

Family Law Toolkit for Survivors

The Domestic Violence & Mental Health Collaboration Project

Parenting Resources

If you are involved in a custody dispute with an abusive partner, the court may look closely at your parenting in order to determine the best interests of your children. Domestic violence can have a serious impact on children, and people who are abusive often parent inappropriately and undermine their partner's parenting. On top of this, it can be challenging to be the kind of parent you want to be when you do not feel like your best self as a result of the abuse you have experienced. For all these reasons and more, now may be a good time for you to reach out for parenting support and education, if you have not already done so.

Parenting was a struggle for me, even when I left my husband. I always felt like I was doing it wrong no matter what I tried. My children had such a hard time adjusting when we left, but now that they are in the Children's Group I can talk with the advocate and her suggestions and support have really made a difference in our lives.

- A domestic violence survivor

Fortunately, many community organizations offer free or low cost parenting assistance. This handout includes information about the factors the court considers when making parenting plan decisions; assistance available from domestic violence organizations; and general parenting resources.

We encourage you to explore your options and select the parenting program that works best for your family's needs, your schedule, location, etc. Taking proactive steps to strengthen your parenting can demonstrate to the court that you will do what is necessary to meet the needs of your children.

You may wish to keep a record of any parenting classes you attend or any steps you take to strengthen your parenting. You can then share this documentation with a parenting evaluator or a judicial officer, if appropriate.

If you and your child's other parent are not able to agree on a parenting plan, then a judicial officer (judge or commissioner) may make decisions for you. In cases of domestic violence, many parties do not reach an agreement. Frequently, judicial officers rely on parenting evaluators to investigate what is in the child's best interest and to make recommendations to the court about residential time, decision making, etc. These recommendations should be based on Washington State laws regarding parenting plans.

According to our state's laws (RCW 26.09.191), a parent's residential time **must** be limited if that parent has engaged in any of the following:

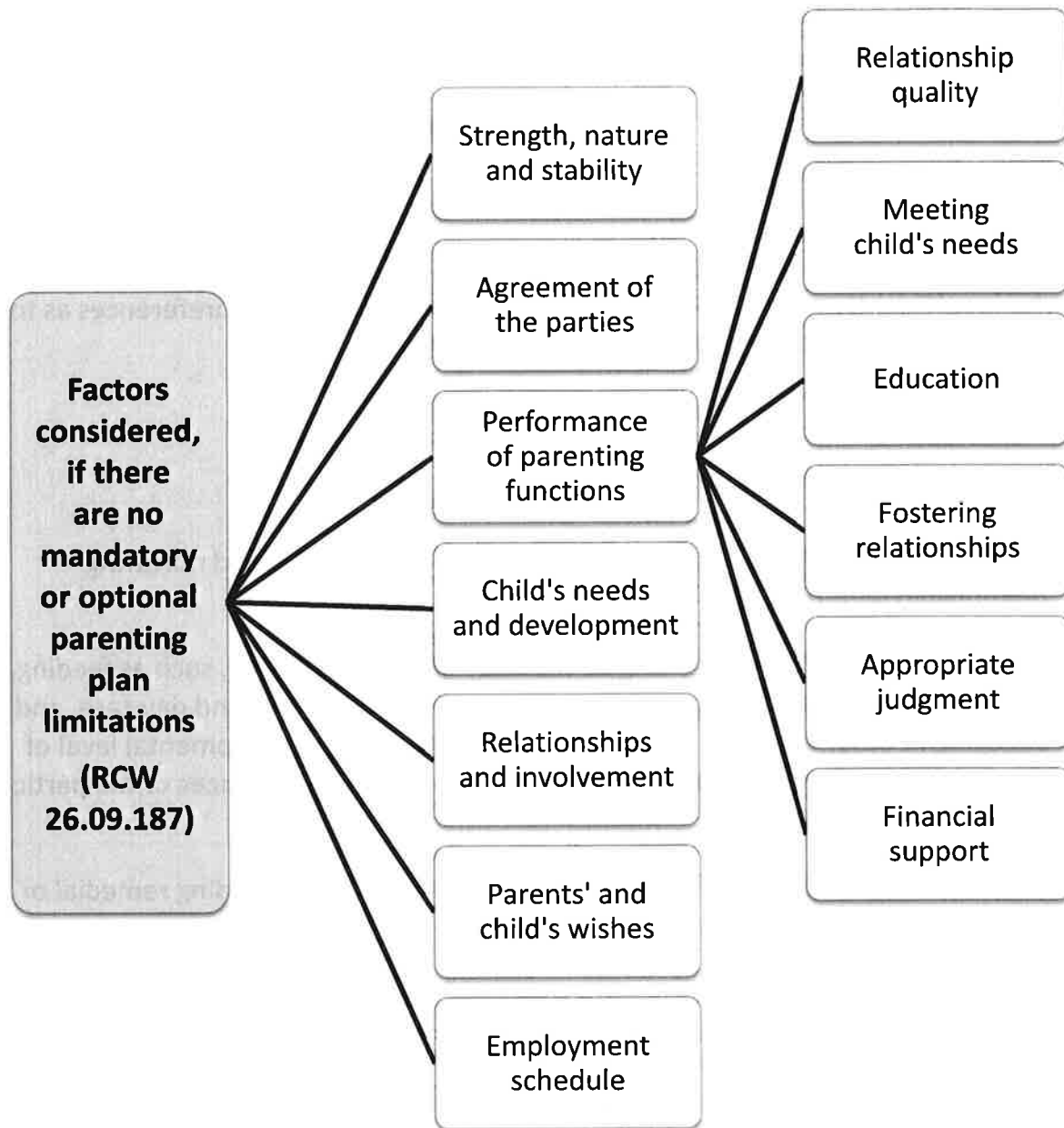
1. Willful abandonment or a substantial refusal to perform parenting functions;
2. Physical, sexual, or a pattern of emotional abuse of a child;
3. A history of acts of domestic violence;
4. An assault or sexual assault which causes grievous bodily harm or the fear of such harm; or
5. The parent has been convicted as an adult of a sexual offense; or

