

## **Popular Myths About Shared Parenting**

**Unravelling some common myths about shared parenting in order to help parents make informed decisions.**

**By Jill Burrett and Michael Green Updated: November 18, 2015**

**Categories:** Child Custody, Children and Divorce, Parenting, Parenting and Step-Families

### **Popular Myths About Shared Parenting**

Sometimes, separated or divorced parents are keen to work out a good shared parenting arrangement but are discouraged by the prejudices of friends or professionals. We will unravel some common myths about shared parenting in order to help those parents get past such objections.

#### **MYTH: Kids need to spend most of their time in one home**

Reality: This is an understandable leftover from hopes that our marriage would thrive and our kids would be in one happy home and an unquestioned presumption of many lawyers and counselors. It's a view that seriously underestimates the adaptability of children and fails to appreciate what is really important for them. The stability that children need is more than geographical. It is emotional stability the stability of meaningful, continuing relationships. The emotional stability that's critical for a child's healthy development comes not only from ongoing relationships with parents, but also from their community. The child's world is those relationships that arise from associations and the sense of belonging that these important connections bring.

#### **MYTH: Kids need to know where they live and not be going back and forth**

Reality: A clear, simple parenting plan plus goodwill from both parents will quickly get children into a routine. Breaking up a week into smaller chunks may mean that parents don't go long without seeing their children, but it may also mean children are constantly changing over. Changeovers are often the hardest time, so lean toward a pattern that has the fewest changeovers, except for very small children.

**Q:** No sooner are my children settled with me than they have to gear up to change again. Is it better if the children stay in one place and the parents rotate?

**A:** It needs a dependable communication system to assist with smooth changeovers and a high degree of dedication and positive spirit. If they are staying in the family home where they have been living, this may only be possible for a time as the home may have to be sold for your financial settlement. Maybe you should initially consider two- or three-week blocks of time to allow for a proper settling-in before the children have to uproot themselves again.

**MYTH:** Infants under three shouldn't spend nights away from Mom

**Reality:** This view was based on outdated theory and is contrary to recent research. Attachment theory tended to emphasize the exclusivity of the maternal bond and its continuity as being crucial to healthy development. There is no consistent evidence that a night with their father is going to cause harm. If children are well attached to the other caretaker (Dad), they should soon become used to him coming at night if needed, for example. There is growing evidence that overnight stays in infancy form a meaningful basis for parent-child relations.

At times, Mom's own attachment to her child interferes with developing a suitable parenting arrangement. Maternal anxiety is a very powerful protector of young infants and therefore deserves respect. Overnight contact with babies and infants (approximately up to eighteen months) is not crucial for cementing parent-child bonds; daytime contact periods are the building blocks.

**MYTH: The more homey, hands-on parent is better equipped for childcare**

**Reality:** Not necessarily, though this parent will have confidence and experience. Emotional bonds are created and strengthened by parents being available and doing things with and for children, but it's not just this. It's listening and talking empathically with your children, hanging out together, sharing parts of your life with them, and helping them learn to discover independently that creates bonds.

**Q:** It can't be right for our twelve-month-old to be away from me for long periods even though he knows his dad?

**A:** If he has had time with Dad, then he will have an attachment, meaning he's okay for increasingly long periods without you in Dad's care. Keep Dad informed about established routines so he can have a settled baby to bring back to you, which will enhance your confidence in his care. Some dads aren't that good with babies on their own—let his relatives help if they're local.

A silver lining to the disappointment of separating is children get the chance to develop a closer relationship with parents who are committed to shared parenting but who weren't very available before, and who can therefore develop their parenting skills more effectively. A parent who appeared to contribute little to family life deserves the chance to become a more involved parent.

**MYTH: Where there's conflict between parents, there should be little or no contact**

**Reality:** Lawyers and counselors sometimes suggest that the only solutions to conflict between separated parents are: to reduce or eliminate contact between the parents or between father and children, or to have supervised pick-ups and drop-offs. This is inconsistent with research, which shows that good contact results in reduced conflict between parents. Rather than seeing hostility as a disincentive to shared parenting, it's better to view it as an indicator of needing a better parenting plan.

In the face of parental tensions, children tend to align themselves with one parent, implying that the other parent is at fault. This is a potentially misguided assumption as to what the child's behavior means: it confuses the picture for parents and their advisers, and should not be the basis for alterations in the arrangement.

### **KEY MESSAGES**

- Myths need challenging and realities need facing.
- Children need two homes when they have two separated parents.
- Organize the program to suit your circumstances, not vice versa.
- Infants require special consideration when part of a shared parenting arrangement.
- Shared parenting allows both parents to be hands on.
- Both quality and quantity are important in parenting.

### **Shared Parenting**

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