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How to Keep the Noncustodial Parent Involved in Your Child's Life

If you are a custodial parent, you may have conflicts and disagreements with your ex-spouse. However, this does not mean that your child should not be involved with his or her other parent. Divorce ends a marriage, after all, not parenthood.

The following are some important reasons that the noncustodial parent should stay involved in their child's life.

- Most children view their noncustodial parent as significant in their lives.
- Children are generally better adjusted when they have a positive relationship with the noncustodial parent. The more frequent the visitation between a noncustodial parent and their child, the better the relationship.
- If you are the custodial parent, your child's visitation with your ex-spouse can allow you some free time. This time could be used to organize yourself, complete some tasks, or perhaps even relax.
- More frequent contact with the noncustodial parent is related to more consistent child support payment, which is very important.



There are some conditions under which frequent contact may be less than beneficial for children. These conditions do not mean visitation should not occur; rather, these circumstances may need to be addressed so that visitation can be more pleasant and beneficial for a child.

- Frequent contact between a noncustodial parent and a child typically means more interchanges between you and your ex-spouse. Thus, if you and your ex-spouse are engaging in high levels of heated conflict in front of your child around visitation or when the two of you meet to exchange your child, this can be detrimental.

- Inconsistent contact, such as visits not occurring as scheduled, can have a negative effect on children. Children need consistent routines. They may also interpret broken visits as indicating a parent does not love or care for them.
- When a particularly high conflict relationship exists between a noncustodial parent and a child, being forced to spend long periods of time together may be detrimental.
- If a noncustodial parent is irresponsible or incompetent, the amount of time spent with that parent likely should be limited. However, if you are the custodial parent, remember that you may have hostile feelings that influence your perceptions of your ex-spouse. Just because an ex-spouse may not have been a good spouse does not mean that he is not a good parent.

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Encourage Your Ex-spouse

Ex-spouses are often willing to spend time with their children but are uncertain about exactly what role to take after the divorce. If you are the custodial parent, you should make sure that your ex-spouse still plays a very important role in your child's life. If you are the custodial parent, following are some recommendations on how to encourage your ex-spouse to spend time with your child.

- Maintain low levels of hostility and high levels of cooperation between the two of you.
- Remember that it's not how you feel but how you act that has the greatest impact on your child. The important point is to prevent your negative feeling from controlling what you say and do in your child's presence.
- Do not criticize your ex-spouse in your child's presence. This can hurt your child's perception and relationship not only with his other parent but also with you.
- Encourage your child to initiate activities with your ex-spouse.
- Encourage phone calls, letters, and e-mails between your child and his other parent, especially if the other

parent lives far away. Parents and children can also play games with each other over the Internet.

- Encourage your child to take items, such as his artwork and photographs, to show or give to his other parent.
- Keep a folder with information to share with the other parent. Items in the folder might include report cards, activity schedules, photographs. You can give these items (or copies) to your ex-spouse. Keeping him or her regularly informed about your child's life can make your ex-spouse feel more connected and thus more likely to continue involvement.
- Incorporate your ex-spouse into your child's special events, such as birthdays, sports activities, and holidays.
- Help your child select cards and gifts for his other parent's birthday and special occasions.
- Communicate to your ex-spouse that you appreciate his or her parenting role.

Smooth Visitation Transitions

Following are some recommendations for making visitation transitions smooth.

- Develop a month-by-month visitation schedule, taking into account holidays, vaca-

tions, and special occasions. Each parent should have a copy of this schedule to minimize misunderstandings.

- Confirm with your ex-spouse about when and where visitation switchovers will occur.
- Have your child ready in advance of the switchover time.
- If your child is going to need to bring anything special along for the visit, let the other parent know in advance.
- Speak to your ex-spouse in advance of any changes in your schedule regarding visitation.
- Realize that visitation schedules may change as a function of your child's activities. Do not try to resolve these changes in front of your child during a switchover.
- Don't make your child responsible for making, canceling, or changing visitation plans.
- Do not be late or fail to show up for a switchover.
- Deal with issues that need to be resolved with your ex-spouse at times other than the transition time.
- Remember, don't use your child to convey messages to your ex-spouse during the transition.



Rejection Hurts

To say that rejection hurts is not to speak metaphorically. Rejection activates the same brain area that generates the adverse reaction to physical pain, causing a sharp spike of activity in the anterior cingulate. Being ditched by your best friend is as threatening to your well-being as touching a hot stove.

