

Circuit Court for Harford County
Case No. C-12-FM-23-000910

UNREPORTED*

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 116

September Term, 2025

Y.A.

v.

L.A.

Reed,
Zic,
Hotten, Michele D.
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

Opinion by Zic, J.

Filed: September 17, 2025

* This is an unreported opinion. This opinion may not be cited as precedent within the rule of stare decisis. It may be cited for its persuasive value only if the citation conforms to Maryland Rule 1-104(a)(2)(B).

This case arises from divorce proceedings between Y.A. (“Father”), appellant, and L.A. (“Mother”), appellee.¹ In February 2025, the Circuit Court for Harford County entered a judgment of absolute divorce (“Judgment”). Father appealed and now presents four questions for our review, which we have consolidated into one:² Whether the circuit court abused its discretion in creating the custody schedule. For the following reasons, we answer this question in the negative and affirm.

BACKGROUND

Father and Mother were married on October 17, 2008, and are the parents of B. (born in 2010), T. (born in 2016), and E. (born in 2020) (collectively, “children”). Mother also has a 17-year-old daughter, C.R., from a previous relationship, who the parties raised together during their marriage.

¹ To protect the minor children’s privacy, we refer to the children by their initials, and to the parties by their initials in the caption and as “Father” and “Mother” throughout the opinion.

² Father phrases the questions as follows:

- I. Did the court abuse its discretion in implementing a custody schedule not reasonably tailored to the best interest of the children as it relates to [access periods during and after Mother’s professional schedule]?
- II. Did the court abuse its discretion in fashioning a custody schedule that does not align with the specific circumstances of the parties’ lives?
- III. Did the court abuse its discretion in failing to create a holiday and vacation schedule aligned with the parties['] past lifestyle?
- IV. Did the court abuse its discretion in failing to articulate what evidence provided it confidence that [Mother] was in a position to genuinely co-parent?

The parties separated on or around May 1, 2023, when Mother, the children, and C.R. left the marital home in Jarrettsville, Maryland, and moved into a house in West Virginia. Father continued to live in the marital home after the separation.

The Divorce Proceedings

Father filed for divorce from Mother on June 15, 2023, and Mother filed a counter-complaint on July 20, 2023. Following a four-day divorce trial, the circuit court issued an oral opinion on February 18, 2025, in which it emphasized the importance of the best interest of the children in making its custody determination:

[T]he primary consideration that I have, and I think I shared with you all this, I always write a Post-It note that contains your children's names and ages and I write best interest of the children under it. . . . These children need both of you, and I find that it's important that my ruling reflect [that] the children need to have a relationship with both parties and need to have input with both parties in the issues that they will be confront[ed] with as they grow up.

The court continued, citing to *Taylor v. Taylor*, 306 Md. 290 (1986), and *Montgomery Cnty. Dep't of Soc. Servs. v. Sanders*, 38 Md. App. 406 (1977), and applied the factors it determined to be relevant:

Number one, the capacity of the parents to communicate and reach shared decisions affecting the children's welfare. . . . I think both of you are self-aware enough to know that these communications are important, that the ability for the both of you to communicate is important, and we do have a lot of history here between the both of you that does make your communication difficult, but I don't find it makes your communication impossible. . . . There are not a lot of areas where the both of you disagree, it's just the sharing of information back and forth that . . . became a little bit of a challenge.

* * *

I don't find your communication style prevents the both of you from reaching shared decisions on medical issues, on mental health issues.

* * *

On the educational issue, [Mother], I was impressed with her ability to explain to me how the homeschooling process works, why children may appear to be delayed when the homeschooling process kind of works in a bit of a different way. . . . I thought her command of the educational process the children are in, and have been in, while I do think they have fallen behind a little bit because you all have been consumed by this divorce and custody litigation, I think the both of you have a distinct and clear intention to get them up to speed and continue moving along.

* * *

The willingness of the parents to share custody. [Mother] is not willing to share legal and physical custody with [Father], and [Father] is willing to share. I think that is a positive characteristic for [Father], and . . . a negative characteristic for [Mother].

* * *

The fitness of the parents. . . . In terms of character and reputation of the parties, as I said, you both are of good character. . . . I think you both have good reputations with the community.

* * *

I don't accept all of [the child psychologist's] conclusions in this case. He did not do a custody evaluation. He did a psychological evaluation, and he was very critical of [Father], less critical of [Mother], but he was quick to acknowledge that his assessment was all the way back in January [] 2024, and his conclusions would change if he knew that [Father] had been engaging in therapy ever since. . . . I do find that [Father] has continued and stayed consistent with his

therapy. . . . I do think there is some truth to [the child psychologist's conclusion that Father] is very jealous and controlling at times.

