

## Kent County Friend of the Court

### Parenting Time Guideline and Parent Resource

All families are unique and have different needs. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for parents sharing time with their child.

#### PARENTS SHOULD WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT PARENTING TIME

Parents are the best people to make decisions about parenting time details. Even if the parents' relationship has ended, they will always be parents to their child.

Working together may be hard at first, but it can be done:

- **Work with the other parent** to develop a unique parenting time plan that meets your family's unique needs.
- A **child needs time with BOTH parents**. Recognize and honor the fact that your child loves both parents. Don't put your child in the middle or make them feel like they must choose.
- The court can make decisions about parenting time—but **parents know** more about their family and can be more creative.
- **Be flexible** and adapt your parenting time schedule as things change—your child will grow up and what once worked, won't work forever.

There are times when parents **may not** be able to work together:

- **Domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, criminal misconduct**, or other serious **safety concerns**.
- Serious **mental health** or **substance abuse** issues.
- When a **parent is absent** from the child's life.

#### RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

- [Kent County FOC Website](#)
- [Kent County FOC Facebook Page](#)
- [Virtual FOC Orientation/SMILE](#)
- [MI Parenting Time Guideline](#)
- [MI Parenting Time Law](#)
- [MI Parenting Time Factors](#)
- [MI Custody Law](#)
- [Best Interest Factors](#)
- [Michigan Legal Help](#)
- [Legal Assistance Center](#)
- [Michigan Courts Website](#)
- [Family Resource Guide](#)

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Website: <https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/FOC/default.htm>  
Phone: 616-632-6888

## HOW KENT COUNTY FOC CAN HELP YOU GET OR CHANGE A PARENTING TIME ORDER

**FOC Mediation.** Kent County FOC offers free mediation for parents who can work together to create a custody arrangement or parenting time plan. If you have a case in Kent County and want to get or change a custody or parenting time order, you can [sign up for FOC Mediation](#).

FOC Mediation is a **confidential** and **voluntary** process to help parents get or change custody or parenting time orders by agreement and without having to go to court. The mediator will prepare a court order if the parents reach an agreement. You can learn more about mediation [here](#). Note: **all cases are screened for domestic violence and FOC will decide whether to proceed with mediation, or whether protections should be put in place first.**

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**Facilitated Parenting Time.** Kent County FOC offers this free, **non-confidential** service to help parents get a parenting time order in a support or paternity case. You and the other parent would meet with a Parenting Time Facilitator to discuss options and concerns related to parenting time. You may have one meeting or a series of meetings, depending on your family's circumstances.

You are eligible for this service if **all** the following are true:

- Your case ends with a -DS or -DP case code (example: 2022-000000-**DP**);
- The Prosecuting Attorney's Office entered a judgment in your case **within the past year**;
- Your judgment orders **facilitated parenting time**; and
- You **request** the service or are referred by the court.

Request/Sign up for Facilitated Parenting Time [here](#). Note: **all cases are screened for domestic violence and FOC will decide whether to proceed with mediation, or whether protections should be put in place first.**

## OTHER OPTIONS FOR PARENTS

Parents can

- Work together to create an agreement and enter their own order with the court.
- Hire a private mediator or work with the [Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan](#).
- Hire attorneys to help.
- File a motion with the court, with or without attorneys, and the court will decide what happens. The court will consider [several factors](#) in making its decision. Motion forms are available [here](#) or at the [Legal Assistance Center](#).

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## CUSTODY, PARENTING TIME, AND CHILD SUPPORT

This guideline is a tool for parents to help them **create customized parenting time plans** in the best interests of their child. Some general information about other topics can be helpful for parents when creating a parenting time plan. Below is some general information on topics related to parenting time.

