Parallel Parenting Setup Guide

A structured approach for high-conflict situations

Inside you'll find:

- What parallel parenting is (and isn't)
- How to set up a communication system
- Boundary-setting templates
- An information-sharing protocol

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What Is Parallel Parenting?

Parallel parenting is an arrangement in which separated parents disengage from each other while remaining deeply engaged with their children. Unlike co-parenting, which requires ongoing communication and cooperation, parallel parenting reduces contact to the minimum necessary to keep children safe and informed.

Is parallel parenting right for your situation?

> *In my experience, parallel parenting is often the right starting point - not a failure - when there is a history of family violence, high conflict, or chronic boundary violations. It creates the safety and distance needed for children to have a relationship with both parents without being caught in the middle.*

Co-parenting vs Parallel Parenting

	Co-parenting	Parallel parenting
Communication	Regular, direct, flexible	Minimal, structured, written only
Decision-making	Collaborative and discussed	Pre-agreed rules; minimal negotiation
Handovers	Can involve brief interaction	Neutral location; no interaction
Best for	Low-to-moderate conflict	High conflict, DFV history, disengagement
Relationship required	Some trust and goodwill	No trust required

Setting Up Your Parallel Parenting System

Step 1: Establish a communication channel

Choose ONE written method - email or a co-parenting app (e.g. Our Family Wizard, Talking Parents). Agree that all communication will go through this channel only. No texts, no calls, no messages through the children.

Step 2: Set a communication rhythm

Decide how often you will communicate and about what. For example: weekly updates on school and health only. Anything outside the agreed scope does not require a response.

Step 3: Create a parenting plan with specifics

A parallel parenting arrangement requires more detail than a standard parenting plan - because the default for any gap is 'no discussion, default to plan.' Specify school, medical, religious, and activity decisions in advance.

Step 4: Agree on handover logistics

Use a neutral third location (school, community centre) or school drop-off/pick-up. No conversation is required at handovers. A nod is enough.

Step 5: Establish an emergency protocol

Define what constitutes an emergency. Only emergencies justify a phone call. Everything else goes through your agreed channel.

Communication Rules Template

Use this as a starting point. Both parents should agree to these rules and have them in writing.

1. All communication will be via [agreed channel] only.

2. Messages will be responded to within [48/72] hours on business days.

3. Messages will be factual, brief, and child focused.

4. Personal grievances, past events, and financial matters will not be raised in parenting communications.

5. Phone calls are reserved for emergencies only. An emergency is defined as: a medical emergency, accident, or immediate safety concern.

6. Children will not be used to pass messages between parents.

7. Parenting time will not be discussed in front of the children.

Information-Sharing Protocol

This protocol clarifies what information is shared, how, and when. It removes the need for negotiation in the moment.

Topic	How shared	How often	Who initiates
School reports / notices	Email / app	When received	Parent who receives it
Medical appointments	Email / app	At least 48hrs notice	Parent booking appt
Medical results / diagnosis	Email / app	Within 24hrs	Parent who was present
Extracurricular changes	Email / app	At least 1 week notice	Parent making change
Holiday travel	Email / app	At least 4 weeks notice	Parent travelling
School events	Forward school email	When received	Parent who receives it

Additional protocols specific to our situation:

Parenting After Separation offers specialist courses for high-conflict and parallel parenting situations. Visit parentingafterseparation.com.au to find the right support for where you are.