

TIME-SHARING SCHEDULES



for
INFANTS to ADOLESCENTS

BY LORI GROVER, NCM, NCMT
Nationally Certified Mediator & Mediator Trainer

Child-parent relationships after a divorce are not only important for parents to remain connected to their children, the relationships children have with both parents directly impacts their health and development.

While many states have adopted an automatic shared placement model unless it would be detrimental to the child, too many Family Courts still use the ‘primary parent/absent parent’ model which, mental health child experts across many professions agree, does not support healthy child development, fails to allow children to remain bonded with both parents, and does not represent how today’s families function.

One of the most important transitions of divorce is shifting a couples relationship from *personal*, to *parenting partners* as equals, rather than adversaries. For some parents, this shift can be emotionally difficult, and complicated by unqualified advice, biased/adversarial legal opinions, or mental health issues, all of which make creating a time-sharing schedule that supports children and meets their needs more difficult.

I know the only way to minimize the impact a divorce has on children and ensure their well-being depends on parents having access to **qualified** information they can trust and use when deciding on the best time-sharing schedule. A caveat to this is when mental health or control issues exist which prevent one or both parents from putting their child’s best interests above all else.

We take child welfare seriously. Information we make available to our clients is thoroughly vetted and up to date. The time-sharing schedules presented in this guide are adapted from 30 years of research by Dr. Linda Neilson, Professor of Adolescent & Educational Psychology at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and a Empirical Study on Parenting Plans

conducted by the Florida Chapter of the Association of Family & Conciliation Courts Parenting Plans Taskforce. Participants of this study include: Debra Carter, Ph.D., Laurie Pine Fisher, LICSW, Linda Fieldstone, M.Ed., Judge Dana Moreland, Jack Moring, Esq., Roxanne Permesly, LMHC, General Magistrate Lee A. Schreiber, Deborah Coe Silver, Psy.D., ABPP, NCSP, Robert Silver, Ph.D., ABPP, Nina Zolla, Esq., and Eric Bruce, Esq.

The findings of this study helped remove labels such as primary & secondary when referring to divorced parents and lead to redrafting the Florida statute to eliminate “winners & losers”. This Parenting Bill Passed in 2008, and other states have moved in the same direction of recognizing parents as equals, something children benefit from, and helps form a more unified post-divorce structure.

Hopefully this guide will help you make time-sharing decisions that support your child both now and as they grow in your new family dynamic.

BIRTH TO SIX MONTHS



The critical component for children from infancy to six months is developing a bond with both parents regardless of which parent is considered the primary caretaker. All children need love, affection, nurturing and attention but from birth to six months, this affection is required to nourish children's psychological and physical well-being; which is their seeking and receiving comfort.

Since the inception of the Tender Years Doctrine, the belief was that infants formed exclusive attachments to one primary caretaker during their first year of life and disrupting this bond would lead to life-long adjustment difficulties. This line of thinking prevented infants and young children from spending overnights away from their primary caretaker, usually mothers, jeopardizing the child's ability to bond with their father.

We know now young children are capable of bonding with both parents even if one of them takes on the role of primary caretaker, but this does not mean the child's developmental and emotional needs are being met if they are disconnected from their fathers.

The bonding process between children and their fathers at this age is at great risk when a father's time

is limited by traditional court-mandated visitation. The minimal contact children under this mandate prevents fathers from regularly taking part in the daily nurturing process and caregiving that creates the bond. Based on the fact that children develop well when both parents are actively involved in their lives from infancy, it is critical to structure time-sharing plans in a way that allows for both parents to participate in all aspects of caring for their child, which includes feeding, cuddling and bathing.

Professionals also believe it is better for children in this age group to have a limited number of familiar caretakers for strong bonding. Parents should also be mindful that infants are sensitive to their environments and are vulnerable, and not immune, to the effects of conflict around them.



It is important for children at this age to have a stable physical environment and routine to prevent anxiety.

Parental conflicts and chaotic or inconsistent co-parenting can be damaging for any child but for infants, the ability to recover from these effects depends on the child's bond with their parents and the ability of both parents to adequately meet the child's needs.

Whether infants have the capacity to remember an absent parent is unclear, however; many professionals suggest they may be capable of having emotional memories of circumstances that frighten them such as anger, harsh words or arguments.

Considering this, it is undeniable that the relationship parents have and their level of cooperation or conflict directly impacts the well-being of their children, even at such an early age.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

The most important element of creating a time sharing schedule for infants is to ensure they maintain their relationship with their primary caretakers and the parent who may not be the primary caretaker.