LEGAL CUSTODY	PHYSICAL CUSTODY
<p>Legal custody means the right to make major decisions about a child's welfare: medical care, school, and other things. A parent with sole legal custody makes these decisions alone. Parents with joint legal custody make these decisions together. If they cannot agree, they can file a motion and the court will decide.</p>	<p>Physical custody means who the child lives with. A child can live with both parents, or a child can live with one parent primarily.</p>
ACCESS TO CHILDREN'S RECORDS	
<p>Generally, both parents have the right to access a child's records or information, regardless of the custody arrangement. This includes medical, dental, school, and childcare records, as well as notification about any school meetings. Read the law <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	
PARENTING TIME	
<p>The court will order parenting time in most cases. Children have the right to spend time with both parents, unless a judge or referee finds there is clear and convincing evidence that it would be a danger to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health.</p>	
CHILD SUPPORT	
<p>Children have a legal right to financial support from both parents, and parents have a legal responsibility to provide support until a child turns 18 or graduates from high school, whichever happens later (or up to 19 ½ if the child is in school full-time with a reasonable expectation to graduate and lives full-time with the recipient of support).</p> <p>The amount of child support is determined by the <a href="#">Michigan Child Support Formula</a>. The parents' incomes, number of parenting time overnights, childcare expenses, and health insurance premiums are some of the factors used to determine child support. You can use the <a href="#">MiChildSupport Calculator</a> to estimate your child support.</p>	

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## CREATING A PARENTING TIME PLAN

Remember, your family is your own. Craft your schedule to work for your child and your family by putting your child first and considering your family's needs. What works for one family may not work for another. **All families are different.**

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Consider your child's age and developmental stage. A schedule that works well for a teenager may not be appropriate for an infant.
- What safety concerns need to be considered (domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, criminal misconduct, serious mental health, or substance abuse issues)?
- How can you make transitions and exchanges easy for your child?
- What will happen during the week? The weekends?
- How will you share holidays? School breaks? Vacations?
- Consider your child's school and activity schedules.
- Consider the work schedules of both parents.
- Consider the child's relationships with others (siblings, family, friends, etc.).
- How will transportation be handled?
- Where will parenting time exchanges take place?
- How will the child get to and from school/childcare?
- What will happen if school or childcare is closed or not available?
- What happens to parenting time if your child is sick? Who is responsible to care for your child if your child is home sick from school/childcare, especially if parenting time exchanges occur before or after the school/workday? Who would stay home with the child or take off work to provide care?
- How will any special or medical needs be handled during parenting time?
- Be flexible and adaptable. Things change all the time making parenting time schedule changes necessary.
- Consider whether your parenting time plan is enforceable by the court or FOC.

**"Keep your child in the center, not the middle."**

## PARENTING TIME “AS AGREED” AND “REASONABLE” PARENTING TIME

Sometimes parents want or need a lot of flexibility and want parenting time to be “as the parents agree” or “reasonable parenting time.” While these arrangements provide flexibility, they are not enforceable by the FOC. Enforceable orders are **specific** and include **days** and **times** for parenting time. Parents can become frustrated when their “as agreed” or “reasonable parenting time” order is not enforceable because it is not specific.

Parents can make their order specific through mediation/by agreement or by filing a motion with the court, which could take several months to resolve. Therefore, FOC recommends that, if parents want a flexible parenting time order, they also include a specific default schedule to follow in the event they do not agree.

*Example:* Parents will exercise parenting time as they agree. In the event they do not agree, parenting time will be [insert specific parenting time schedule, including times and locations for exchanges].

Parents may also want to include back-up schedules for holidays, school breaks, and summers to use in the event they do not agree.

## SAMPLE PARENTING TIME SCHEDULES

The parenting time plans included here are **sample parenting time schedules**. You **do not** have to use one of these plans and can create a customized plan that best fits your family. Schedules vary based on needs and stages of child development, from short daytime visits to shared parenting time arrangements. There **is no default plan**, but here are some examples.

The following schedules are color-coded, with a different color for each parent. You may want to use parents’ names when creating your schedule.

These schedules are **not** appropriate in every case, especially in cases with safety concerns like domestic violence. In these cases, **supervised parenting time** may be appropriate instead of one the following schedules. See supervised parenting time on page 14.

**"Hard to see the picture when you're in the frame."**

## WEEK-ON-WEEK-OFF PARENTING TIME

A shared parenting time schedule where the child alternates full weeks between parents. This schedule works when:

- **Both parents** previously provided day-to-day care; AND
- Parents live close enough that child can attend school from either parent's home; AND
- Parents can **communicate and cooperate** well about the child's care.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Limited exchanges	Less consistency from week-to-week, can be confusing for child and complicate plans
Longer blocks of time for parents to bond with child	Child may struggle not seeing a parent for several days in a row
<i>This schedule may not be appropriate for a very young child</i>	

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

\*\*\*Sometimes parents will have the other parent exercise a midweek visit. \*\*\*

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## 2-2-5-5 PARENTING TME

This schedule is a variation of the week-on-week-off schedule. Each parent has the same two consecutive weekday overnights during the week and alternate weekends. If the child is in school, all pick-ups and drop-offs can be at the start and end of the school day.

