

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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