

Florida Child Custody Checklist

A practical guide to organizing information for parental responsibility, parenting plans, and time-sharing matters in Florida

A note about Florida terminology

People often say, “child custody,” but Florida law generally uses parental responsibility, parenting plan, and time-sharing. This checklist helps you prepare information for an initial case, divorce, paternity matter, or possible modification. Work through only the sections that apply to your family.

1. Record the Basic Case Information

- ☐ Write down each parent's full legal name, address, phone number, email address, date of birth, and employer.
- ☐ List each child's full legal name, date of birth, present address, school or childcare provider, and healthcare providers.
- ☐ Prepare each child's residential history for the past five years, including dates, addresses, and the people with whom the child lived.
- ☐ Identify any prior or pending court cases involving the child, either parent, or another person claiming custody or time-sharing rights.
- ☐ Locate existing parenting plans, paternity orders, support orders, divorce judgments, injunctions, or other relevant court orders.
- ☐ Note whether a parent or child currently lives outside Florida, recently moved, or may move soon.

Helpful note: Jurisdiction can depend on where the child has lived and whether another state has entered an order. Discuss interstate or international facts with an attorney before filing.

2. Protect the Child from the Conflict

- ☐ Do not discuss litigation details, court filings, attorney communications, or adult financial disputes with the child.
- ☐ Do not ask the child to choose between parents or carry messages, documents, money, or accusations.
- ☐ Avoid disparaging the other parent in person, online, or within the child's hearing.
- ☐ Preserve relevant communications without editing them, but do not access accounts or devices unlawfully.
- ☐ Keep a calm, factual calendar of parenting time, exchanges, school events, appointments, and significant incidents.

Understand the Child's Needs

Florida courts decide parenting and time-sharing matters based on the child's best interests. Organize information that shows the child's actual routine, relationships, developmental needs, and stability.

3. Daily Routine and Care

- ☐ Document the child's typical weekday and weekend schedule, including waking, meals, school, homework, activities, and bedtime.
- ☐ List the parenting tasks each parent has customarily handled, such as school contact, medical care, meals, transportation, homework, and bedtime.
- ☐ Record childcare arrangements, babysitters, extended-family support, and third parties regularly involved in care.
- ☐ Identify important friendships, community ties, religious activities, teams, clubs, and other sources of continuity.
- ☐ Note each parent's work schedule, travel obligations, transportation options, and realistic availability.

4. Health, Education, and Development

- ☐ Gather school calendars, report cards, attendance information, individualized education plans, evaluations, and teacher contact information when relevant.
- ☐ List medical, dental, vision, therapy, and prescription needs, along with provider and insurance information.
- ☐ Identify any special medical, developmental, educational, behavioral, or emotional needs and how they are currently addressed.
- ☐ List recurring appointments, therapies, tutoring, activities, and transportation requirements.
- ☐ Gather accurate records rather than relying on memory; do not alter or remove records from the other parent's access.

5. Parent-Child Relationships and Communication

- ☐ Describe the child's relationship with each parent and with siblings, stepsiblings, grandparents, and other important people.
- ☐ Note how each parent keeps informed about school, healthcare, friends, activities, and the child's everyday life.
- ☐ Identify communication methods that work well between the parents and areas that require clearer boundaries.
- ☐ Consider how the child will communicate privately with the other parent during each household's parenting time.

Helpful note: A child's preference may be one factor if the court considers the child mature enough, but a child does not simply choose the outcome. Avoid questioning or coaching the child about a preferred schedule.

6. Safety and Urgent Concerns

- ☐ Write down specific safety concerns involving domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse, neglect, abandonment, substance misuse, dangerous driving, weapons, or threats.
- ☐ Preserve police reports, injunctions, medical records, child-protection records, photographs, messages, and witness information that you may lawfully access.
- ☐ Separate verified facts, direct observations, and third-party statements from assumptions or suspicions.
- ☐ If a child or parent faces immediate danger, call 911. Speak promptly with an attorney or qualified advocate about protective options.

Build a Workable Parenting Plan

A Florida parenting plan must address how parents will share daily responsibilities, when the child will spend time with each parent, major decision-making, communication, and exchange locations. The schedule should be detailed enough to reduce future conflict.