* * *

[G]oing back to fitness of the parents[] . . . I do have concerns about [Mother] leaving May 1st of 2023 and basically disappearing into the thin air, and not giving [Father] access to the children for a lengthy period of time. The day-to-day care that she provides I believe she's very fit in that regard. I don't believe she's neglecting or denying the children anything. I don't believe that she's abusive or neglectful towards the children.

I similarly don't find that [Father] has those characteristics. When he has time with his children, I think he elects to enjoy that to the fullest extent. . . . I don't think for a second that you all are not feeding these children, getting them their daily needs or caring for them in a very adequate and substantial way.

* * *

The relationship between each child and parent. There [were] numerous examples of testimony [regarding each child's feelings toward Mother and Father]. . . .

I do find that the gap in time that the children experienced away from [Father] . . . hasn't resulted in the kids being alienated or estranged from [Father].

They still love him. They still like him. They still want to spend time with him. . . . [These are] essentially the preferences of the child[ren]. The best interest attorney also echoed some of those same points. . . .

Potential disruption of the child[']s social and school life. These children have a very very flexible life with homeschool. . . . I don't see any disruption to their school or social life based upon the implantation of more set[,] clear custody schedule.

Geographic proximity of the homes. . . . [F]or now, you all have geographic proximity to each other. Demands of

parental employment. I am going to modify two schedules. One is outside [period of Mother's professional obligations] and one is inside [that period]. I believe[that Mother's father] has done a fine job just pitching in while [Mother is fulfilling professional obligations], but it's time for [Father] to do some of that heavy lifting during that period. . . . The age and number of the children. [W]e have three kids, and I stated their ages [when explaining the relationship between the child and each parent].

The sincerity of the parents' request. [] I not only listened to your testimony throughout the trial but I've physically observed how you both are, and I saw there were at least 10 or 15 occasions throughout this trial when the both of you were crying[.]

* * *

[Father], I think your request to be an involved parent, involved in their lives, involved in aspects of making decisions for them is sincere. It's also evident from the [text] messages that I've read. . . . [Mother], I believe you're sincere as well that you want to be in the driver's seat. . . .

The financial status of the parents . . . doesn't have much of an impact on the [custody] decision. . . . Benefit to the parents, obviously, there's a great benefit to both of you involved in the children's lives. . . . The potential of maintaining natural family relations.

I know it is important to me that the children have good and meaningful relationships with both of you. The extended family less so, but that's important as well, and I do make some provisions [in the custody schedule] for all of that. Material opportunity affecting the future life of the children. . . . I think that they have good opportunities for future success in life.

The health of the children. . . . None of [the medical issues discussed at trial] appear to me to inhibit any physical custody schedule from being implemented, nor do I think that there's a major problem working out those issues in a legal custody environment between the two of you.

Length of separation from natural parents. . . . [W]e have this separation that abruptly occurs on May 1st of 2023 and to the point, essentially to the present. This is the most critical point for [Mother]. . . . I understand you have your differences. I understand [Mother] felt controlled, and the victim of coercive control and abuse at the hands or at the words of [Father] at various times throughout your marriage, but looking through the lens of the children, it's a very very concerning set of circumstances for any [c]ourt when we know children are being deprived of access.

* * *

As I said earlier, the length of separation from the natural parents usually results in a situation where the kids are alienated from the parent and usually results in a situation where the kids are resistant and hesitant to go to the alienated parent. We don't have that situation here[.]

* * *

[W]e also have the [Maryland Rule] 9-204.1 factors which essentially overlap. I think the only one that I also want to identify here is the children's physical and emotional security and protection from conflict and violence. All right, I'm going to order that the both of you continue in the therapy that you've been undergoing. I'm going to order that the children continue in the therapy that they've been undergoing. All of this is I think very important for their emotional security and protective from conflict and violence.

The court then explained the physical custody schedule, which it entered on February 19, 2025, as part of the written Judgment:

ORDERED that, pursuant to Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 9-106, each party shall provide advance written notice (via email or regular mail) of at least 90 days to the other party of the intent to relocate the permanent residence of the party or the minor children either within or outside the State; and it is further,

ORDERED that the parties shall have shared physical custody/parenting time with the minor children pursuant to the following phased-in schedule:

