

For Parents to Keep in Mind in Co-Parenting Planning

Relevant facts about courts, attorneys, and research

- ongoing conflict hurts children
- proximity and cooperation prevent damage from divorce
- neither the specific custody arrangement (by itself) nor frequency of father visitation (by itself) influences children's psychological adjustment
- factors influencing children's psychological adjustment include (1) the psychological health and functioning of the parents and (2) the degree of post-divorce hostility and conflict between parents
- children generally prefer joint custody
- regularity, not frequency, of visits is most important to children's adjustment
- research does not support certain structures as superior (e.g., primary home, primary parent the same gender as the children, two parents better than one, straight parents better than gay, structured homes better than loose, parents agreeing rather than disagreeing on discipline, parents treating each child consistently with the others, etc.)
- research indicates the primary destructive influence is ongoing conflict between parents
- research indicates the primary constructive ingredient is parental warmth
- courts generally support the status quo if it has been working (i.e., kids are doing well in school and are well adjusted psychologically)
- to courts, non parenting issues (e.g., affairs, financial problems, different religious beliefs, poor judgment in non-parenting areas, hurtful interspouse behaviors) are often not relevant
- courts do not like rigidity, game-playing/manipulation, dishonesty, stubbornness, conflict over small/unimportant matters, repeat problems, allegations of child abuse
- courts prefer parents to solve problems/reach agreements
- attorneys are trained to think and act on their client's behalf, advocating their clients' positions in an adversarial way
- children need cooperative, flexible parents who solve problems and keep their eye on the ball: how the overall arrangement will affect the children (not how the arrangement will affect the parents—though how the parents feel about the arrangement will affect the children)
- couples who craft their own arrangements are happier and more likely to adjust the arrangement appropriately when necessary
- you can be successful divorced parents
- children's access to different parental styles can be enriching
- children benefit from being around cooperating parents together

Factors to consider in crafting a child custody arrangement

- how well the children have been doing under the current arrangement
- the recommendations of teachers and therapists
- the specific strengths (skills and relationship/bonding) of each adult involved
- matching the adults' strengths to the children's access to them
- the specific needs of each child
- the overall psychological adjustment of each adult
- the flexibility of each adult—motivation and ability
- each adult's belief in the importance of the other adults to the child's happiness
- the ability of each adult to shield the children from his/her anger, resentment, fears, bitterness
- the ability of each adult to control his/her anger, aggressiveness, threats, and manipulation toward the other adults
- the ability of each adult to maintain cordiality
- the degree of current bonding of the children with each parent
- the historical involvement of each parent in activities and caretaking
- how the children will likely react to a change in the arrangement—the transition itself as well as the message they may perceive from the change
- how each parent will react to/accept/support the various arrangement possibilities
- how severe the children's current problems are as an indicator of how dramatic or radical the solution should be
- adequately addressing each adult's deepest concerns
- the parents having adequate access to communication and decision-making support during and following implementation of a new arrangement