If a child has been primarily cared for by one parent, with little exposure to the other parent, it's not unusual for them to experience adjustment difficulties when transitioning between parents. While this can be unsettling for parents, it should not be considered a sign that the child doesn't want to be with the other parent, barring any abuse or neglect.

When children show signs of stress, it indicates they need time to adjust to the new schedule and environment. Under these circumstances transitions can be eased by initially structuring the time based on each parents' caretaking responsibilities before the divorce – if both parents were involved, then increasing the time as the child becomes more comfortable with the caretaking and contact with that parent.

At this stage in a child's life, it is about ensuring the time-sharing schedule is comfortable for them, doesn't create anxiety and fosters parental bonding. I believe one of the most controversial findings in the field of child psychology and development, which is also unsettling for some parents, is that infants can spend overnights with both parents when they are cooperative, and

their roles are unified, as is the case with cooperative and parallel parents. In the case of conflicted parents, overnights should be introduced gradually and well coordinated when they can both provide the child with the same level of care, nurturing and consistency without exposing the child to conflict.

If parents have established continuity in their care and nurturing, children at this age can tolerate spending every other night with each parent without negative impact. It's more likely that parents suffer more anxiety when young children are with their other parent than children themselves, and this is where parents need to make the emotional adjustment of not having their children spending every night with them. If a child is breastfed, breast milk should be sent to the other parent when the child will be with them.

Regardless of the time-sharing schedule, infants have difficulty tolerating extended separation from those they have bonded with, so separations from either parent should not exceed two or three days. If the child spends more than three days away from one parent, provisions should be made for that parent to spend time with the child and caring for the child during the lapse in parenting time.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS TO THREE YEARS



From around eighteen months, children have the ability to separate from their parents and are developing a sense of independence. Since at this age children are beginning to grasp the concept of how others exist independently from them, they are capable of handling longer periods of separation from their caretakers than infants.

This age is also when children begin testing limits and seeking boundaries. With an increasing and expanding awareness, most children are able to tolerate spending one or two days away from their familiar home environment, but separation from either parent should not be more than a day or two. Just like infants, children at this age will do best transitioning between their parent's homes when there is an established, coordinated routine and schedule at both homes including bathing time, playtime and feeding.

A predictable routine provides the consistency children at this age need and can help keep the relationship between parents open and cooperative. The goal for parents with children in this age group is to continue to develop and nurture the relationship each of them has with their child through

involvement that is both on-going and frequent. Parents must also be aware that children at this age are sensitive to non-verbal communication, so if parents are unable or unwilling to manage their emotions, involving a neutral third party to assist with transitioning the child between homes can shield the child from parental conflict.

From eighteen months to the age of three, time spent away from either parent should not exceed three days and nights whenever possible. If parents have been able to establish a cohesive routine at both homes, alternating three consecutive overnights with each parent can be implemented provided the child has adjusted to both homes. If the child hasn't adjusted, overnights should be implemented gradually to align with the child's level of comfort and tolerance.

If a child hasn't fully adjusted to an alternating three-day schedule, it's important for parents to be understanding of where their child is in the adjustment process while still gradually introducing the schedule and providing adequate time for the child to spend with the other parent.



Just because it may take time for a child to adjust to their new family dynamic doesn't mean they should not spend time or overnights with their other parent. I often hear this issue arise between parents during mediation where one parent, usually the primary caretaker, raises numerous objections to their children spending so much time with the other parent.

While this concern is understandable, parents must be aware that much of the anxiety children experience is learned from their environment. If children sense anxiety or fear, they will react accordingly. The best way for parents to help their children adjust is with patience and positive reinforcement. As long as both parents are supportive, the child will adjust in time.

In situations where one parent is not up to speed with providing the necessary care for their child,

they should still have frequent, daily contact in an appropriate setting. Some parents use the child's most familiar home for this time sharing as an interim arrangement, so the interaction is comfortable, and quality child-parent time can be spent together until that parent can adequately manage the care-taking responsibilities on their own. Even if the child does not transition to the other parent's home, this type of contact and care fosters the bond between the child and the other parent.

If this arrangement isn't possible or comfortable for either parent, utilizing the home of a trusted friend or relative allows the parent and child to spend quality time together with the support and guidance of others who can assist the parent in acquiring the necessary care-taking skills.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS



By the age of three children can tolerate periods of two to three days with each parent or three days with one parent and four days with the other, alternating every other week.