This schedule works when:

- **Both parents** previously provided day-to-day care and guidance; AND
- Parents live close enough that child can attend **school** from either parent's home; AND
- Parents can **communicate and cooperate** well with each other about the child's care.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Consistency for weekdays	Child may struggle not seeing a parent for five full days
Longer blocks of time for parents to bond with child	<i>This schedule may not be appropriate for a very young child</i>

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## 2-2-3-3 PARENTING TIME

This schedule is another option for shared parenting time. Two consecutive overnights with each parent during the week, followed by three consecutive weekend overnights, with the schedule alternating each week. Weekends alternate between the parents.

This schedule works when:

- **Both** parents previously provided day-to-day care and guidance; AND
- Parents live close enough that child can attend **school** from either parent’s home; AND
- Parents can **communicate and cooperate** well with each other about the child’s care.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Child sees each parent every two days	No day-of-the-week consistency, which can be confusing and complicate plans
Longer blocks of time for parents to bond with child	Child may struggle not seeing a parent for two days in a row
<i>This schedule should only be used if parents can commit to it and be consistent. Lots of changes or disruptions can make weeks feel even more broken up.</i>	

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.



## ONE WEEKDAY OVERNIGHT AND LONG WEEKENDS

This schedule may work well when the child lives primarily with one parent, while also providing the other parent extended overnight parenting time: four consecutive overnights during Week 1 and one overnight during Week 2. Weekends alternate and are long.

This schedule works when:

- **Both** parents previously provided the child day-to-day care; AND
- Parents **live close** enough that the child won't have to travel far between homes; AND
- Parents can **communicate and cooperate** well with each other about the child's care.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can arrange for minimal contact between parents if child is in school and school is the exchange location	School-aged child may struggle with school day exchanges
Consistency and predictability	Child may struggle not seeing a parent for five days every other week
Long weekends can be used for short trips	

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
			Parent			

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
Parent			Parent	Parent		

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## ALTERNATING LONG WEEKENDS AND MIDWEEK TIME

This schedule consists of three consecutive overnights every other week and an additional 3- to 6-hour period each week.

This schedule works when:

- The child will spend less time with one parent because of **work/school schedules** or **living arrangements**; or
- The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Frequent visits with each parent	School-aged child may struggle with school day exchanges
Consistency and predictability	This schedule may be difficult for teenagers

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
Parent		Parent 3—6 hour visit				

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
		Parent 3—6 hour visit		Parent		

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## ALTERNATING WEEKENDS AND MIDWEEK TIME

This schedule consists of two consecutive overnights every other weekend and a 3- to 6-hour period in the middle of each week.

This schedule works when:

- The child will spend less time with one parent because of **work/school schedules** or **living arrangements**;
- The child needs the **stability** of a single primary residence;
- One of the parents does not have living space where the child can stay longer; or
- The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Frequent visits with each parent	Child goes six days without seeing one parent
Consistency and predictability	

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
		Parent 3—6 hour visit				

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
		Parent 3—6 hour visit		Parent		

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## ALTERNATING SHORT WEEKENDS AND MIDWEEK TIME

This schedule consists of one overnight every other weekend and a 3- to 6-hour period in the middle of each week.

This schedule works when:

- The child will spend less time with one parent because of **work/school schedules** or living **arrangements**;
- The child needs the **stability** of a single primary residence;
- One of the parents does not have living space where the child can stay longer; or
- The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Frequent visits with each parent	Child goes several days without seeing one parent
Consistency and predictability	

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
		Parent 3—6 hour visit				

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
		Parent 3—6 hour visit			Parent	

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## DAYTIME ONLY

This schedule consists of two to four periods of 3—6 hours each spaced throughout each week.

This schedule works well when:

- The child will spend less time with one parent because of **school/work schedules** or **living arrangements**;
- The child has not yet developed a **bond** with a parent;
- A parent has **limited parenting skills**; or
- The child has previously spent most of the time with one parent, or there have been **large gaps** in exercising parenting time. Frequent contact helps the child bond with each parent, something that is important for the child’s healthy development.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Frequent visits with each parent, helping develop a bond.	Many exchanges in each week, which can be difficult when parents do not get along well
Consistency and predictability in amounts of time spent with child.	Different days each week could be confusing.