7. Draft the Regular Time-Sharing Schedule

- ☐ Sketch a school-year schedule showing overnights, weekday time, weekends, pickup times, and drop-off times.
- ☐ Prepare separate plans for summer, school breaks, holidays, birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and other important family or religious dates.
- ☐ Specify exchange locations, transportation responsibilities, car-seat needs, and procedures for delays.
- ☐ Consider the child's age, school hours, travel time, activities, sleep needs, and ability to manage transitions.
- ☐ Decide how schedule changes will be requested, documented, and confirmed.

Helpful note: Florida law currently provides a rebuttable presumption that equal time-sharing is in a child's best interests unless the parties agree otherwise or the presumption is overcome by evidence. The court still evaluates the individual child's best interests and all relevant statutory factors.

8. Plan for Shared Decisions

- ☐ Identify how decisions about education, nonemergency healthcare, mental-health treatment, activities, religion, and other major issues will be made.
- ☐ Decide which parent's address will be used for school-boundary determination and registration.
- ☐ Create a method for sharing school notices, medical information, schedules, travel details, and emergency contacts.
- ☐ Plan how parents will communicate: email, text, telephone, a parenting application, or another documented method.
- ☐ Identify subjects for which one parent may need ultimate decision-making responsibility and explain why that arrangement would serve the child.

9. Expenses and Child Support Information

- ☐ Gather recent pay stubs, tax returns, financial affidavits, and documentation of other income.
- ☐ List childcare, health-insurance, uncovered medical, school, tutoring, activity, and transportation costs.
- ☐ Identify who currently pays each expense and what reimbursement method is practical.
- ☐ Keep time-sharing and support issues separate: unpaid support generally does not permit withholding court-ordered time-sharing, and denied time-sharing does not permit stopping support payments.

Helpful note: Equal time-sharing does not automatically eliminate child support. Support is calculated separately under Florida law using income and other required factors.

10. Anticipate Special Situations

- ☐ Address out-of-state or international travel, passports, advance notice, itineraries, and emergency contact information.
- ☐ Discuss military deployment, unusual work schedules, rotating shifts, or extended business travel.
- ☐ Do not assume you can relocate with the child. A move of at least 50 miles for at least 60 consecutive days may trigger Florida's relocation statute and specific procedures.
- ☐ If safety-focused or supervised time-sharing may be needed, identify safe exchange locations and qualified supervision options.

Prepare for the Attorney Consultation

Bring a concise, factual summary. You do not need every document before seeking advice, especially when a hearing, move, safety issue, or other deadline may be approaching.

11. Create a One-Page Parenting Summary

- ☐ Write a short timeline of the parents' relationship, the child's residences, prior agreements or orders, and recent events.
- ☐ Describe the current schedule and the schedule you believe would best meet the child's needs.
- ☐ List areas of agreement and the issues likely to be disputed.
- ☐ Identify your most important goals, your most urgent concerns, and the outcome you hope to avoid.
- ☐ Prepare specific questions about parental responsibility, time-sharing, temporary orders, child support, relocation, evidence, fees, and next steps.

12. Bring to the Meeting

- ☐ Photo identification and contact information for both parents and each child.
- ☐ Existing petitions, parenting plans, judgments, support orders, injunctions, notices, and hearing information.
- ☐ The child's residential history, school and medical information, current schedule, and your proposed schedule.
- ☐ Your calendar, factual timeline, relevant communications, and available financial records.
- ☐ Information about urgent deadlines, safety concerns, a possible move, withheld time-sharing, or a child being taken out of state.

Helpful note: Parents in qualifying dissolution and paternity cases are generally required to complete an approved Parent Education and Family Stabilization Course. Statutory deadlines commonly run 45 days from filing for the petitioner and 45 days from service or the applicable paternity event for the other party, unless excused by the court.

Talk With a Florida Family Law Attorney
Grant J. Gisondo, Esq., is Board Certified in Marital and Family Law and represents clients in Palm Beach and Martin counties.

Call 561-530-4568 or visit gisondolaw.com to request a free consultation.

Helpful Official Resources

Florida Courts: Parenting Plan, Form 12.995(a)
Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law Forms
Florida Statutes, Section 61.13

Legal disclaimer: This checklist provides general educational information and is not legal advice. It does not create an attorney-client relationship, replace advice from a qualified attorney, or address every form, deadline, local rule, or fact that may apply. Court forms and legal requirements can change. Consult an attorney about your individual circumstances before acting.

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