

4. There are a lot of different options you can consider for your children's individual needs, circumstances and relationships

- Don't just follow the example of other separated families – one size does not fit all.
- Remember that babies and young children need really short gaps between seeing parents, and they need more of a routine to be kept going at both homes.
- School age children are more flexible.
- Teenagers like to make their own decisions, often around their own social lives.
- For lots of good ideas for children who have two homes, go to –
 - www.afccnet.org
 - www.supreme.state.az.us
 - www.coloradodivorcemediation.com/family/schedules.asp
- If there's often conflict around change-overs, then avoid contact with the other parent by getting help from a neutral third person, or maybe the school.

5. To let your children have a say, you will have to strike a balance between listening to them and protecting them from pressure to choose between you

- If you have older children (11 or older), ask them very gently if they want to tell you their ideas about the arrangements.
- Respect your kids' views, if they do give them. If you have to make different arrangements from the ones they want, explain why.
- Respect your children's right to say nothing – you may harm your children if you pressure them into making decisions and choices when they don't want to.
- Let your children rely on you and your ex to make the decisions if that's what they want – it's your responsibility because you're the adults.
- Read page 23 of the Putting Your Children First booklet.

6. Your children's needs are going to change as they get older. The arrangements will need to change as well to stay up to date.

- From time to time your children will probably go through stages when they need to be more with one parent than the other (try not to take this personally!).
- Teenagers want to spend independent time with friends as well as being with both parents.
- You will really help your children if the arrangements include a regular review time (6 monthly or annually) to get together and make changes.



This handout was written by Julia Maskill and Dr Kerry Gould for the Ministry of Justice (2007) and provides additional information to that provided in the free 'Parenting Through Separation' programme delivered for the Ministry of Justice. For details of programmes in your area phone 0800 211 211. There is more information available for parents who have separated from www.justice.govt.nz/family