- (1) **Phase 1** (Effective February 18, 2025 through April 1, 2025): Father shall have parenting time with the minor children every other weekend (to start on February 21, 2025) from Friday at 4 p.m. until Sunday at 7 p.m.;
- (2) **Phase 2** (April 2, 2025 through June 1, 2025): Father shall have parenting time with the minor children every other weekend from Friday at 4 p.m. until Monday at 9 a.m.;
- (3) **Phase 3** (June 2, 2025 going forward): In addition to the Phase 2 schedule, Father shall have parenting time with the minor children every Wednesday overnight at 4 p.m. through Thursday morning at 9 a.m.;
- (4) **Phase 4** (solely during . . . mid-January through mid-April[] from 2026 going forward, provided Mother is still [in her current employment]): Father shall have parenting time with the minor children every Monday at 9 a.m. through Thursday at 4 p.m. each week; and Mother shall have parenting time with the minor children from Thursday at 4 p.m. until Monday at 9 a.m.;
- (5) **Except as otherwise set forth below with regard to holidays and vacations**, Mother shall have parenting time with the minor children at all other times; and it is further,

ORDERED that custody exchanges shall occur at the foregoing dates and times at the Harford County Sherriff's Office [] or another location as mutually agreed (in writing) by the parties; and it is further,

ORDERED that, except in the case of emergency, each party shall have the opportunity for telephone/Facetime access to each of the minor children while in the other party's care no more than one time every other day for no more than fifteen minutes; and it is further,

* * *

ORDERED that the parties shall alternate all major holidays, as follows:

Holiday	Mother's Years	Father's Years	Comments
Christmas Eve (Dec. 24 @ 2 p.m. to Dec. 25 @ 2 p.m.)	All	-	
Christmas Day (Dec. 25 @ 2 p.m. to Dec. 26 @ 2 p.m.)	-	All	
New Years Eve (Dec. 31 @ 2 p.m. to Jan. 1 @ 2 p.m.)	Odd	Even	Based upon # of year on 12/31
New Years Day (Jan. 1 @ 2 p.m. to Jan. 2 @ 2 p.m.)	Even	Odd	Based upon # of year on 12/31
Last Day of Ramadan	-	All	
Kurban	-	All	
Good Friday @ 6 p.m. to Easter @ 6 p.m.	All		
Memorial Day Weekend (Friday at 4 p.m. to Monday @ 4 p.m.)	Odd	Even	
Labor Day Weekend (Friday at 4 p.m. to Monday @ 4 p.m.)	Even	Odd	
Thanksgiving (Wednesday @ 11 a.m. to Fri. @ 11 a.m.)	Even	Odd	
Thanksgiving (Fri. @ 11 a.m. to Sunday at 11 a.m.)	Odd	Even	
Father's Day (11 a.m. to 9 p.m.)	-	All	
Mother's Day (11 a.m. to 9 p.m.)	All	-	

And it is further,

ORDERED that each party shall have two non-consecutive weeks of vacation with the minor children each year, which may be scheduled during the summer or otherwise. All vacations shall be scheduled to coincide with that [party's] existing weekend parenting time; and it is further,

ORDERED that in even years Mother shall have priority to select her vacation weeks by April 1 and Father shall select his vacation weeks by May 1; in odd years Father shall have priority to select his vacation weeks by April 1 and Mother shall select her vacation weeks by May 1; and it is further

ORDERED that the "holiday schedule" shall take priority over the "vacation schedule," which shall take priority over the "regular schedule[.]"

On March 19, 2025, Father filed a motion to revise or amend the Judgment. He filed a timely notice of appeal later on the same day. We supplement with additional facts below as appropriate.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

This Court’s assessment of a child custody determination generally involves three interrelated standards of review. *Reichert v. Hornbeck*, 210 Md. App 282, 303 (2013) (citation omitted). The Supreme Court, in *In re Yve S.*, 373 Md. 551, 586 (2003), explained:

When the appellate court scrutinizes factual findings, the clearly erroneous standard of [Maryland Rule 8-131(c)] applies. [Secondly,] [i]f it appears that the chancellor erred as to matters of law, further proceedings in the trial court will ordinarily be required unless the error is determined to be harmless. Finally, when the appellate court views the ultimate conclusion of the chancellor founded upon sound legal principles and based upon factual findings that are not clearly erroneous, the chancellor’s decision should be disturbed only if there has been a clear abuse of discretion.

(second and third alterations in original) (emphasis and citations omitted).

The abuse of discretion standard “accounts for the trial court’s unique opportunity to observe the demeanor and the credibility of the parties and the witnesses.” *Santo v. Santo*, 448 Md. 620, 625 (2016) (internal marks and citation omitted). A trial court abuses its discretion when “‘no reasonable person would take the view adopted by the [trial] court,’ or when the court acts ‘without reference to any guiding rules or principles.’” *In re Adoption/Guardianship No. 3598*, 347 Md. 295, 312 (1997) (internal citations omitted).

