

# NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report: Executive Summary 8/29/2018

[National Parents Organization](#) has completed a study—the first of its kind—of the parenting time guidelines of each of Ohio’s 88 county courts of domestic relations. These 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 on 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 recent 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.) This means that the defaults that courts set in place are important in promoting the best interest of children. And, importantly, the research established that this is true even for infants and toddlers and even when parents are in (non-violent) high-conflict relationships.

NPO’s study focused on “ordinary parenting time”, meaning non-holiday/non-vacation time. This is time that’s vital to establishing a true parent/child relationship. Furthermore, it was restricted to the guidelines that courts apply to parents living in close proximity, based on the individual court’s definition of that term.

The results of NPO’s study, reported in the “[NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report](#)” are shocking! Ohio Counties vary widely—indeed, wildly—in their parenting time guidelines.

- Sixty-four of Ohio’s 88 counties have a parenting schedule that allows 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 (One other Ohio county provides a schedule only slightly enhanced from this outdated model, by adding one additional overnight with the non-residential parent in a two-week period. This still accords the children just 20% of ordinary parenting time with one of their parents.)
- Thirteen Ohio counties 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%.

- Only three Ohio counties provide default schedules that allow the children equal, or nearly equal, time with each parent.

The wide variation, alone, undermines any claim to Ohio counties' parenting time schedules being based on research about what parenting arrangements promote child wellbeing. It is just not believable that, for children in Sandyville, Ohio (Tuscarawas County), it is presumptively in their best interest to be with their separated parents equal amounts of time but for children in Magnolia, Ohio (Carroll County)—just four miles away—it is presumptively in their best interest to see one of their parents only every 12 days, and then only for two days.

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

Surprisingly, 39 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.

Using county population data from the U.S. Census Bureau, NPO estimated that 60% of Ohio families are subjected to parenting time guidelines that allow children just two overnights in a two week period with one of their parents. Only 2% of Ohio families reside in counties whose guidelines allow children equal, or nearly equal, time with both of their fit and loving parents.

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