

Best Interest of the Child Checklist



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Attorney's Note

Use this checklist to evaluate how your parenting may be viewed by a court, custody evaluator, or CPS investigator. Each item reflects a factor commonly considered under the best-interest standard. See [the full article](#) for more context.

Safety & Supervision

- Child is adequately supervised at all times appropriate to age
- Home is free from hazards, unsecured substances, and unsafe individuals
- Parent does not drive impaired
- Parent knows child's whereabouts at all times
- Emergency contacts are current and accessible
- Firearms, if any, are secured according to law
- Caregivers for the child are properly vetted and deemed safe
- Child is not left alone beyond age-appropriate limits

What this means: Courts prioritize physical safety above all else. Even otherwise legal behavior can be problematic if it creates risk for a child.

Stability & Routine

- Child has consistent housing
- Parent maintains stable employment or income source
- Child has a predictable daily schedule (schools, meals, bedtime)
- Child has a consistent sleeping arrangement
- Child has reliable transportation to school and activities

- Parent plans ahead for childcare needs
- Child is not left wondering where his or her food will come from or when they will eat next

What this means: Stability supports emotional security. Frequent disruptions raise concerns.

Physical & Medical Care

- Parent maintains health insurance or coverage plan
- Child attends medical and dental appointments
- Parent tracks medical records and immunizations
- Parent follows prescribed treatments and medications
- Medications are stored safely
- Child's nutritional and hygiene needs are met
- Parent responds promptly to illness or injury
- Parent follows through on specialist or therapy referrals

What this means: Missed appointments and untreated conditions can signal neglect.

Emotional Support & Bonding

- Parent demonstrates affection and responsiveness to child
- Child feels safe expressing emotions
- Parent is attentive to child's emotional needs
- Child shows comfort and trust in the parent

What this means: Courts evaluate not just presence, but quality of engagement.

Education & Development

- Regular school attendance (if child is school-aged)
- Parent ensures child's homework is completed (if child is school-aged)
- Parent communicates with teachers or caregivers
- Child's developmental needs are addressed
- Child has access to learning materials at home
- Parent monitors screen time appropriately
- Parent supports extracurricular or enrichment activities
- Parent addresses learning challenges promptly

What this means: Chronic absences or lack of involvement can weigh heavily against a parent

Judgment & Decision-Making

- Parent makes age-appropriate decisions for child
- Parent prioritizes child's needs over personal convenience
- Parent avoids exposing child to adult conflicts and/or overwhelming child with adult responsibilities
- Parent demonstrates impulse control
- Parent considers long-term impact of decisions
- Parent seeks help when overwhelmed and demonstrates problem-solving skills

What this means: Courts assess whether decisions reflect mature, child-centered judgement.

Substance Use & Impairment

- Parent avoids substance use before parenting time
- There is no impairment by parent, other adults, or caregivers while supervising the child

- Substances are kept inaccessible to children
- Parent has a plan for childcare if impaired
- Parent is compliant with court orders or agreements regarding refrain from substance use
- Parent recognizes and manages triggers responsibly
- Parent demonstrates sobriety during exchanges or supervision

What this means: The big issue is impairment and risk, not simply use.

Co-Parenting & Communication

- Parent encourages healthy relationship with the other parent (when safe)
- Parents communicate respectfully, especially when around child
- Parents share important information promptly
- Parents resolve disputes without involving the child
- Parents follow court orders
- Parents encourage consistency for the child between households

What this means: Courts favor parents who reduce conflict, not escalate it.

Accountability & Compliance

- Parent follows CPS or court recommendations
- Parent completes required services on time
- Parent is respectful to case workers, volunteers, and the court
- Parent documents compliance when necessary

What this means: Cooperation and accountability often matter as much as the underlying issue.

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