Circuit Court for Montgomery County
Case No. C-15-FM-24-004074

UNREPORTED

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND*

No. 937

September Term, 2025

A. A. E.

v.

S. K. B.

Arthur,
Ripken,
Kehoe, Christopher, B.
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

Opinion by Kehoe, Christopher, B. J.

Filed: January 27, 2026

* 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 Rule 1-104(a)(2)(B).

A. A. E. ("Mother) and S. K. B ("Father") are the parents of a minor child, M.,[1] who was two years old when the judgment was entered in this case. After their relationship ended, Mother filed a complaint for custody and child support in the Circuit Court for Montgomery County. Father filed a counter complaint seeking the same relief. Following a three-day evidentiary hearing, the court announced its findings of fact and conclusions of law from the bench and entered orders regarding custody, child support, and earnings withholding. Mother has appealed and presents three questions, which we have rephrased:

> I. Whether the court failed to consider the best interest of the child or otherwise abused its discretion by limiting virtual calls between her and M.?
>
> II. Whether the court failed to consider the best interest of the child or otherwise abused its discretion in ordering that each party shall be responsible for making their own childcare arrangements during their custodial time?
>
> III. Whether the provisions of the court's judgment as to scheduling vacation time with M. were ambiguous?[2]

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[1] We will refer to the parties and their child by initials to protect their privacy. *See J.A.B. v. J.E.D.B.*, 250 Md. App. 234, 241 n.1, 242 n.4 (2021). Neither the minor child's first name nor their last name begins with the letter "M." We have chosen the letter "M." at random. *See Augustine v. Wolf*, 264 Md. App. 1, 7 n.2 (2024).

[2] Mother articulates the issues as follows:

> I. The Court failed to consider the best interest of the child [M.] in regards to video calls.
>
> II. The Court failed to consider the best interest of the child [M.] in regards to allowing for third party care, such as daycare, during Appellee's

(Footnote Continued . . . .)

We will affirm the judgment of the trial court as to the first two issues. However, we will vacate the court's judgment regarding vacations with M. and remand the case to the trial court for proceedings consistent with this opinion.

BACKGROUND

Mother and Father dated on and off beginning in 2021. At some point, Mother began to reside with Father in his home in Annapolis, and they conceived a child. They separated after an argument in December of 2022 when Mother was six or seven months pregnant. There was conflicting testimony as to the cause of the argument, and the trial court declined to make a finding on that issue. However, the court found that:

> there was an argument and that the defendant did ask the plaintiff, who was six or seven months pregnant, to move out of the home in the middle of the night in December. Defendant's decision was wrong which he now admits. It is clear to the Court that communication has been a problem throughout the parties' relationship.

By the time of M.'s birth, Mother had moved back to her parents' home in Olney, Maryland, and Father was staying at a motel nearby to be available for the birth. After M. was born, the parties resumed living together, but in June 2024, they separated again. As of the time of trial, Mother was living with her parents in Olney, and Father was living at his home in Annapolis.

> parenting time, when the Ap[p]ellant (mother) and grandparents are available, in which she has a close attachment and bond with.
>
> III. There is ambiguity in the Order regarding vacations.

After their separation, Mother withheld access to M. from Father for a two-week period that concluded when the parties "work[ed] out an agreement" with the assistance of counsel. Thereafter, Father had access with M. two days each week. Mother did not believe that more access was appropriate because M. was breastfeeding, and lengthy car rides were not in the child's best interest.[3] According to Father, he agreed to the two day a week schedule only because he did not think he would have any access otherwise.

In December 2024, the parties appeared for a pendente lite hearing before a family law magistrate. The magistrate recommended that Mother be awarded primary physical custody with a three-stage graduated access schedule for Father. The parties never implemented the first two steps of the schedule and instead went right to the final stage in which the amount of time that M. stayed with Father varied on alternating weeks.[4]

In April 2025, the matter came before the circuit court for a three-day merits hearing. The court made factual findings:

> Both parties made similar allegations of verbal and emotional abuse, manipulation, and controlling behavior. The Court credits both parties that they felt unheard in the relationship and that from each of their perspectives, the other party did not value their contributions or their voice, particularly when it came to parenting [M.] [Mother] testified that on one

[3] The trial court found that it typically takes approximately one to one-and-one-half hours to drive from one party's home to the other's. Neither party challenges this finding.