If the parent resides with a person who has done any of items 2-5 above.

A parent's residential time **may** be limited if that parent has any of the following:

1. Neglect or substantial nonperformance of parenting functions;
2. A long-term emotional or physical impairment that interferes with parenting;
3. A long-term impairment resulting from substance abuse that interferes with parenting;
4. The absence of or substantial impairment of emotional times with child;
5. The abusive use of conflict by the parent which creates the danger of serious damage to the child's psychological development;
6. Withholding access to the child from the other parent for a protracted period without good cause; or
7. Other factors identified by the court.

If none of the above factors apply, then the court will consider the factors listed in RCW 26.09.187. (*See the next page.*)



Parenting Factors Explained:

- a) Strength, nature, stability - The relative strength, nature and stability of the child's relationship with each parent (*This is given the greatest weight.*)
- b) Agreement of the parties - The agreements of the parties, provided they were entered into knowingly and voluntarily
- c) Performance of parenting functions - Each parent's past and potential for future performance of parenting functions relating to the daily needs of the child (*See list of parenting functions below.*)

- d) Child's needs and development - The emotional needs and developmental level of the child
- e) Relationships and involvement - The child's relationship with siblings and with other significant adults, as well as the child's involvement with his or her physical surroundings, school, or other significant activities
- f) Parents' and child's wishes - The wishes of the parents and the wishes of a child who is sufficiently mature to express reasoned and independent preferences as to his or her residential schedule
- g) Employment schedule - Each parent's employment schedule

Parenting Functions Explained (see RCW 26.09.004):

- i. Relationship quality - Maintaining a loving, stable, consistent and nurturing relationship with the child
- ii. Meeting child's needs - Attending to the daily needs of the child, such as feeding, clothing, physical care and grooming, supervision, health care, and day care, and engaging in other activities which are appropriate to the developmental level of the child and that are within the social and economic circumstances of the particular family
- iii. Education - Attending to adequate education for the child, including remedial or other education essential to the best interests of the child
- iv. Fostering relationships - Assisting the child in developing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships
- v. Appropriate judgment - Exercising appropriate judgment regarding the child's welfare, consistent with the child's developmental level and the family's social and economic circumstances
- vi. Financial support - Providing for the financial support of the child

Parenting Skills Checklist

www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/doc/398

This checklist could help you identify your parenting strengths and articulate how you parent. This list may also give you some ideas about how you can better support your child. This list was not developed by parenting evaluators or for the purpose of parenting evaluations.

