

Top Ten Ways to Make a Child Custody Exchange Go Smoothly

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In the spirit of starting the New Year off on the right foot, here are ten suggestions for making custody exchanges go as smoothly as possible:

- 1. Follow your Parenting Plan.** This may seem obvious, but following the terms of your [Parenting Plan](#) as closely as possible helps avoid last minute changes that cause stress for everyone, including children.
- 2. Keep it Simple.** Between the work schedules of two parents and the increasingly demanding school and activity schedules for children, creating a [time-sharing schedule](#) can be difficult. Limiting the number of transitions during the week and maintaining the same exchange locations and times can alleviate the stress of exchanges for children and parents alike. Keeping the Parenting Plan, or at least the time-sharing schedule, in an easily visible place can help children and parents keep everything straight.
- 3. Arrive on Time.** This not only helps avoid arguments between parents, it gives children a sense of security knowing that they can count on being picked up and dropped off at a specific time.
- 4. Keep Everyone Updated.** While it's always best to follow the Parenting Plan and to arrive on time, we all know that life can sometimes get in the way. A parent who is running late should let the other parent and, if possible, let the children know what is going on.
- 5. Pick Up and Drop Off at School.** When possible, arranging exchanges at school can minimize contact between parents (if this is needed) and create a smooth transition for children. Be sure to let the school know which parent picks up the children when.
- 6. Neutral Locations for Exchanges.** Sometimes a time-sharing schedule, or children's ages, don't allow for exchanges at school. In those cases, drop off and exchanges at a neutral, public location, like a store parking lot or police substation, can help limit conflict between parents and may be a way to limit travel time for parents that live far away from each other.
- 7. When Exchanging at Home, be Respectful.** If parents have decided to pick up and drop off children at their respective homes, remember to be respectful of other parent's space. Do not enter the home unless invited in and do not make negative comments about the home to the other parent or the children.

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8. Communicate with Children. Exchanges can be very difficult for children, who often feel torn between both parents. Encourage children to share their feelings without pumping them for information about the other parent or making negative comments. This can be a difficult balance to reach, especially when there is a high level of conflict between parents. A trained child therapist or psychologist may be able to provide some techniques for encouraging communication in a positive way.

9. Communicate with the Other Parent. This can be the toughest part of co-parenting, but it is essential to making a Parenting Plan work. If the exchanges aren't going well because the children are upset or the schedule is cumbersome, address the problem with the other parent and try to reach a resolution before allowing resentment to build or running back to Court. In high conflict situations, a text or e-mail exchange may help.

10. Change the Time-Sharing as Needed to Meet the Changing Needs of the Children. No Parenting Plan is one size fits all. Children's needs and desires changes as they get older. Work with the other parent to modify the time-sharing schedule as children's needs change. For instance, when a teenager's after school sports practice interferes with their weekly dinner visit with the non-custodial parent, discuss adding in some more weekend time with that parent or an activity they can share.

Keep in mind that the goal of an effective parenting plan at least in the estimation of the courts is to promote the [best interests of the children](#). Exchanges are fertile ground for conflict and conflict in the end hurts the children. Following a few basic rules, and common courtesies, will avoid much unnecessary conflict.

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