[4] Specifically, M. stays with Father on every other weekend from Friday at 5:30 p.m. until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. On the alternating weeks, M. stays with Father from Monday at 9:30 a.m. overnight until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m.

> occasion after a morning of arguments, [Father] grabbed her wrist while they were in the car. [Father] testified he recalled that [incident] and offered to take [Mother] to the hospital when she said she might be injured. [Mother] did not feel she needed to go to the hospital, and I credit both parties regarding this incident.
>
> [Mother] testified that [Father] did not support her breastfeeding [M.] during the night and soothing her when she cried at night. According to [Mother], [Father] threatened to put a camera in the nursery so that he would know if she was breastfeeding at night. [Father] denied this allegation. According to [Father], [M.] was not waking up on her own and said [Mother] was waking her up during the night to feed, which [Father] did not think was in [M.'s] best interest.

The court credited Mother's testimony "that she felt isolated from her friends and family during the relationship[,]" and it credited Father's testimony that Mother "would always threaten to leave him and take [M.] and get sole custody[.]" The court further found that Father is "supportive of [Mother] breastfeeding [M.]," but that "the parties have very different opinions about whether [M.] needs to be breastfed so often at night." The court concluded that M.'s "current breastfeeding schedule would [not] preclude [Father] from having overnight access."

Additionally, the trial court found that both parents are fit.[5] The court further found that Father "has [fostered] and will continue to foster [M.'s] relationship with [Mother], her family, and his family."[6] The court found that Father "has the financial means to

[5] Mother alleged that Father drank excessively, but the court found that he "does not at this time have an alcohol abuse issue[.]"

[6] Presumably because of her age, the court expressly did not consider M.'s preference.

provide for [M.], and he has historically done so."[7] The court expressly noted that the distance between the parties' homes was a factor it considered to be "extremely relevant[.]" The court found that both parents demonstrated their ability to meet M.'s developmental and educational needs. The court further found that Father "has been able to act on [M.'s] needs rather than his own" but that Mother's actions in cutting off Father's access to M. gave it "some pause." The court found that "each party has made harmful and inappropriate comments to others in front of" M., and it made clear that the child "should never be exposed to any form of domestic violence, whether that is emotional, mental, or physical." The court found that Mother "has always performed parenting tasks and responsibilities." Finally, the court found that "the resolution of the custody matter will allow the parties to coparent without disrupting [M.'s] life" and "that both parties have the desire and potential to coparent with each other."

After considering all these factors, the court issued its rulings concerning custody, child support, and earnings withholding. It then entered a written order[8] memorializing its oral rulings, which are the subject matter of this appeal.

[7] Consistent with its findings, the court further entered an order requiring Father to pay $2,627 per month in child support, and to pay an additional $1,000.00 towards the arrears, which were assessed at $7,475.00. Neither party disputes this aspect of the trial court's judgment.

[8] The Court's order is titled "Order (Custody & Support)." We will refer to it as the "Custody and Support Order."

Mother filed a timely motion to alter or amend judgment, which the court denied. This timely appeal followed.

We will provide additional facts where pertinent in our discussion of the issues.

DISCUSSION

The Standard of Review

"We review child custody determinations utilizing three interrelated standards of review." *J.A.B. v. J.E.D.B.*, 250 Md. App. 234, 246 (2021) (citing *In re Yve S.*, 373 Md. 551, 586 (2003)). The Supreme Court of Maryland has explained the three interrelated standards as follows:

> When the appellate court scrutinizes factual findings, the clearly erroneous standard of [Rule 8-131(c)] applies. Secondly, if it appears that the [court] 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 [court] founded upon sound legal principles and based upon factual findings that are not clearly erroneous, the [court's] decision should be disturbed only if there has been a clear abuse of discretion.