Example:

Week 1

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
Parent 3—6 hour visit		Parent 3—6 hour visit		Parent 3—6 hour visit		

Week 2

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent	Parent
	Parent 3—6 hour visit		Parent 3—6 hour visit		Parent 3—6 hour visit	

Click [here](#) to create this schedule.

## SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME

Supervised parenting time is when a third party or agency oversees parenting time due to safety concerns like **domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, criminal misconduct**, or serious **mental health** or **substance abuse** issues. Supervised parenting time has two objectives:

- Provide a **safe environment** for the children and the parent, and
- Move the supervised parenting time toward an unsupervised plan, *if appropriate*.

Supervised parenting time orders should include **specific objectives**, such as supervised parenting time sessions exercised or appropriate treatment completed, addressing the reason supervision is needed. Be sure to include the timeline to achieve objectives.

Graduated plans should be used to move from supervised to unsupervised parenting time. For example, the plan could call for agency supervision, followed by third party supervision (e.g., friend/family), followed by short periods of unsupervised parenting time in a public place, and moving toward extended periods of unsupervised parenting time.

### Local Agencies Offering Supervised Parenting Time:

- [Journies, Inc.](#) 528 Bridge St NW, Suite 3, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, Telephone: 616-774-7002.
- [YWCA Safe Connections.](#) 25 Sheldon Ave SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, Telephone: 616-459-4581.

**"Different does not have to be devastating."**

## LONG DISTANCE PARENTING TIME

Longer periods of parenting time may be considered when parents live far apart. The right schedule for any family will depend on the distance between the parents' homes and the ability of the child to travel that distance. **Both parents** are responsible for their respective share of providing food, accommodations, and other necessary supplies for the child during travel.

Some schedules which might be appropriate include:

- Every other weekend;

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- A three-day weekend each month. If a three-day weekend does not occur during the month, then a two-day weekend;
- Extended time during school breaks of more than two consecutive days. School breaks might include: spring break, summer break, Thanksgiving weekend, winter break, and mid-winter break;
- The parent travels to the child for parenting time. The parent should take advantage of opportunities to meet the child's friends, teachers, coaches and others important in the child's life;
- A combination of these or other options.

## VIRTUAL PARENTING TIME

Technology offers opportunities beyond in-person parenting. Parents may want to include virtual parenting time between in-person parenting time in their court order.

Video conferencing like ZOOM, FaceTime, or Skype can be helpful for a child to remain connected to a parent. Here are activities that parents can do with a child during virtual parenting time:

- |                           |                    |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Play games/video games    | Cook/eat a meal    |
| Draw and color            | Craft projects     |
| Read books                | Bake               |
| Share pictures or stories | Watch movies/shows |

## MOVING OUT OF STATE OR CHANGING DOMICILE

A move can impact parenting time. For more information, click [here](#).

**"Childhood is the shortest season in life."**

## HOLIDAYS

Not all families celebrate the same holidays or place the same importance on holidays. **Each family's holiday schedule should be unique to that family's traditions and preferences.**

It is in a child’s best interests to not experience unnecessary stress around the holidays related to the holiday parenting time schedule. FOC recommends that each family have a specific holiday schedule in place. Consider:

- What holidays are important to you, your family, your child?
- What holidays do you want to include in your schedule?
- Will you and the other parent share holidays each year or alternate from year to year?
- Do you want holidays to include overnights or long weekends?
- What about birthdays? The FOC recommends **NOT** including the children’s or parents’ birthdays as part of your holiday schedule because doing so can cause a lot of confusion when those birthdays conflict with other holidays or vacation/break time.

