

NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report: 2023 Executive Summary

[National Parents Organization](#) has completed the *2023 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report*. This report, which updates the NPO's previous reports in [2018](#) and [2020](#), analyzes and evaluates the parenting time guidelines of each of Ohio's 88 county domestic relations courts. These statutorily required guidelines are intended to guide divorcing parents in setting a parenting time schedule for their children and, often, are explicitly presented as default schedules, "for parents who cannot agree otherwise." Because these guideline schedules have a significant effect on the schedules parents agree to and those imposed when parents do not agree, they are important factors in shaping the actual parenting of children of divorced parents.

A large and compelling body of scientific research shows that children of separated parents benefit from substantially equal parenting time with each parent. (See "[NPO Shared Parenting Research Resources](#)" for citations and links to recent research and videos of conference presentations.) This means that the defaults that courts set in place are significant factors in promoting the best interest of children. And, importantly, the research establishes that this is true even for infants and toddlers and even when parents are in (non-violent) high-conflict relationships.

NPO's study focuses on "ordinary parenting time", meaning non-holiday/non-vacation time. This is time that is vital to establishing a true parent/child relationship. The study was also restricted to the guidelines that courts apply to parents living in close proximity, based on the individual court's definition of that term.

As was true in 2018 and 2020, the results of NPO's study, reported in the [2023 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report](#) are distressing! While there has been progress in a number of Ohio counties, the majority of Ohio courts still rely on outdated, scientifically unsupported, guidelines for parenting time.

Ohio Counties vary widely—indeed, wildly—in their parenting time guidelines.

- Forty-five of Ohio's 88 counties have default parenting schedules that allow the children only two overnights and 60 hours or less with one of their parents in a two-week period. This means that the children are with their non-residential parent less than 20% of the ordinary parenting time. None of these counties' schedules provide for the children to be with the non-residential parent on a school night.
- One Ohio county provides minimally more time, an additional overnight with the non-residential parent in a two-week period but still restricts the children to just 20% of the ordinary parenting time with that parent.
- Eighteen Ohio counties (up from 12 in 2020) provide default schedules that allow the children 4-5 overnights with the non-residential parent and substantially more time with the non-residential parent, between 25% and 30%.

- Seven Ohio counties provide default schedules that allow the children equal, or nearly equal, time with each parent, up from six such counties in 2020. Harrison County is the latest county to improve its local parenting time rule to provide almost equal parenting time to each parent.
- Seventeen Ohio counties (up from 11 in 2020) provide multiple schedules for children of the same age groups with none identified as the default schedule. Eleven of these counties include as options one or more schedules that allow the children equal time with each parent.

As NPO has noted in previous reports, the wide variation, alone, undermines any claim that Ohio counties' parenting time schedules are based on research about what parenting arrangements promote children's well-being. It is just not credible that, for children living on the east side of Sunset Drive in Newcomerstown, Ohio (Tuscarawas County), it is presumptively in their best interest to be with their separated parents equal amounts of time but, for children living just across Sunset Drive on the west side, which is in Coshocton County, it is presumptively in their best interest to see one of their parents only every other weekend and one evening a week for a few hours.

Ohio counties are also divided over whether children's interests are served by parenting time guidelines that are age-sensitive or not. Forty-five counties have age-sensitive schedules—up from 42 in 2020—though some are minimally sensitive to children's ages; forty-three counties still impose the same schedules on children of all ages, from birth to 18 years.

Unfortunately, 30 Ohio counties still use the outdated language of 'visitation' to talk about all of the time that the children are in the care and physical custody of one of their parents. This number represents minimal progress; between 2018 and 2020, six counties removed visitation language from their parenting rules. Since that time only three more counties have done so.

Currently, only about 4.7% of Ohioans (549,707) reside in counties whose guidelines presumptively allow children equal, or nearly equal, time with both of their fit and loving parents. This is a depressingly small number, and it has increased only very slightly (.1%) since 2020. Using county population data from the U.S. Census Bureau, NPO estimates that more than a third (33.5%) of Ohio families are still subjected to parenting time guidelines that allow children just two overnights with one of their parents in a two week period. While this is a drop of over 10 points from 2020, it still represents almost 4 million Ohioans who are subject to a default parenting schedule that allows the children only four overnights a month with one of their parents and no school nights.

Ohio courts are directed to make decisions about parenting time in the best interest of the children. NPO's study demonstrates that, despite the significant progress that some county courts have made, most Ohio domestic relations courts do not have parenting time guidelines that research shows are in children's best interest.

NPO notes with satisfaction and optimism that ***every Ohio county court of common pleas that has revised its local parenting time rule since the publication of the initial 2018 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report has improved the rule.*** We are disappointed that many courts have chosen to continue to ignore the research on child well-being and still employ outdated parenting time rules that don't serve children well.

We believe that if other Ohio courts would undertake a serious review of their parenting time rules in light of the best research on child well-being, they too would update their rules to align with that research and with modern parenting practices. For the sake of Ohio's children, we urge Ohio courts to do this!