Yve S., 373 Md. at 586 (cleaned up).[9]

"The light that guides the trial court in its determination, and in our review, is 'the best interest of the child standard,' which 'is always determinative in child custody

[9] In written orders and opinions, Maryland courts sometimes remove non-substantive material, such as brackets and quotation marks, from quotations to improve readability. The phrase "cleaned up" is a signal to the reader that this has occurred. *See Lamalfa v. Hearn*, 457 Md. 350, 373 n.5 (2018).

disputes.'" *Santo v. Santo*, 448 Md. 620, 626 (2016) (quoting *Ross v. Hoffman*, 280 Md. 172, 178 (1977)); *see id*. at 635 (observing that "[i]t is the child, after all, whom the court must consider foremost in fashioning custody awards"); *Taylor v. Taylor*, 306 Md. 290, 303 (1986) ("We emphasize that in any child custody case, the paramount concern is the best interest of the child.").

It is important for the parties to understand that appellate courts do not make their own determination as to a child's best interest. *J.A.B.*, 250 Md. App. at 247. "Rather, the trial court's decision governs, unless the factual findings made by the trial court are clearly erroneous or there is a clear showing of an abuse of discretion." *Id*. (cleaned up). Generally, a "'trial court's findings [as to factual matters] are not clearly erroneous if there is competent or material evidence in the record to support the court's conclusion.'" *Id*. (quoting *Azizova v. Suleymanov*, 243 Md. App. 340, 372 (2019)).

Appellate courts will reverse discretionary decisions for two reasons. First, trial courts can misunderstand or misapply a relevant legal rule or principle. *See, e.g., Zadeh v. State*, 258 Md. App. 547, 587 (2023) (stating that the exercise of "the court's discretion is always tempered by the requirement that the court correctly apply the law applicable to the case" (cleaned up)).

Second, a court can abuse its discretion by making a decision that "does not logically follow from the findings upon which it supposedly rests or has no reasonable relationship to its announced objective." *North v. North*, 102 Md. App. 1, 14 (1994). This occurs when "[t]he decision under consideration [is] well removed from any center mark

imagined by the reviewing court and beyond the fringe of what [the reviewing] court deems minimally acceptable." *Id.*

A trial court's "exercise of discretion is presumed correct until the attacking party has overcome such a presumption by clear and convincing proof of abuse." *Hossainkhail v. Gebrehiwot*, 143 Md. App. 716, 725 (2002) (citing *Langrall, Muir & Noppinger v. Gladding*, 282 Md. 397, 401 (1978)).

With this as background, we turn to the issues raised by the parties in the current case.

I. The Virtual Calls[10]

The trial court's Custody and Support Order included a phased-in schedule for virtual calls between the parents and M. The relevant part of the order is titled "Phase III." It states in pertinent part:

> [Father] shall have access with the minor child every other weekend from Friday at 5:30 pm. until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. [Father's] first phase III weekend shall occur July 11, 2025 through July 15, 2025.
>
> On the Mondays not following [Father's] weekend access, he shall have access with the minor child from Monday at 9:30 a.m. overnight until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. [Father's] first Monday-Tuesday overnight access shall occur from July 21, 2025 through July 22, 2025.
>
> [Father] shall no longer have visits on Wednesdays under this final phase.

* * *

[10] In their briefs, the parties use the terms "video" and "virtual" in reference to the remote audio-visual communications between M. and her parents. For the sake of consistency, we will use "virtual" in this opinion.

> ORDERED, that the non-custodial parent shall have a virtual call with the minor child on Saturdays at a time to be agreed to by the parties. If the parties cannot agree to a time the default time shall be 7:00 p.m. [Father] shall have a virtual call every Thursday evening at a time to be agreed to by the parties. If the parties cannot agree to a time the default time shall be 7:00 p.m.; and it is further
>
> ORDERED, that once Phase III begins, [Mother] shall have a virtual call with the minor child every Monday evening at a time to be agreed to by the parties. If the parties cannot agree to a time, the default time shall be 7:00 p.m.