Here is an **example** of a specific holiday schedule, using federal holidays. **Your holiday schedule could look different, and include different holidays, depending on your family’s traditions:**

Holiday	Times	Odd Years	Even Years
Easter	9:00 am until 6:00 pm Easter Sunday	Parent	Parent
Memorial Day	6:00 pm Sunday until 6:00 pm Memorial Day	Parent	Parent
4 <sup>th</sup> of July	6:00 pm July 3 <sup>rd</sup> until 6:00 pm July 5 <sup>th</sup>	Parent	Parent
Labor Day	6:00 pm Sunday until 6:00 pm Labor Day	Parent	Parent
Halloween	9:00 am until 9:00 pm on non-school days; 4:30 pm until 9:00 pm on school days	Parent	Parent
Thanksgiving	9:00 am until 6:00 pm Thanksgiving	Parent	Parent
Christmas Eve	6:00 pm December 23 <sup>rd</sup> until 6:00 pm Christmas Eve, December 24 <sup>th</sup>	Parent	Parent
Christmas Day	6:00 pm Christmas Eve, December 24 <sup>th</sup> , until 6:00 pm Christmas Day, December 25 <sup>th</sup>	Parent	Parent
New Year’s Day	9:00 am until 6:00 pm New Year’s Day	Parent	Parent
Mother’s Day	9:00 am—6:00 pm	Parent	Parent
Father’s Day	9:00 am—6:00 pm	Parent	Parent

Click [here](#) to create your own holiday parenting time schedule.

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## CHRISTMAS/WINTER BREAK AND SPRING BREAK

Parents will often share or rotate Christmas/Winter and spring break. Below are some examples:

### Christmas/Winter Break:

Sharing the break: Christmas/Winter Break. The break will be equally shared between the parties with each receiving one-half of the days off from school while maintaining the regularly scheduled weekends and holidays. **Parent** will have the first half of the break in even-numbered years and the second half in odd-numbered years while **Parent** will have the first half in odd-numbered years and the second half in even-numbered years.

\*\*\*It is best to include dates and times for exchanges and whether the holidays are included in counting days/overnights to divide the break\*\*\*

Rotating the break: Christmas/Winter Break. The parents will alternate the break from the time school is released to the time the child/ren return to school. **Parent** will have the break each even-numbered year and **Parent** will have the break each odd-numbered year.

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### Spring Break:

Sharing the break: Spring Break. The parents will share the break with each exercising their regularly scheduled weekend and the exchange occurring at 12:00 p.m. on the Wednesday during the break.

Rotating the break: Spring Break. The parents will alternate the break each year with **Parent** exercising the break in odd-numbered years and **Parent** exercising in even-numbered years. The break begins at 6:00 p.m. the day school releases and ends 6:00 p.m. the Friday before school resumes.

## SUMMER BREAK

Parents can do several different things in the summers and may have special events or vacations planned for their children.

Some parents will have **one week** in the summer carved out for each parent to enjoy uninterrupted parenting time to accommodate events or vacations. Here is an example:

*Summer Parenting Time.* The parties will each have the option of exercising one week (7 consecutive overnights) of uninterrupted parenting time each summer, not to include the other party's weekend parenting time or holiday parenting time. Each party will inform the other of the week he or she intends to exercise each year by May 1. If the parties select the

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same week, Plaintiff's selection will take precedence in odd-numbered years and Defendant's preference will take precedence in even-numbered years.

Some parents prefer to share the summer break by **alternating weeks** between the parents. Here is an example:

*Summer Parenting Time.* The parents shall alternate weeks during the summer commencing the first Friday that school is out and concluding the last Friday before school resumes. The first week shall be taken by the parent whose regular alternate weekend occurs first in the break, and the summer exchanges shall occur on Friday at 6pm with each parent's regular weekend to be included in his/her week. The first week of the summer shall run from Friday to the following Friday (6pm) and the weeks will alternate thereafter until 6pm on the Friday before school resumes, at which time the regular parenting time and alternating weekend schedule will resume.

Click [here](#) to create your own parenting time schedule for school breaks.

**"Instead of designing a parenting time plan around the parents, design it around the child."**

## **PARENTING TIME ASSISTANCE AND ENFORCEMENT**

If you believe the other parent is **denying your parenting time**, you may seek FOC assistance. The first step in asking the FOC for help is to file a **written complaint** that provides the details of how you were denied court-ordered parenting time.

**FOC assistance is available if you can answer **yes** to all the following:**

- Do you have a Kent County FOC case?
- Do you have a parenting time order? The FOC can only help if there is an order.
- Does your order include specific days and times for parenting time? The FOC may not be able to help when parents are exercising parenting time "as agreed" or "reasonable parenting time."
- Did the other parent deny you parenting time on a day and time specified in your order?
- Was the missed parenting time within the last 56 days?