Appropriate schedules for this age include 3 days with one parent and 4 days with the other parent, a split week where the child is with each parent 3 1/2 days or 2 1/2 days and alternating weekends.

Vacations

Vacations with children are important and offer quality time regardless of whether parents travel, take day trips or just have a period of time together. By the age of three, children can tolerate up to seven days away from their other parent. Since each child is different, professionals suggest some children may tolerate up to four days on a regular basis better than one longer period., particularly at first.

Quality, one-on-one vacation time with both parents is important for children but the exact time and duration varies from child to child.

When either parent is vacationing with the children, whether there is traveling involved or not, every effort should be made for the child to easily communicate directly and freely with their other parent.

Daily telephone calls, face-time or Skype are all options that will allow children to stay connected to their other parent and build trust in their ability to communicate with Mom or Dad when they want to.



This type of contact lessens any sense of separation children may feel, and it sends them the message that they can freely love both parents and interact with them without fear, anxiety or divided loyalty. This practice is the golden rule for children of any age.

AGES FOUR & FIVE



Four and five-year-old children are learning the dynamics of relationships with their families, friends, and teachers. They are also gaining a greater sense of their identity regarding gender, and their relationship with the parent of the same gender is even more important to them. Gender identification is a normal part of every child's development, and they should never be made to feel they are the one who divided their parents.

It is important for parents to be aware of and sensitive to their children's emotions at this age. It's not uncommon for them to feel as though the divorce was their fault, feel guilty about their relationship with the same gender parent or experience anxiety about their acceptance of the opposite gender parent. Gender identification can be an emotionally charged issue for parents, especially in high conflict divorces. When parents do not understand their child's development, gender identification can be construed as a slight or

favoritism and their reactions can invoke unnecessary guilt and stress on their children. In essence, the parent's feelings of loss, insecurity or disdain for the other parent are projected onto the child as something they have done wrong.

For children at this age, the same continuity and structure between parents and their separate homes that has been outlined for younger children should remain in place.

As children approach the age of five, they are becoming more social and may seek to engage in sports or other types of extra-curricular activities outside of their parental interactions. Decisions about these activities including how they will impact everyone's schedules, how parents will pay for them, and transportation responsibilities should have already been discussed as part of the parenting plan, and should never take place in the presence of the child.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS



The emotions and adjustments of a divorce can be intensified for children when it coincides with a developmental milestone such as beginning school. Changing schools during a divorce can create stress and result in a developmental crisis for some children.

If a child shows signs of stress over the number of changes in his or her life, parents can consider several options: children can remain at the family home or with one parent Monday through Thursday or Friday, with the transition to the other parent's home on Thursday

or Friday until Sunday evening or Monday morning and alternate weekends or spend one weekend day with each parent, or slowly implement the split week schedule of 2 1/2 or 3 1/2 days with each parent and alternate weekends.

If a child adjusts well to school and the divorce, appropriate time sharing schedules include 3 days with one parent and 4 days with the other parent, split weeks where the child is with each parent 3 1/2 days or 2 1/2 days and alternating weekends.

AGE SIX



At six years old children exhibit much more independence, and they adjust well to separation from their parents. They are learning to rely more on others, like their peers and teachers, rather than solely on their parents, family or caretakers. Even with this increased level of independence, children still require the same level of continuity and stability in their lives as younger children to further their development. It is also critical that they are not involved or concerned with family problems or on-going parental conflict of any kind for them to master the emotional and social demands of their increasing independence.

Healthy, open communication and cooperation between parents is the key to all well-adjusted at any age, and just like with younger children, parents must

have a unified approach to managing homework and projects between their homes, keeping one another updated on school-related information and activities, and participate together as much as possible in these events. This level of parental cooperation promotes a great sense of security for children physically and emotionally.

For children this age, the ability to love both parents openly and without restriction can be more important than a Parenting Plan, but that doesn't mean one should not be in place or followed regularly. Parents must place the emphasis on their child being able to spend comfortable, quality time with both of them, which may mean occasionally varying from their time sharing schedule.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS



Many child psychology experts point to research that indicates children feeling free to love both parents and experiencing minimal conflict at this age is actually more important to their adjustment than the time-sharing schedule parents adopt. When parents have a time-sharing schedule that is well established, that plan can remain in place until or unless a change is required to meet the needs of the child. Any of the schedules noted can be used for children at six years of age.

