. I believe in you and I am proud of you!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. You may email me at:
radicalstepmomspodcast@gmail.com

Be Well & Stay Radical,

Christina

