

RCW 26.09.187 Criteria for establishing permanent parenting plan.

(1) DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS. The court shall not order a dispute resolution process, except court action, when it finds that any limiting factor under RCW 26.09.191 or 26.09.192 applies, or when it finds that either parent is unable to afford the cost of the proposed dispute resolution process. If a dispute resolution process is not precluded or limited, then in designating such a process the court shall consider all relevant factors, including:

(a) Differences between the parents that would substantially inhibit their effective participation in any designated process;

(b) The parents' wishes or agreements and, if the parents have entered into agreements, whether the agreements were made knowingly and voluntarily; and

(c) Differences in the parents' financial circumstances that may affect their ability to participate fully in a given dispute resolution process.

(2) ALLOCATION OF DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY.

(a) AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE PARTIES. The court shall approve agreements of the parties allocating decision-making authority, or specifying rules in the areas listed in RCW 26.09.184(5)(a), when it finds that:

(i) The agreement is consistent with any limitations on a parent's decision-making authority mandated by RCW 26.09.191 and 26.09.192; and

(ii) The agreement is knowing and voluntary.

(b) SOLE DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. The court shall order sole decision-making to one parent when it finds that:

(i) A limitation on the other parent's decision-making authority is mandated by RCW 26.09.191 or 26.09.192;

(ii) Both parents are opposed to mutual decision making;

(iii) One parent is opposed to mutual decision making, and such opposition is reasonable based on the criteria in (c) of this subsection.

(c) MUTUAL DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. Except as provided in (a) and (b) of this subsection, the court shall consider the following criteria in allocating decision-making authority:

(i) The existence of a limitation under RCW 26.09.191 or 26.09.192;

(ii) The history of participation of each parent in decision making in each of the areas in RCW 26.09.184(5)(a);

(iii) Whether the parents have a demonstrated ability and desire to cooperate with one another in decision making in each of the areas in RCW 26.09.184(5)(a); and

(iv) The parents' geographic proximity to one another, to the extent that it affects their ability to make timely mutual decisions.

(3) RESIDENTIAL PROVISIONS.

(a) The court shall make residential provisions for each child which encourage each parent to maintain a loving, stable, and nurturing relationship with the child, consistent with the child's developmental level and the family's social and economic circumstances. The child's residential schedule shall be consistent with RCW 26.09.191 and 26.09.192. Where the limitations of RCW 26.09.191 or 26.09.192 are not dispositive of the child's residential schedule, the court shall consider the following factors:

(i) The relative strength, nature, and stability of the child's relationship with each parent;

(ii) The agreements of the parties, provided they were entered into knowingly and voluntarily;

(iii) Each parent's past and potential for future performance of parenting functions as defined in *RCW 26.09.004(2), including whether a parent has taken greater responsibility for performing parenting functions relating to the daily needs of the child;

(iv) The emotional needs and developmental level of the child;

(v) 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;

(vi) 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; and

(vii) Each parent's employment schedule, and shall make accommodations consistent with those schedules.

Factor (i) shall be given the greatest weight.

(b) Where the limitations of RCW 26.09.191 or 26.09.192 are not dispositive, the court may order that a child frequently alternate his or her residence between the households of the parents for brief and substantially equal intervals of time if such provision is in the best interests of the child. In determining whether such an arrangement is in the best interests of the child, the court may consider the parties geographic proximity to the extent necessary to ensure the ability to share performance of the parenting functions.

(c) For any child, residential provisions may contain any reasonable terms or conditions that facilitate the orderly and meaningful exercise of residential time by a parent, including but not limited to requirements of reasonable notice when residential time will not occur. [2025 c 166 s 4; 2007 c 496 s 603; 1989 c 375 s 10; 1987 c 460 s 9.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 26.09.004 was amended by 2025 c 272 s 4, changing subsection (2) to subsection (4).

Part headings not law—2007 c 496: See note following RCW 26.09.002.

Custody, designation of for purposes of other statutes: RCW 26.09.285.