If you feel you need to strengthen your parenting, improve your relationship with your child, or prepare for a parenting evaluation, the resources below can help.

Domestic Violence Parenting Resources		
Organization	Services	Service Area / Contact Info
Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services	Positive parenting classes & support; Children's advocacy & groups for transitional housing residents	King County 206-812-1001 www.adwas.org
Domestic Abuse Women's Network	*Children's DV Response Team	South King County 425-656-7867 www.dawnonline.org
Jewish Family Service's Project DVORA	**Kids' Club; Parenting Counseling	King County 206-461-3240 www.jfsseattle.org
LifeWire	*Children's DV Response Team; Children's support groups	N & E King County 1-800-827-8840 www.lifewire.org
New Beginnings	*Children's DV Response Team; **Kids' Club; Parenting education & support groups	Seattle & Shoreline 206-522-9472 www.newbegin.org
NW Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian & Gay Survivors of Abuse	Queer Parents' Networking Dinners	King County 206-568-7777 www.nwnetwork.org
Salvation Army DV Programs	Parenting groups for shelter & transitional housing residents	Seattle 206-324-943 www.salvationarmydomesticviolenceprograms.org
Sound Mental Health	*Children's DV Response Team	King County 206-302-2300 www.smh.org
YWCA	In-home education & support for children exposed to DV	South King County 425-226-1266 www.ywcaworks.org

The services above are free, but there may be eligibility requirements (such as being a program participant of the organization's domestic violence services) or space limits. Contact the organizations listed for more information.

***The Children’s Domestic Violence Response Teams (CDVRT)** are coordinated domestic violence advocacy and mental health counseling teams for children and their non-abusive parents. Services include therapy, parent support, and safety planning.

****Kids’ Clubs** are educational and supportive programs for children and their non-abusive parents designed to help children who have witnessed domestic violence process their experiences.

General Parenting Resources		
Organization	Services	Location / Contact Info
Childhaven	Triple P Positive Parenting Program	Seattle 206-957-4826 http://childhaven.org/breaking-the-cycle/parenting-skills/
Encompass	Emotion coaching; ★Parent-Child Interaction Therapy; Parenting classes	North Bend 425-888-2777 www.encompassnw.org
Friends of Youth	Parenting support for families in Duvall, Issaquah & Snoqualmie	Eastside 425-869-6490 www.friendsofyouth.org
Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress	★Parent-Child Interaction Therapy	Seattle 206-744-1600 depts.washington.edu/hcsats/
Kinderling	10-week classes in English, Russian & Spanish; One-on-one consultation; Support group for class graduates	Eastside 425-653-4302 www.kinderling.org
Refugee Women’s Alliance	Support & education for parents raising their children in a new country	Seattle 206-721-0243 www.rewa.org
Sound Mental Health	For clients only: Parenting groups; ★Parent-Child Interaction Therapy; Individual parenting coaching	King County 206-302-2300 www.smh.org
Wellspring Family Services	Reflective parenting classes for parents of children ages 1 ½ to 4	Seattle 206-826-3050 www.wellspringfs.org
Youth Eastside Services	Parent group to support family recovery from youth substance abuse	Eastside 425-747-4937 www.youtheastideservices.org

★**Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)** is an intervention to improve parenting skills for families with children ages 2 to 7 who have serious behavioral problems. Not all of the general parenting services listed are free. Contact the organizations listed for information about eligibility and cost including whether they offer services on a sliding scale.

Inclusion in this handout is not an endorsement. We encourage you to evaluate if the services and the provider are the right fit for you and to verify that the information listed is still accurate. The content of this handout is current as of the time of publication, but may have since changed.

If you are not sure where to start, we recommend discussing your options with a domestic violence advocate.

This is one piece of the Family Law Toolkit for Survivors. It was developed by the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Collaboration Project of the Coalition Ending Gender-Based Violence and can be found in its entirety at <http://endgv.org/toolkits/family-law-toolkit-for-domestic-violence-survivors/>. This project is supported by Grant No. 2014-FW-AX-K010 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