If you can answer **yes** to all the questions above, you can submit a [complaint](#) to the FOC. The FOC will evaluate your complaint to see if it is eligible for enforcement. If it is, the FOC will send a copy of your written complaint to the other parent for response within **14 days** of the date the FOC receives the complaint. If your complaint is not eligible for enforcement, the FOC will notify you and explain why within 14 days.

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## After you file a complaint:

- FOC will decide if your complaint is actionable and what [action](#) to take.
- FOC may schedule and hold a **joint meeting** to try and resolve the complaint(s) without a court hearing. Note: **all cases are screened for domestic violence and FOC will decide whether to proceed with mediation, or whether protections should be put in place first.**
- If the complaint is not resolved, FOC may schedule a hearing. At the hearing, the court will determine whether a parent has violated an order and is in contempt of court. Possible sanctions for contempt include fines (up to \$100 per violation), costs, and jail. Failure to appear for a hearing could result in a bench warrant for a parent's arrest.

FOC's goal is to help parents find solutions without having to go to court and to help parents work together to resolve conflicts without FOC or court intervention if it is safe and appropriate to do so.

## REASONS NOT TO DENY PARENTING TIME

The following explanations for denying parenting time are generally not acceptable to the FOC:

- The child had a **minor illness**.
- The child had to go somewhere else.
- The other parent is behind in **child support**.
- The parent **does not want** the child to go with the other parent.
- The **weather** was bad.
- The child had **no clothes** to wear.
- The **child refused** to go.

**"You don't have to be wrong  
for the other parent to be right."**

## NOT EVERYTHING IS ENFORCEABLE BY FOC

Not all court order provisions are enforceable by the FOC, and there are some things the FOC cannot do:

- Enforce **first right of refusal**: violations or interpretations.
- Enforce **agreements** parents make outside of their orders.
- **Provide copies** of orders.
- Address **passport** applications for minors or out-of-state travel.
- Enforce **legal custody** (e.g. where the child lives, goes to school, doctor appts.).
- Enforce **childcare** provisions.
- Enforce **domicile/100-mile rule** violations.
- Enforce parent **communication** complaints.
- **Interpret orders**. HOWEVER, we do explain FOC procedures when your order is unclear, such as week and holiday definitions and information in our parenting time brochures or offer services to make an order more specific and more enforceable.
- **Advise parents** on a parenting time schedule after a hearing when no new written order yet exists. FOC only enforces written orders signed by a judge.
- Allow parents to appear by phone or request **adjournment for court hearings**. Parents must follow the court rules requiring parents to file motions directly with the court for these requests.
- **Grandparenting time**.
- Enforce parenting time on **interstate** cases (UE, UI, UN, UM case codes).
- **Inherent rights** language.
- Provisions that also fall under other **authority/laws**; e.g., driving on a suspended license, drinking and driving, driving the children when someone has a suspended license, not having an age-appropriate car seat, etc.

## HOW FOC CAN HELP: CO-PARENT SESSION

If your order is not specific enough to be enforceable, or you have not exercised parenting time in a long time, you may be eligible for a **co-parent session**.

A **co-parent session** is a free, non-confidential service offered by FOC for: (1) cases with an existing order that contains vague terms; (2) long absence of a parent or repeated failure to exercise parenting time; or (3) other challenges presented by the current court order.

**How to know if your case is eligible for a co-parent session:** If you submit a written complaint and your case is eligible for this service, FOC will notify you. Note: **all cases are screened for domestic violence and FOC will decide whether to proceed with mediation, or whether protections should be put in place first.**

