

## Things to consider when negotiating time off with kids

By **Nathalie Boutet**

Law360 Canada (May 17, 2024, 12:24 PM EDT) -- For many divorced or divorcing couples, having children off from school during summer vacation requires a lot of planning and negotiation. It can be a cause of stress and conflict. Are the kids going to camp? Are they old enough to be working? Do they need to be registered for day camps or other activities? How much money needs to be allocated to cover expenses?

Negotiating time off and time with kids can be a delicate process, but it's crucial for the well-being of both the parents and the children. Here are some things for parents to consider when it comes to summer with children out of school.



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1. **Plan ahead:** Start discussing summer plans well in advance to allow for ample time to make arrangements and accommodate everyone's schedules. Planning ahead can help minimize conflicts and ensure a smoother transition between school and summer activities.
2. **Communicate clearly:** Maintain clear and open communication with the co-parent about preferences, commitments and any potential conflicts that may arise during the summer months. Clearly outline your expectations regarding vacation plans, activities and responsibilities.
3. **Share financial responsibilities:** Agree on how to share the financial responsibilities associated with summer activities, such as camp fees, travel expenses and extracurricular programs. Be transparent about costs and discuss how to divide expenses fairly.



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4. **Consider the children's preferences:** Take into account the children's interests, preferences and needs when planning summer activities and vacations. Solicit their input and involve them in the decision-making process whenever possible to ensure they feel heard and valued. It's also important to consider their ages and developmental needs. Younger children require more frequent contact with both parents while older children may have their own activities and social lives to consider.

5. **Create a co-parenting schedule:** Develop a detailed co-parenting schedule for the summer months that outlines each parent's time with the children, including vacations, weekends and holidays. Be flexible and willing to accommodate each other's schedules to ensure meaningful time with the children.
6. **Co-ordinate vacation plans:** Co-ordinate vacation plans with the co-parent to avoid scheduling conflicts and ensure that both parents have the opportunity to spend quality time with the children during the summer break. Consider alternating major vacations or sharing vacation time to maximize the children's experiences.
7. **Divide responsibilities fairly:** Divide responsibilities for registering the children for summer activities, such as sports leagues, day camps or educational programs, in a fair and equitable manner. Share information about registration deadlines, costs and requirements to ensure that both parents are involved in the decision-making process.
8. **Be flexible and willing to compromise:** Recognize that unexpected changes or conflicts may arise during the summer months and be willing to be flexible and compromise when necessary. Keep the children's best interests at the forefront and prioritize maintaining a positive co-parenting relationship.
9. **Seek mediation if needed:** If you're unable to reach agreements on summer plans or responsibilities, consider seeking the assistance of a lawyer, mediator or family counsellor to facilitate discussions and help find mutually acceptable solutions. A neutral third party can provide guidance and support to navigate challenging situations.

Remember that co-parenting is an ongoing process that requires patience, flexibility and co-operation from both parents. By prioritizing the children's needs and maintaining open communication, you can navigate time off and time with the kids in a way that benefits everyone involved. By considering these factors and working together as co-parents, you can create a positive and enjoyable summer experience for your children while navigating the complexities of divorce and shared custody.

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