DISCUSSION

I. THE CIRCUIT COURT DID NOT ABUSE ITS DISCRETION IN MAKING THE CUSTODY SCHEDULE.

A. The Parties' Contentions

On appeal, Father argues that the court abused its discretion in not awarding him more parenting time. Father specifically contends that the circuit court abused its discretion by not explaining how the phased parenting schedule operates in the best interest of the children. Father also argues that three consecutive weeks of vacation, instead of the two consecutive weeks awarded, would be “more in line with the parties’ established lifestyle and the best interests of the children[,]” and that the holiday schedule should be “more clearly define[d] to avoid disputes between the parties.” Last, Father argues that the court abused its discretion because it did not “articulate what evidence was presented to provide assurance that [Mother] is able to promote Father’s relationship and to work in good[]faith regarding legal custody matters.” Father reintroduces evidence presented to the circuit court during trial in support of his last argument but does not assert that the court clearly erred in its factual findings or committed a legal error.

Relying on this Court’s deferential review of child custody determinations, Mother counters that Father does not explain why a reasonable person could not have found as the circuit court did. Therefore, according to Mother, Father has not provided a sufficient reason to justify reversing the circuit court’s custody schedule.

B. Analysis

A trial court’s authority to make custody determinations “is very broad so that it may accomplish the paramount purpose of securing the welfare and promoting the best interest of the child.” *Santo*, 448 Md. at 627 (quoting *Taylor v. Taylor*, 306 Md. 290, 301-02 (1986)) (internal marks omitted). The “primary goal” in a custody determination “is to serve the best interests of the child.” *Conover v. Conover*, 450 Md. 51, 60 (2016) (citing *Taylor*, 306 Md. at 303). To determine what is in the child’s best interest, a trial court “examines numerous factors and weighs the advantages of the alternative environments.” *Montgomery Cnty. Dep’t of Soc. Servs. v. Sanders*, 38 Md. App. 406, 420 (1977); *see also Taylor*, 306 Md. at 304-11.³ When physical custody is shared,

³ In *Sanders*, this Court articulated the following factors for consideration by a court determining custody:

The criteria for judicial determination includes, but is not limited to, 1) fitness of the parents, 2) character and reputation of the parties, 3) desire of the natural parents and agreements between the parties, 4) potentiality of maintaining natural family relations, 5) preference of the child, 6) material opportunities affecting the future life of the child, 7) age, health and sex of the child, 8) residences of parents and opportunity for visitation, 9) length of separation from the natural parents, and 10) prior voluntary abandonment or surrender[.]

38 Md. App. at 420 (internal citations omitted).

The Supreme Court of Maryland also listed factors for trial courts to consider in reaching custody decisions in *Taylor*, including: the capacity of parents to communicate and to reach shared decisions affecting the child’s welfare, willingness of parents to share custody, fitness of parents, relationship established between the child and each parent, preference of the child, potential disruption of child’s social and school life, geographic proximity of parental homes, demands of parental employment, age and number of children, sincerity of parents’ request, financial status of the parents, impact on state or

(continued)

Maryland Rule 9-204.1(c) also provides a list of factors that may be used to determine each party’s parenting time.⁴

Before turning to the facts here, we make two observations. *First*, appellate review is not the proper forum for a party to relitigate its theory of the case or to reargue the weight of the evidence. *Terranova v. Bd. of Trs.*, 81 Md. App. 1, 13 (1989) (“The weighing of the evidence and the assessment of witness credibility is for the finder of fact, not the reviewing court.”). Broad discretion is afforded to a trial court’s credibility assessments because only it:

[S]ees the witnesses and the parties, hears the testimony, and has the opportunity to speak with the child; [a trial court] is in a far better position than is an appellate court, which has only a cold record before it, to weigh the evidence and determine what disposition will best promote the welfare of the minor child.

Reichert, 210 Md. App. at 304 (quoting *In re Yve S.*, 373 Md. at 585-86) (internal marks omitted). *See also Hripunovs v. Maximova*, 263 Md. App. 244, 269 (2024) (observing that a trial judge is “entitled ‘to accept—or reject—*all*, *part*, or *none* of the testimony of

federal assistance, benefit to parents, and “all other circumstances that reasonably relate to the [custody] issue.” 306 Md. at 304-11. The factors in *Sanders* and *Taylor* are colloquially known as the *Taylor-Sanders* (or the *Sanders-Taylor*) factors. *See, e.g., Jose v. Jose*, 237 Md. App. 588, 600 (2018).