## CO-PARENTING

### Co-Parenting Do's and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be <b>respectful</b> to the other parent.</li> <li>• Focus on the <b>needs</b> of your child.</li> <li>• <b>Encourage</b> a relationship between your child and the other parent.</li> <li>• <b>Be consistent</b> with parenting time.</li> <li>• Have your child <b>ready</b> for parenting time exchanges.</li> <li>• Allow your child to bring <b>important items</b> for parenting time—clothes, blankets, toys.</li> <li>• <b>Be consistent</b> about meals, homework, bedtime, and discipline.</li> <li>• <b>Encourage relationships</b> between our child and the other parent's family.</li> <li>• Encourage your child to participate in the other parent's <b>family celebrations</b>.</li> <li>• Your best to schedule <b>vacations</b> during your regular parenting time.</li> <li>• Inform the other parent of vacation travel dates, locations, and return times.</li> <li>• Consider your <b>child's activities</b> when planning vacations or extended parenting time.</li> <li>• Make sure your child is in a <b>safe environment</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Argue</b> with the other parent when the child is present or nearby.</li> <li>• <b>Make negative statements</b> about the other parent or the other parent's family.</li> <li>• <b>Ask</b> the child about the other parent's life.</li> <li>• <b>Make plans</b> with your child that you are not going to keep.</li> <li>• <b>Pass messages</b> to each other through the child.</li> <li>• <b>Destroy</b> the other parent's relationship with the child.</li> <li>• <b>Consume</b> excessive amounts of alcohol or other mind-altering substances before or during parenting time.</li> <li>• Exercise parenting time <b>inconsistently</b>.</li> <li>• Often <b>show up late</b> for parenting time.</li> <li>• <b>Drop off</b> the child earlier or later without arranging with the other parent.</li> <li>• Keep the <b>belongings</b> and <b>clothes</b> the child arrived with.</li> </ul>

## CO-PARENTING RESOURCES

- [SMILE](#): Co-parenting can be difficult when parents don't live together. The videos below include a good deal of information that will be helpful to you whether you are going through a divorce or never lived with the other parent. *Videos provided courtesy of the Oakland County Friend of the Court.*
- [SPLIT: A Film for Kids of Divorce \(and their Parents\).](#)

## HOW KENT COUNTY FOC CAN HELP WITH CO-PARENTING

**FOC Supportive Parenting:** The Kent County FOC provides a service to help parents communicate and cooperate better through supportive parenting sessions. During these educational sessions, parents work with a FOC professional to set goals and improve their communication and co-parenting relationship. Cases are referred to FOC for this service by court order, and you can contact us at 616-632-6888 or [FOC.PT@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:FOC.PT@kentcountymi.gov) for more information.

While the court and FOC involvement will end when your child turns 18, your co-parenting relationship with the other parent is a **lifelong relationship**. There will be **graduations, weddings, family events** and various **milestones** in your child's life. Therefore, FOC encourages parents to build and maintain strong co-parenting relationship whenever possible.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PARENTING TIME EXCHANGES

- **Have your child ready** (clothes, special toys, or homework) and on time for the other parent. Have positive conversations with your child about the upcoming time with the other parent.
- If you are the parent picking up, **be on time**, it is not good for your child to be waiting and it can increase possible parental conflict.
- The time that your child goes from one parent to another should be **peaceful**. This time is not an opportunity to have adult conversations or discuss disagreements. You will need to schedule these discussions for a time when your child is not around.
- Do not bring **other people** to the exchanges, especially if they are hostile or likely to negatively engage with the other parent.
- **Do not be late returning your child** to other parent, anticipate leaving and have your child packed and ready for the return. Have pleasant conversation during the return trip to the other parent, emphasizing the enjoyment of the visit.

Email: [FOC.Mail@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:FOC.Mail@kentcountymi.gov)

Website: <https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/FOC/default.htm>

Phone: 616-632-6888

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Kent County departments and agencies offer a variety of services to parents including education, coaching, job assistance, domestic violence support, and many others.

- [2-1-1](#) offers a variety of services, including:
  - Bill Payment Assistance
  - Community Services
  - Disaster Services
  - Education
  - Employment and Financial Support
  - Food
  - Health Care
  - Housing and Utilities
  - Mental Health and Substance Abuse
  - Personal and Household Items
  - Transportation
  - Medical Services
  - Mentoring/Coaching
  - Job and Career Support
  - Support groups for parents
  - Parenting Classes
- [Safe Haven Ministries](#) provides services related to:
  - Domestic violence and dating abuse
  - Human trafficking
  - Personal protection Order (PPO) assistance and court accompaniment
  - Support groups for children that have witnessed abuse
  - 24/7 line: 616-452-6664
- [Family Resource Guide](#)
- [Bethany Christian Services](#) provides:
  - Family Counseling
  - Pregnancy Support
  - Services for refugees.
- [Strong Fathers/Strong Beginnings](#) provides services to:
  - Expectant parents
  - Parents of young children
- [The MSU Extension](#) provides:
  - Parenting classes
  - Anger management classes
- [YWCA](#) provides services related to:
  - Domestic Violence & Dating Abuse
  - Sexual Assault
  - Child Abuse and Sexual Assault
- [Alpha Grand Rapids](#) provides services for parents, including:

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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