with one parent every Monday & Tuesday, with the other parent every Wednesday & Thursday, and Friday through Sunday is alternated between parents,

with one parent from noon on Sunday through Wednesday morning, then transitioning to the the other parent from Wednesday morning through noon on Sunday,

for parents who work different shifts, one parent can assume daytime responsibility and the other can assume nighttimes with the children,

alternate weeks from Monday through Friday with parent A, and Saturday & Sunday with parent B. During week 2, the child is with parent A Monday through Sunday and with parent B Monday through Friday transitioning to parent A Saturday through Sunday. During week 4, the children spend Monday through Sunday with parent B, and the rotation begins again with week 1,

from Friday after school through Monday morning every other week with parent A plus one or two overnights during the week, with the remainder of the time with parent B,
or

3 days with one parent and 4 days with the other parent, switching to 4 days with parent A and 3 days with parent B on the alternate week.

AGE SEVEN



By the age of 7 children are very involved with their peers, activities and their competence levels, and they look to please their parents with their accomplishments. Children also when they begin to measure themselves against others at this age and are more experienced in their activities. Seven-year-olds also have a strong sense of right and wrong. By the time children reach seven or eight years of age, they can tolerate spending time apart from a parent for longer periods of time, from five to seven days, as well as up to two weeks vacationing with either parent. They also possess a strong desire for their parents to reconcile, perhaps even attempting to make a reconciliation happen.

In spite of their understanding of relationship dynamics and their sense of independence, children at this age can still have a fear of losing their parents and may

continue to carry feelings of blame for their parents' separation, appearing sad at times.

Seven-year-old children can travel between their parents' homes without stress. However, it's not uncommon for them to test either parent after initially returning from the other parent's home.

Even when children adjust well to each parent's home, it is not uncommon for some children to be homesick if they spend extended time away from either parent. These types of unexpected events are why parents need flexibility in their relationship and time-sharing agreements, except in the case of conflicted parents where provisions for unexpected or unusual changes should be in place in advance.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS



The same time sharing schedules that are appropriate for six-year-old children can also be used for children at seven:

with one parent every Monday & Tuesday, with the other parent every Wednesday & Thursday, and Friday through Sunday is alternated between parents,

with one parent from noon on Sunday through Wednesday morning, then transitioning to the the other parent from Wednesday morning through noon on Sunday,

for parents who work different shifts, one parent can assume daytime responsibility and the other can assume nighttimes with the children,

alternate weeks from Monday through Friday with parent A, and Saturday & Sunday with parent B. During week 2, the child is with parent A Monday through Sunday and with parent B Monday through Friday transitioning to parent A Saturday through Sunday. During week 4, the children spend Monday through Sunday with parent B, and the rotation begins again with week 1,

from Friday after school through Monday morning every other week with parent A plus one or two overnights during the week, with the remainder of the time with parent B,
or

3 days with one parent and 4 days with the other parent, switching to 4 days with parent A and 3 days with parent B on the alternate week.

AGE EIGHT



At eight years old, children are developing an even greater sense of independence with increasing amounts of time being spent with their peers and participating in social and extra-curricular activities. Children at this age are also highly focused on not being left out by their peers. At this stage of development, a child's emotions are more stabilized; they can empathize with others and are more articulate in expressing themselves to others.

Most children at this age have accepted their parents' separation or divorce. However, if they experience divorce at this age, they tend to feel extreme sadness because of their ability to empathize and their broader understanding of family. 8-year-old children tend to fear abandonment and worry about having their basic needs met to a greater degree than younger children.

They also have a tendency to daydream in school about the loss they feel or about their parents reconciling, which places them at academic risk.

It's important for children at this age to have on-going interaction with both parents for gender role identification, however, some children may express a preference for a 'home base' during the week, where they can focus on their studies and remain connected and involved with their peers and activities. Children tend to prefer this type of schedule if their parents do not live in a close enough proximity to each other for them to maintain peer relationships or participate in extra-curricular activities after school or on weekends.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

The same time sharing schedules that are appropriate for younger children presented in this guide can also be used for children at age eight.

Another option for children at this age is to spend weekdays during the school year with one parent and one weekend each month, and with the other parent three weekends per month and time during each week for dinners or activities. This plan works well for parents who can share direct caretaking.

This schedule can be adjusted during summer months to accomodate children spending time with both parents during each week.

AGE NINE



By the age of nine, children are becoming more independent in their thinking, but they like the stability of having a home base. While they want regular contact with both parents, they like spending one-on-one time with the parent of the same gender while also enjoying having their space. In spite of their increasing autonomy, children at this age still rely on their parents for routine tasks such as dressing and personal grooming as well as being reminded of their responsibilities.