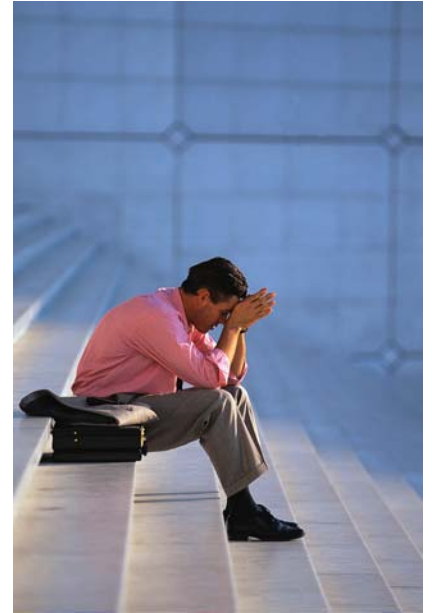
Kids who constantly expect rejection are more aggressive and get into trouble more with teachers than do their classmates. Young adults who are sensitive to rebuffs tend not to open up and reveal themselves in the early stages of friendship. They may have a hard time with transitions and adjusting to new settings. A diary study of college freshmen found that rejection-sensitive students made fewer friends and liked school less than did their peers.

Rejection-phobes are also less willing to have friends who are different from themselves—from other ethnic backgrounds, for instance. A tendency to stick to one's own kind could impede young adults from gaining an enriched perspective on life.

Hands down, the rejection-sensitive suffer most in the realm of romance. No matter how committed their partners are, they worry about being dumped. They attribute hostile intent to innocuous behaviour. Unsurprisingly, both they and their partners are less happy than other couples.

Living with someone who is sensitive to rejection is like walking on eggshells. Any little slip up on your part—like calling at 6:03 instead of 6:00—could trigger their anger. They tend to seek constant reassurance from partners, but even if told repeatedly that they are loved, the information isn't trustworthy—because the affirmation had to be elicited. It's maddening for others to deal with. People who feel secure have a hard time understanding a partner like this.

Our psychologists at FAC have strategies to assist people who either are rejection sensitive or who are in a relationship with such people.



Flora, Carlin. Dumped—But Not Down. *Psychology Today* July/August 2007. pp 71-72.



Annual Conference

One of our highlights in 2007 was to attend the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) Annual Conference. This year it was held in Phoenix, Arizona. Both Dr. Larry Fong, who is a past president of the ACR, and Terra Taylor attended. Attendees from all around the world were present. Some of the other countries represented included Nepal, the Netherlands, Jamaica, as well as many others. The annual conference allows a time for its members to come together, network, address cutting-edge issues, and learn more about conflict resolution.

We were especially excited as this year's keynote speaker was William Ury. For the past 30 years, William Ury has served as a mediator, writer and speaker working with conflicts and negotiations around the world. His compelling talk referenced his latest book *The Power of a Positive No*.

Another highlight was Dr. Larry Fong's Institute offered on *Advanced Training in Mediation, Dangerousness and Risk*. He was the only Canadian to provide an Institute at this conference. He also co-presented a workshop with another leading Psychologist from Pennsylvania on *Risk Assessment in Mediation*.

Terra Taylor was able to take a specialized training Institute on *Maximizing Mediator Effectiveness*. She also attended many interesting workshops such as: *Power Imbalances in Mediation*, as well as *Mediating Family Disputes: Getting Parents and Kids Talking about Conflict and Communication*.

Outside of training Dr. Fong and Terra were able to connect with other members and enjoy some warm sunshine before arriving back to our crisp Calgary Fall. Overall the ACR conference was a success and we are proud to bring our supplementary knowledge to FAC.



Understanding Business Mediation and Facilitation

Business models are changing, and managers and owners are looking for forward thinking companies that facilitate and maximize productivity, and morale. Today's organizations need to be innovative in their quest to find and retain good employees.

Mediation, facilitation, coaching, and mentoring, are but a few of the services that we can offer you at *Fong Ailon Canniff*. Mediation is a process that has been traditionally associated with divorce, but is now being seen as a highly effective tool in organizations. Most of the Fortune 500 companies employ mediators. Conflicts at the management level can be disruptive and costly. When a trained mediator can facilitate between two parties or more, it provides an objective process whereby people come to understand their differences, appreciate a different personality, and see a new point of view. Once this has been established they are then able to negotiate a workable solution that allows them to continue working together with greater understanding, and a feeling they have all been heard and their concerns dealt with. This can be done through mediation with two or more people, individual coaching or mentoring where required, or customized workshops designed to deal with an organization's specific issue.

Fong Ailon Canniff, an organization of highly specialized psychologists and consultants, provide these proven services to any type of organization. For further information contact Karen Fawcett at: (403) 266-2017, extension 29.

SUGGESTIONS/COMMENTS?

Do you have any suggestions for future articles, or just a comment regarding this newsletter?

We welcome your feedback. Please contact Wanda Mueller at 266-2017 or at wmueller@worldpsych.ca.