Mother contends that the trial court abused its discretion in fashioning its order awarding virtual calls. She complains that the trial court's order "drastically reduce[s]" the frequency of her virtual calls in comparison with the schedule provided under the pendente lite order and that the change is not in M.'s best interest. According to Mother, the court's order "was not supported by credible evidence," harmed M.'s "emotional and developmental needs," and is "inconsistent with" Maryland Rule 9-203(c)[11] because it denied her "reasonable means of communication" with M. during non-custodial periods.

Mother further asserts that, under the schedule ordered by the trial court, M. "will not . . . see or speak with" Mother for three consecutive days. According to Mother, there was no evidence that her virtual calls with M. "were disruptive, inappropriate, or harmful

[11] Mother's reliance on Md. Rule 9-203(c) is misplaced. Rule 9-203 governs financial statements required in cases involving spousal or child support. The rule does not address "reasonable means of communication between the child and parents," as Mother asserts. We have found two other inaccuracies in Mother's briefs. Mother cites *Zur Oestrich v. Zur Oestrich*, 215 Md. App. 341 (2013), and *Fraser v. Dixon*, 98 Md. App. 80 (1993). Neither opinion exists. We will disregard these non-authorities.

to" M. but that Father's virtual calls "were emotionally and verbally abusive" to Mother in M.'s presence. Mother asks us to "remand with instructions to reinstate a more frequent and developmentally appropriate [virtual] call schedule, particularly during long periods of separation."

We believe that Mother misreads the trial court's order. The order provides that Mother and Father each has custody of M. for a portion of each week.[12] Mother has the right to have a virtual call with M. every Monday evening, and Father has the same right on every Thursday evening. The non-custodial parent has the right to a virtual call every Saturday. Father and Mother are scheduled to meet face to face to exchange M. two days each week.

A court abuses its discretion when its ruling is "well removed from any center mark imagined by the reviewing court and beyond the fringe of what that court deems minimally acceptable." *North*, 102 Md. App. at 14. Another way of expressing this concept is that an abuse of discretion "may arise when no reasonable person would take the view adopted by the trial court or when the court acts without reference to any

[12] Specifically, the court's order provided:

> [Father] shall have access with the minor child every other weekend from Friday at 5:30 pm. until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. [Father's] first phase III weekend shall occur July 11, 2025 through July 15, 2025.
>
> On the Mondays not following [Father's] weekend access, he shall have access with the minor child from Monday at 9:30 a.m. overnight until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. [Father's] first Monday-Tuesday overnight access shall occur from July 21, 2025 through July 22, 2025.

guiding rules or principles." *Santo*, 448 Md. at 625-26 (cleaned up). Applying that standard, we will not reverse a trial court's ruling merely because we disagree with it; rather, we will reverse only if its "decision is 'well removed from any center mark imagined by the reviewing court.'" *Id.* at 626 (cleaned up) (quoting *In re Adoption/Guardianship No. 3598*, 347 Md. 295, 313 (1997)).

Under the Phase III access schedule adopted by the trial court, neither party must wait longer than one day either to have a virtual call with M. or to see her in person. We cannot say that the trial court abused its discretion in fashioning its order regarding virtual calls.

II. The Childcare Arrangements

Mother contends that the trial court failed to consider the best interest of the child or otherwise abused its discretion in ordering that each party shall be responsible for making their own childcare arrangements during their custodial time. Mother contends that both she and her mother (M.'s maternal grandmother) are able and willing to take care of M., and furthermore, that M. "has a close attachment and bond with" them.

Mother asserts that:

> Research consistently shows that (1) **secure attachment** to a consistent caregiver underpins later confidence, social competence, and resilience; (2) **Breast-milk feeding**, especially when it continues beyond infancy, provides not only nutrition but also a unique soothing ritual that helps the toddler self-soothe and manage stress; and (3) **Language acquisition** accelerates through daily, responsive interaction with the same adult voice, facial expressions, and routines.