⁴ A “parenting plan” is a “written agreement about how parties will work together to take care of a child.” Md. Rule 9-204.1(a)(2). Parenting plans specify “the amount of time the child spends with each party.” Md. Rule 9-204.1(a)(3). Many of the factors listed in Rule 9-204.1(c) overlap with the *Taylor-Sanders* factors. *See, e.g.,* Md. Rule 9-204.1(c)(9) (“[a]ge of the child”).

any witness, whether that testimony [is] or [is] not contradicted or corroborated by any other evidence’’) (quoting *Omayaka v. Omayaka*, 417 Md. 643, 659 (2011)).

Second, “trial judges are not obliged to spell out in words every thought and step of logic[.]” *Beales v. State*, 329 Md. 263, 273 (1993). For this reason, “a trial judge’s failure to state each and every consideration or factor in a particular applicable standard does not, absent more, constitute an abuse of discretion, so long as the record supports a reasonable conclusion that appropriate factors were taken into account in the exercise of discretion.” *Cobrand v. Adventist Healthcare, Inc.*, 149 Md. App. 431, 445 (2003); *see also Wagner v. Wagner*, 109 Md. App. 1, 50 (1996) (“[W]e presume judges to know the law and apply it, even in the absence of a verbal indication of having considered it.”).

Our review of the record before us reveals that the circuit court considered, in depth, multiple *Taylor-Sanders* factors, including the capacity of the parties to communicate, the willingness of the parties to share custody, parental fitness, age and health of the children, the sincerity of the parents’ requests, length of separation, geographic proximity of the parties’ homes, the character and reputation of the parties, preferences of the children, material opportunities to the children, and the parties’ financial status. The court also expressly considered Maryland Rule 9-204.1(c)(6), finding that continued therapy would be “very important” to the children’s emotional security.

Father’s argument that the court abused its discretion by not explaining how the phased parenting schedule operates in the best interests of the children is not supported by the thorough factual findings made by the circuit court. Contrary to Father’s assertion,

the court’s factual findings are aligned with many of the *Taylor-Sanders* factors—factors that are used to create custody arrangements in the child’s best interest. *Taylor*, 306 Md. at 303 (“[I]n any child custody case, the paramount concern is the best interest of the child. . . . The best interest of the child is [] not considered as one of many factors, but as the objective to which virtually all other factors speak.”).

Father does not explain how the Judgment’s consecutive two-week vacation schedule or holiday schedule fail to serve the best interests of the children. We do not seek out law and facts in favor of either party. *See Rollins v. Capital Plaza Assoc., L.P.*, 181 Md. App. 188, 201-02 (2008) (“Not only will we not delve through the record to unearth factual support for [appellant], but we also will not seek out law to sustain [appellant’s] position.” (internal marks, emphasis, and citation omitted)); *see also Elecs. Store, Inc. v. Celco P’ship*, 127 Md. App. 385, 405 (“[I]t is not this not this Court’s responsibility to attempt to fashion coherent legal theories to support appellant’s [] claims.”). Therefore, we do not discuss this particular argument further.

Father’s last contention, that the circuit court did not explain its finding that Mother will “promote Father’s relationship” and “act in good faith[,]” challenges the weight given to testimony and other evidence. We give broad discretion to a trial court’s credibility assessments because, as explained above, trial courts are in a far better position than this Court to weigh the evidence. *Reichert*, 210 Md. App. at 304. The cited evidence reintroduced on appeal was previously weighed by the circuit court, and we decline to second-guess its evidentiary value when Father does not argue that the court made a clear factual error or committed a legal mistake.

Furthermore, while trial courts are not “obliged to spell out in words every thought and step of logic[,]” *Beales*, 329 Md. at 273, we note that many of the court’s factual findings reasonably support that Mother “promote[s] Father’s relationship” with the children and has “act[ed] in good faith[.]” In its verbal ruling, the circuit court recounted observing the parties’ physical reactions during the trial, including “10 or 15 occasions” when both parties were crying, and noted that text messages between Mother and Father evinced the sincerity of their requests for physical custody and their ability to communicate productively about the children. The court also found that Mother’s separation of the children from Father did not result in their emotional alienation from Father, and separately commended Mother on her command of the children’s education. Given these findings, we cannot conclude that “no reasonable person would take the view adopted by the [trial] court.” *In re Adoption/Guardianship No. 3598*, 347 Md. at 312.

For these reasons, we hold that the circuit court did not abuse its discretion in creating the custody schedule, and, accordingly, affirm.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
FOR HARFORD COUNTY AFFIRMED;
COSTS TO BE PAID BY APPELLANT.**