

Custody Considerations[©]

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KEEP THESE POINTS IN MIND:

1. It is NOT the access schedule itself which will determine your child's emotional adjustment and well-being over the years. Much more important is the quality of parenting he or she receives. If you both are reasonably happy with the schedule, if you have resolved most of your anger, if you are both getting on with your lives and the children are "out of the middle," they will probably turn out OK!

2. Try to learn to communicate directly with your spouse or ex. Avoid going back to Court if at all possible. Litigation is costly, and deepens the mutual hostility and mistrust between you. This is not good for the children. If you cannot communicate directly, seek the services of a professional mediator or a mental health professional to act as a parent coordinator. Remember to give mediation a chance--it may take up to 3 to 4 sessions for it to get results!

3. Watch out for "indirect child abuse!" When you say bad things about the other parent in front of the child (or even if she overhears you talking on the phone), the child feels attacked! Since your children have both parents as parts of their core identity, any negative comments you make about the other parent are felt by the child as attacks on them! It may take a great deal of restraint and self-control to avoid denigrating the other parent, but the positive impact on your child is worth it in the long run.

4. Remember that your children still need discipline, limits, responsibilities, structure. Many parents "feel sorry" for the suffering their kids are experiencing and thus may "let up" to make life easier. DON'T! They will cry out for assertive parenting from both you and the other parent. Continue the same rules and expectations--this will alleviate the anxiety they may have that you will cease being a strong parent to them.

5. If problems with the other parent arise, ask yourself these questions before doing anything:

1) How would I handle this problem if we were still married? Could we try to handle it again this way? If not, why not?

2) What might be the unintended effects on the children of what I am about to do or say to the other parent?

3) Will the simple passage of time change this problem or make it easier to solve? Why do I have to act NOW?

4) Is what I am about to do or say going to increase the likelihood that we can eventually achieve a working, cooperative "co-parenting" relationship, or will it set us back from this goal?

5) Ten years from now, will my kids look back and say "THAT WAS A GOOD DECISION YOU MADE"?

6) Is this an issue that impacts me or my child?

6. Traditions are important to your children and to both you and your spouse. Your children need to be able to celebrate traditions with both parents and both extended families. New traditions may need to be created if distance or other considerations make it impossible to carry on traditions in place when you lived together. Most children are very happy to celebrate their birthday or Christmas twice!

7. Activities and friends are important to your children and their healthy development. Allow friends to come to your home and your children to go to their friends home on "your time." Take your children to their activities regardless of who signs the child up for the activity.

8. Make sure your children have what they need when they need it regardless of whose home they are in. If they left their soccer shins or homework at your house, cooperate in getting it to your child in a timely manner. Let your children take their favorite toys, etc. with them when they are with your spouse. You want your children to be happy wherever they are and having familiar sleep aids, game boys, etc. with them make them happy. Ask yourself- who does it hurt if my child doesn't have his/her ?

9. Your children should be unaware of how much child support is paid or by whom. When they need lunch or spending money, they need to get it from the parent they are with regardless of who pays child support. Your children should never be told, "I pay your mom/dad child support so ask them for the money." Money issues should be handled by the parents and kept between the parents. Keep in mind that you and your spouse will have less money available for college or your own needs if you buy your children 2 bikes, 2 Game cubes, 2 winter boots, etc.

10. Your children can observe significant differences in lifestyles between their parents homes. Child support is intended to covers only necessities such as food, shelter, clothing (unless in a shared custody arrangement) and does not cover your child's extras such as extra-curricular activities, sporting equipment, tutors, extra-ordinary medical expenses. While 2 households cost more than 1, your children deserve to continue to experience the type of lifestyle they enjoyed when you and your spouse lived together.