(Emphasis in original.)

Mother contends that placing M. in daycare is inferior to allowing her to care for M. whenever Father is unavailable to do so, and furthermore, the benefits of allowing Mother to care for the child persist beyond infancy and include flexibility of schedule, grandparent support, and long-term consistency in the identity of M.'s caregiver. Thus, Mother contends that the trial court erred in denying her "a right of first refusal provision that favors parental and familial care over third-party options whenever feasible."

Father counters that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in ordering that each party be responsible for their own childcare during their custodial time. According to Father, the trial court "carefully considered" the parties' testimony concerning childcare arrangements, specifically commenting that it did not believe that it would be harmful to M. to spend some time in daycare but that it would be detrimental for her to be subjected to additional lengthy car trips, which would be necessary if Mother's right of first refusal request was granted. Father maintains that the trial court's ruling denying a right of first refusal was "well-reasoned" and in M.'s best interest, was supported by the record, and was not an abuse of discretion.

In rendering its decision, the trial court stated in relevant part:

> [Mother] argued that if [Father] were given more access, he would place [M.] in daycare while he worked. She contends that she should have [M.] during any times when [Father] cannot watch her. While [Father] testified that while it is preferable to have [M.] with family, he would like to have her in daycare occasionally to allow her to socialize with other children. The Court does find that having [M.] in daycare once a week for a short period of time does not have a negative impact on her or [Father's] ability to spend time with her. This is especially true in a case where the parties live so far from one another.

> Having [Mother] watch [M.] during [Father's] custodial time would require one or both parties and [M.] to spend even more time in the car.

Consistent with its reasoning, the trial court's judgment provided that "each party shall make childcare decisions for the minor child during their custodial time[.]"

It is clear to us that the trial court carefully considered the pros and cons of the parties' contentions and the circumstances surrounding their custody arrangements, including the distance separating their respective homes and the amount of time that M. would spend traveling from Father's residence to Mother's and vice versa. We believe that the travel time between the homes, approximately two to three hours per day, is a particularly significant consideration.

Mother has failed to persuade us that "no reasonable person would take the view adopted by the trial court" or that its "decision is well removed from any center mark imagined by the reviewing court." *Santo*, 448 Md. at 625-26 (cleaned up). The court's conclusions that it would not be harmful to M. to spend some time in daycare but that it would be detrimental for M. to be subjected to additional lengthy car trips are both reasonable and consistent with the evidence presented to the court. We conclude that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in ruling that each party would make childcare decisions for M. during their custodial time.

III. Vacations

Mother contends that the trial court's judgment regarding physical custody and vacations is problematic. The relevant parts of the court's judgment state:

> ORDERED, that [Mother] shall have primary residential custody of [M.] . . . ; and it is further
>
> ORDERED, that [Father] shall have access with [M.] as follows:
>
> * * *
>
> [Father] shall have access with [M.] every other weekend from Friday at 5:30 pm. until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. . . .
>
> On the Mondays not following [Father's] weekend access, he shall have access with the minor child from Monday at 9:30 a.m. overnight until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. . . .
>
> * * *
>
> Each party shall be permitted three weeks' vacation to be taken non-consecutively during each calendar year. The parties shall notify each other of any week they plan to use at least 12 weeks in advance[.] If the parties both select the same week and cannot come to another agreement, [Mother] shall have priority in odd years and [Father] shall have priority in even years. Neither party shall select a week that interferes with the holiday schedule[13] unless the parties otherwise agree in writing. Once the minor child begins kindergarten the vacations shall only be taken during school breaks.

Mother asserts that the provision in the court's judgment that the parties "shall notify each other of any week they plan to use at least 12 weeks in advance[,]" is ambiguous because the order does not define "week," and thus, she asserts, "the way parenting time is scheduled[] could easily result in vacations exceeding both [one] calendar week and seven consecutive days."

[13] In a portion of its order that we have omitted, the trial court set forth a detailed custody schedule for Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and Federal Holidays.

