

Shared Parenting for Parents Living Apart

A significant challenge facing parents during separation is deciding how to divide responsibility for their children. Parents can fear that the loss of their relationship will result in the loss of their parent-child relationship and will have a negative impact on their children's development.

What Happens to the Kids

The Massachusetts Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) found that children of separated or divorced parents do their best when not exposed to parental conflict and when parenting plans are adjusted as each family member's needs change. It's also important for children to maintain positive relationships, routines and activities, and to be allowed to bring items between homes, no matter who bought them.

Establishing a Plan

Before planning a time-sharing arrangement for your family, it is helpful to consider:

- › The age, temperament, social adjustment and special needs of each child.
- › The ability of parents to communicate and cooperate with each other.
- › Each child's daily schedule and the potential flexibility of each parent's work schedule.
- › Distance between each parent's home, workplace and children's schools.

Holidays and Vacations

Holidays should be defined by both parents and alternated/shared with consideration to family traditions, religious beliefs and the location of both parents and their respective families. Children benefit from extended, uninterrupted vacation time with each parent consistent with their abilities to handle separation from either parent. Vacation lengths are dependent upon the age of the child, the location of the vacation and availability of the parents.

Longer vacations may be implemented, but trips for children less than 18 months of age should be consistent with their ability to tolerate separations from either parent. Other tips include:

- › Trips should be planned as far in advance as possible and not in conflict with school or the other parent's holiday, except for special circumstances or parental approval.
- › The vacationing parent should provide the other parent with full contact information.

Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway: www.childwelfare.gov/supporting

Adapted from "Planning for Shared Parenting: A Guide for Parents Living Apart" by the AFCC: www.mass.gov.

Additional Information

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