

## Permanent Parenting Plan Law

Tennessee Code Annotated § 36-6-404 (“Requirement of and Procedure for Determining Permanent Parenting Plan”)

(a) Any final decree or decree of modification in an action for absolute divorce, legal separation, annulment, or separate maintenance involving a minor child shall incorporate a permanent parenting plan; provided, however, that this part shall be inapplicable to parties who were divorced prior to July 1, 1997, and thereafter return to court to enter an agreed order modifying terms of the previous court order. A permanent parenting plan shall:

(1) Provide for the child’s changing needs as the child grows and matures, in a way that minimizes the need for further modifications to the permanent parenting plan;

(2) Establish the authority and responsibilities of each parent with respect to the child, consistent with the criteria in this part;

(3) Minimize the child’s exposure to harmful parental conflict;

(4) Provide for a process for dispute resolution, before court action, unless precluded or limited by § 36-6-406; provided, that state agency cases are excluded from the requirement of dispute resolution as to any child support issue involved. In the process for dispute resolution:

(A) Preference shall be given to carrying out the parenting plan;

(B) The parents shall use the designated process to resolve disputes relating to the implementation of the plan;

(C) A written record shall be prepared of any agreement reached in mediation, arbitration, or settlement conference and shall be provided to each party to be drafted into a consent order of modification;

(D) If the court finds that a parent willfully failed to appear at a scheduled dispute resolution process without good reason, the court may, upon motion, award attorney fees and financial sanctions to the prevailing parent;

(E) The provisions of this subsection (a) shall be set forth in the decree; and

(F) Nothing in this part shall preclude court action, if required to protect the welfare of the child or a party;

(5) Allocate decision-making authority to one (1) or both parties regarding the child’s education, health care, extracurricular activities, and religious upbringing. The parties may incorporate an agreement related to the care and growth of the child in these specified areas, or in other areas, into their plan, consistent with the criteria in this part.

Regardless of the allocation of decision making in the parenting plan, the parties may agree that either parent may make emergency decisions affecting the health or safety of the child;

(6) Provide that each parent may make the day-to-day decisions regarding the care of the child while the child is residing with that parent;

(7) Provide that when mutual decision making is designated but cannot be achieved, the parties shall make a good-faith effort to resolve the issue through the appropriate dispute resolution process, subject to the exception set forth in subdivision (a)(4)(F);

(8) Require the obligor to report annually on a date certain to the obligee, and the department of human services or its contractor in Title IV-D cases, on a form provided by the court, the obligor's income as defined by the child support guidelines and related provisions contained in chapter 5 of this title; and

(9) Specify that if the driver license of a parent is currently expired, canceled, suspended or revoked or if the parent does not possess a valid driver license for any other reason, the parent shall make acceptable transportation arrangements as may be necessary to protect and ensure the health, safety and welfare of the child when such child is in the custody of such parent.

(b) Any permanent parenting plan shall include a residential schedule as defined in § 36-6-402. The court shall make residential provisions for each child, consistent with the child's developmental level and the family's social and economic circumstances, which encourage each parent to maintain a loving, stable, and nurturing relationship with the child. The child's residential schedule shall be consistent with this part. If the limitations of § 36-6-406 are not dispositive of the child's residential schedule, the court shall consider the factors found in § 36-6-106(a)(1)-(15).

(c) The court shall approve a permanent parenting plan as follows:

(1) Upon agreement of the parties:

(A) With the entry of a final decree or judgment; or

(B) With a consent order to modify a final decree or judgment involving a minor child;

(2) If the parties cannot reach agreement on a permanent parenting plan, upon the motion of either party, or upon its own motion, the court may order appropriate dispute resolution proceedings pursuant to Rule 31 of the Rules of the Supreme Court, to determine a permanent parenting plan; or

(3) If the parties have not reached agreement on a permanent parenting plan on or before forty-five (45) days before the date set for trial, each party shall file and serve a proposed permanent parenting plan, even though the parties may continue to mediate

or negotiate. Failure to comply by a party may result in the court's adoption of the plan filed by the opposing party if the court finds such plan to be in the best interests of the child. In determining whether the proposed plan is in the best interests of the child, the court may consider the allocation of residential time and support obligations contained in the child support guidelines and related provisions contained in chapter 5 of this title. Each parent submitting a proposed permanent parenting plan shall attach a verified statement of income pursuant to the child support guidelines and related provisions contained in chapter 5 of this title, and a verified statement that the plan is proposed in good faith and is in the best interest of the child.

(d) The administrative office of the courts shall develop a "parenting plan" form that shall be used consistently by each court within the state that approves parenting plans pursuant to § 36-6-403 or § 36-6-404 on and after July 1, 2005. The administrative office of the courts shall be responsible for distributing such form for the use of those courts no later than June 1, 2005. The administrative office of the courts shall be responsible for updating such form as it deems necessary, in consultation with the Tennessee family law commission, the domestic relations committee of the Tennessee judicial conference, and other knowledgeable persons.