At this age, many children have come to accept that their parents won't reconcile, but they are still vulnerable to feelings of insecurity when it comes to having their basic needs met. On a superficial level, children are also capable of identifying if one parent is emotionally stronger than the other, financially better off than the other, and how each parent and extended family is coping with the divorce.

Nine-year-olds are very accepting of what is told to them as fact, they also may continue to daydream in school, and can become more aggressive; harboring feelings that they are to blame for the divorce. Reassurance from their parents is desired, and they may ask specific questions about the divorce. Children at this age understand rules exist for safety and structure, and test those rules to ensure they are in place and operating.

Nine year olds also find personal power in accomplishing goals and mastering skills which increases their feelings of personal worth and security.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

The time-sharing schedule for nine-year-olds can be any of the schedules previously outlined for younger children. At nine, children can also tolerate spending up to 75 - 80% of their time with one parent, while spending time with the other parent on alternate weekends, alternate holidays, and up to six weeks during the summer.

AGE TEN



By age ten children have a better grasp of the concept of divorce and are less prone to fantasizing about their parents' reconciliation than younger children. At this age, children are capable of empathizing with their parents, but their feelings about the divorce can be best described as emotionally disorganized. With this disorganization, it's not uncommon for them to form an alliance with one parent, especially if they have been exposed to conflict between their parents, and they may even inject their opinions about the divorce. These feelings can manifest as their wanting to be Dad's buddy or Mom's helper or resisting a relationship with one parent or the other.

These children want some knowledge about the divorce to understand, but at the same time, they can feel ashamed or embarrassed about their parents'

separation among their peers, teachers or coaches. It's important to reassure them that they belong, they are loved, and they are safe. Because of their expanded thinking and ability to empathize, they seem to express more sadness than anger about their parents' divorce.

Ten-year-old children want to be told they still belong, have stability in their home base, and be reassured they will have on-going and predictable contact with both parents, particularly when their time is divided between homes.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

The time-sharing schedules described for younger children can be utilized for children at this age including a home-base approach where the child is with one parent during the week and one weekend each month during the school year, with the other parent having three weekends per month and an overnight during the week. This schedule would flip to the other parent during the summer months. If the child has a home base during the school year, it's important that they have one-on-one interaction with the other parent at least one day during the week in addition to their time with them on weekends.

AGE ELEVEN



Eleven-year-old children are pretty autonomous and require less parental guidance with personal care, dressing and eating, as well as becoming more skilled in academics and extra-curricular activities. Even though they still need the security of family relationships, they are becoming more social with their peers and are putting more emphasis on their self-image and the images of others. This marks the beginning of adolescence and although children begin to exercise more independent decision making they still require predictable, stable parents.

Ten-year-olds have a more developed conscience, they tend to be idealists and can respond more effectively to the feelings of others. They are capable of understanding and making moral judgments and their emotions are fragile. It's easy for them to feel unloved if they are rejected by their peers and may experience feelings of anger or betrayal associated with their parents' divorce. It's not uncommon for children at this age to take the position that the divorce is the fault of one parent or the other which

which is a projection onto the parent they feel abandoned them. These feelings of **anger - fault - allegiance** can also shift from one parent to the other. A divorce can be an even greater challenge for some children at this age since they are also experiencing hormonal changes in addition to the changes of their family. The combination of these factors can be an emotional tightrope for parents, especially the opposite gender parent or the parent that the child holds responsible for the divorce. If children consistently reject one parent, do not want to spend time with them, or show signs of emotional distress, it should be considered signals of a deeper problem. If any of these behaviors persist, it would be wise to seek the help of a qualified therapist who can assist the child with their emotions, help with parent-child unification and support the family through the divorce transition by establishing a foundation for their 'new normal' structure. When children experience stress aside from the normal grieving process, they need help.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

Any of the parenting schedules described for younger children can be implemented for eleven-year-olds in addition to an equal time-sharing schedule, which includes the child spending equal amounts of time with both parents during the week and weekends. Weekend time sharing can be either alternated or with children spending one weekend day with each parent.

AGE 12



The age of twelve means big changes for children. As pre-adolescents, they are experiencing changes in growth and hormone production which can result in increased moodiness and fatigue. The expanded thinking capability of a twelve-year-old opens them up to new opinions and judgments, and this requires parents to stay much more on top of their children's activities and feelings. At this age, many children prefer to receive support and get their emotional needs met by their peers and members of the opposite sex rather than through their extra-curricular activities or academic accomplishments.