Mother also contends that the court's order does not address the relationship between vacations and the provisions of the court's order that pertain to physical custody. She points out that M. is two years old and that "[c]ourts routinely emphasize that prolonged separations from either parent, especially for a toddler, may impair the child's emotional stability, attachment formation, and routine." She asserts that an absence of a parent for one week or more is not in the best interest of M. in light of M.'s age. Mother contends that when the relevant provisions of the court's order are considered in conjunction with one another, the order "demonstrates" that the court's intent "is to avoid having [M.] away from each parent for longer than a period of one week." According to Mother, this result would be consistent with M.'s best interest.

In response, Father states:

> There is no ambiguity to the vacation provision of the Custody Order; [Mother] simply does not like it. . . . [Mother] boldly attempts to impose her own desires into the order by masquerading them as "the court's intention." The court's intention was to give each party three (3) non-consecutive weeks of vacation time, which it did. [Mother's] manifestation [sic] that the court would somehow be offended if either party ended up having more than seven (7) days with [M.] because their vacation runs into their regular access time is wholly unsupported by any facts in evidence, or findings of the court.
>
> * * *
>
> The trial court's determination in awarding three non-consecutive weeks of vacation without otherwise restricting the timing/method of which said vacations can be taken is not an abuse of discretion, nor an "error of law" as asserted by [Mother]. [Mother's] request to modify perceived ambiguity must be denied and the trial court's decision affirmed.

The premise of Father's contention, namely that the trial court's custody order is unambiguous, is incorrect. Additionally, Father's analysis overlooks M.'s best interest, which "is always determinative in child custody disputes." *Santo*, 448 Md. at 626 (cleaned up).

We start with Father's interpretation of the Custody Order. The order provides that each party has the right to "three weeks' vacation [with M.] to be taken non-consecutively during each calendar year." The court's order does not provide a precise meaning of the word "week." As we will now explain, the meaning of "week" in the court's order is ambiguous in the factual context presented by this case.

The landmark Maryland appellate decision regarding the interpretation of court orders and judgments is *Taylor v. Mandel*, 402 Md. 109 (2007). In it, our Supreme Court explained that:

> court orders are construed in the same manner as other written documents and contracts, and if the language of the order is clear and unambiguous, the court will give effect to its plain, ordinary, and usual meaning, taking into account the context in which it is used. Ambiguity exists, however, if when read by a reasonably prudent person, it is susceptible of more than one meaning.

Id. at 125 (cleaned up).

> Additionally, the Court explained that language in a court order could be:
>
> ambiguous in two different respects: 1) it may be intrinsically unclear; or 2) its intrinsic meaning may be fairly clear, but its application to a particular object or circumstance may be uncertain. Thus, a term which is unambiguous in one context may be ambiguous in another.

Id. at 125-26 (cleaned up).

Maryland courts look to dictionary definitions to identify the common and proper understanding of words used in legal documents as evidence of what a reasonable person in the position of the parties would understand those terms to mean. *W. F. Gebhardt & Co., Inc. v. Am. Eur. Ins. Co*., 250 Md. App. 652, 666 (2021).

The dictionaries tell us that there are three relevant definitions of the term "week." The OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY defines "week" as:

> 1.a. A unit of time consisting of a cycle of seven named or numbered days, one day being fixed as the first in the cycle; a single period of this cycle, being a space of seven successive days beginning with the day traditionally fixed as the first day of the week (generally Sunday or Monday)
>
> * * *
>
> 2. A space of seven successive days, irrespective of the time from which it is reckoned.[14]

The MERRIAM-WEBSTER COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY defines "week" as: "[A]ny of a series of 7 day cycles used in various calendars; *esp*: a 7-day cycle beginning on Sunday and ending on Saturday." *Week*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY 1418 (11th ed. 2019).

BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY defines "week" as:

> 1. A period of seven consecutive days beginning on either Sunday or Monday.
> 2. Any consecutive seven-day period.

Week, BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY 1915 (12th ed. 2024).