This age is also when a close friend or friends become more of a child's confidant than his or her parents. Security, belonging and self-esteem needs are met more by the child's peers than their parents, which can provoke a sense of loss in parents and complicate parent-child relationships. Even though children at this age are having some of their needs met by their peers, they still need the stability and predictability of both parents.

The opinion that one parent is at fault for the divorce can be quite strong in children at this age where they will either become the ally, blame both parents or remain completely neutral.

They also have many opinions about their parents' separation and are capable of harsh moral judgments about the divorce. These children are often more aware of the issues of the divorce than parents realize. As parents, we often underestimate how much information about the divorce our children have been exposed to whether by overhearing arguments or conversations between parents or through extended family. In either case, any information these children obtain can be powerful in affecting their emotions and their relationship with both parents.

Twelve-year-olds are also becoming aware of economics; they want to purchase clothing and the 'in' styles, and they understand the concept of earning money to have money to spend. This awareness also makes them vulnerable to being swayed in favor of one parent over the other through monetary incentives, known as 'Disney parenting', especially if one parent is better off financially than the other. Conversely, some children rally around the parent they perceive to be more vulnerable, as a sort of protector/guardian. In either case, children are prevented from maintaining well balanced emotional relationships with both parents complicated by their conflicting emotions.

TIME SHARING CONSIDERATIONS

Time-sharing schedules for children this age include:

Children residing with one parent during the week and one weekend each month during the school year, spending time with the other parent three weekends per month and a few hours one or two nights during each week,

Three days with one parent and four days with the other parent each week,

2 1/2 days with each parent every week with alternating weekends, or

Residing with one parent 75-80% of the time, spending alternate weekends, alternate holidays and a major portion of the summer with the other parent.

Parents must be aware that at this age children are increasingly less interested in parental contact, and more focused on meeting developmentally important relationships with their peers, and participating in school and extra-curricular activities. When creating a time-sharing schedule for twelve year olds, neither parent should penalize the other for the time their children spend with friends or participating activities. Both parents will experience a decrease in the time they spend with their children as a normal part of their child's growth and development.

13 To 18 YEARS



Adolescence is a time of significant change where children are experiencing changes in the concepts of themselves, their futures and the world, changes to their bodies and changes in the relationships they have with their parents. As these children move through adolescence into adulthood, they become more and more independent even though they realize how much they still rely on their parents. There are notable differences in some of the feelings about divorce in adolescence that are different than in younger children since their awareness, empathy, moral character and the ability to think independently are more developed.

Like younger children, adolescents can also be ashamed of their parents' divorce. They may express sadness, depression or anger, or may be resentful toward one or both parents, feeling that the divorce messed up their life.

Adolescents can have anxiety over the financial situation of one or both parents and how the economic standing of each parent may affect them and their ability to attend college.

Feeling neglected or rejected by one or both parents is also common, especially if either parent hasn't adjusted or recovered from the divorce themselves. Younger adolescents may fear having to move to a new home, away from their peers, familiar home or school.

Since children are so developed at this age, cooperative parenting is essential for them to thrive socially and economically. Parents must maintain healthy relationships with their child and put the child's needs above their own. Some of the concerns to watch for in children this age include; increases in stress or aggressive behavior, a negative attitude towards one or both parents,



substance abuse, withdrawing from social activities and interactions, poor academic performance, negative views towards intimate relationships and marriage, wanting to leave home, run-ins with the law, increased or promiscuous sexual behavior and withdrawing from family interactions or celebrations. Time sharing with adolescents in this age group must be coordinated with their academic and extra-curricular activities, work schedules and peer relationships.

While they still need structure and stability, children who are old enough to drive can move between their parents' homes more independently around their events, activities and responsibilities. The goal is to balance family time with the evolving life of the child. When there is more than one child, parents will need to create a time-sharing schedule for the adolescent child separately and age appropriately from the younger child.

Time sharing options for adolescents can be less structured. However, some amount consistency should still be required. Alternating weekends and one overnight during the week with each parent is an option as well as spending one or two weeks with each parent based on the child's schedule. Alternating weeks during the school year and weekends and open access between the homes with one weekday night each week scheduled for a family dinner with one or both parents also works for children in this age group.

One thing for parents of adolescents to remain aware of is at this age they often spend overnights at their friends' houses, so this must be understood when creating your time sharing plan.