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[14] *Week*, OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/week_n?tab=meaning_and_use#14824926 (last visited Jan. 12, 2026).

Finally, the CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY DICTIONARY defines "week" as "a period of seven days, especially either from Monday to Sunday or from Sunday to Saturday[.]"[15]

Although the words used in each dictionary vary slightly, the substance of each definition is the same. We conclude that "week" as used in the trial court's judgment could mean:

> 1. a period of seven consecutive days beginning on a Sunday and ending on a Saturday,
>
> 2. a period of seven consecutive days, beginning on a Monday and ending on a Sunday, or
>
> 3. any consecutive seven-day period.

Acknowledging that the court's order "is silent on the precise definition of 'week,'" Mother asserts that:

> the ordinary meaning under United States practice is a seven-day period beginning on Sunday and ending on Saturday. Accordingly, "any week" is understood to refer to a single, contiguous seven-day interval that commences on a Sunday. The purpose of this language is to prevent either parent from unreasonably extending a vacation beyond one week and thereby depriving [M.] of regular contact with either parent.

(Emphasis omitted.)

We agree with Mother that the Custody Order is "silent on the precise definition of 'week,'" which is another way of saying that the Custody Order is ambiguous in this respect. We believe that Mother raises valid concerns that periods of more than seven

[15] *Week*, CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/week (last visited Jan. 12, 2026).

days during which M. has no contact with one of her parents may not be in the child's best interest in light of M.'s age.[16] However, the definition advocated by Mother is only one of the three that is consistent with the language of the trial court's judgment. On remand, the trial court must identify which definition is the most appropriate in this case at this time.

Mother also contends that Father should not be permitted to schedule a week's vacation that ends on a day on which he has had access with M. from "Friday at 5:30 pm. until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m." or on which he has already had access with M. from "Monday at 9:30 a.m. overnight until Tuesday at 5:30 p.m." Under the first scenario, M. would have no physical contact with Mother for eleven days, and under the second, M. would have no physical contact with Mother for nine days. Mother argues that these scenarios are not in M.'s best interest in light of her age. She contends that the vacations should be scheduled so that M. is not physically separated from either parent for more than a week. As we have explained, Father does not agree with any of this.

These issues must be addressed by the trial court. The first step in resolving them requires a judicial decision choosing an appropriate definition of "week" — does the term refer to seven consecutive days beginning on a Sunday and ending on a Saturday, or a

[16] The circuit court's judgment is clear that, in times other than vacations, the parents are obliged to arrange virtual calls between the non-custodial parent and M. The trial court should consider whether similar provisions should be made when M. is on vacation with a parent.

period of seven consecutive days beginning on Monday and ending on a Sunday, or a period of seven consecutive days chosen by one of the parties?

Second, the trial court must address whether a parent should be permitted to schedule a vacation to dovetail with a period that the child is in the care of that parent pursuant to the terms of the Custody Order, thus extending the period that M. will have no physical contact with one of her parents. The court must decide whether such an arrangement is in M.'s best interest.

Third, the trial court must address whether Mother and Father should make arrangements for virtual calls when M. is on vacation with a parent and, if so, how frequent the calls should be.

The court's lodestar in resolving these issues is M.'s best interest because the best interest of the child standard "'guides the trial court in its determination, and in our review' and 'is always determinative.'" *Basciano v. Foster*, 256 Md. App. 107, 128 (2022) (quoting *Santo*, 448 Md. at 626).

For these reasons, the circuit court has the authority to modify the custody schedule, the provisions of its judgment pertaining to vacations, the virtual call schedule, or all of them to protect the best interest of M.

In summary, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court in part and vacate it in part. We remand this case to the circuit court for proceedings consistent with this opinion.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY IS AFFIRMED IN PART AND VACATED IN PART. THIS CASE IS REMANDED TO THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR PROCEEDINGS CONSISTENT WITH THIS OPINION.
COSTS TO BE ALLOCATED AS FOLLOWS: APPELLANT: 2/3, APPELLEE: 1/3.