



THE REALITY BEHIND CREATING HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE CO PARENTING RELATIONSHIPS

From my own experiences as a divorced parent I understand how difficult it can be to transition a married parenting relationship into a unified co-parenting relationship, and cooperatively raise children without personal differences or grievances getting in the way. As a Mediator, I'm aware of the conditioning by both society and family law professionals that encourages conflict between divorcing spouses with no regard to how the consequences of doing so will prevent these parents from being able to make this transition and act in the genuine best interests of their children.

Any action or advice that interferes with either parents' ability to be a loving, present parent in the lives of their children marginalizes the parent-child relationship and treats children like something parents 'own', with the time each one spends with them as just one more thing to be divided up. The current system of divorce, which assigns labels of 'custodial parent' vs. 'absent parent', has reduced the importance of post-divorce parental relationships down to little more than mandated designations of financial support and placement arrangements, while turning a blind eye to how this approach fails children both emotionally and financially. Until recently this widely utilized ideology has gone unchallenged even though it created a void in the emotional connections between children and their parents while the black and white mandates of child support made it difficult, if not impossible, for parents to cooperatively adjust to inevitable changes in financial support or how much time is spent with Mom or Dad.

This approach drives a wedge between divorced parents, making every aspect of their co-parenting relationship a challenge, greatly impairing both sides' willingness to cooperate, even when it benefits their children. How your relationship with each other changes during and after your divorce has no bearing on the relationship your children have with either of you, nor should it create an imbalance in how you, as parents, provide for their financial needs or how much time you spend with them. From a child's perspective, they don't love and need either of you any less because of your divorce and nothing positive will come from having their relationship with either of you interfered with by the court because of your desire to punish each other.

Many parents are under the misconception that somewhere, in some law book, there are specific laws that dictate the amount of time children should spend with each parent, and how they should be supported financially after a divorce. This false belief is reinforced everyday in law offices at great financial and emotional expense to both parents and their children. The truth is, parents have every right to create a parenting schedule that is practical, healthy and sustainable for them as well as their children, free of legal interference. What's important to realize is that the courts only step in when parents can't or won't agree, use children as tools to manipulate each other, or when the child's safety is at risk.

When it comes to child support it's true that every state has guidelines that are used, however what is also true but not revealed publicly is that couples have the right to create their own child support agreement and present it to the court for approval, but it must be noted that judges do have the right to deny a deviation from standard state guidelines at their discretion. This does not mean parents get to skirt their responsibilities or deprive their child, it simply means that the standard guideline approach doesn't always work for families.

Here at the Center, we're tireless in our effort to advocate for children and help parents become successful co parenting partners. We know it isn't always easy but, parents can agree to set their personal feelings about each other aside from their roles as parents and work together for the benefit of their kids - and we know this because it happens in our office everyday. But this only happens when parents are provided the right tools, support and guidance.

By helping parents learn to negotiate and communicate effectively with each other, they become better able to create and manage parenting plans and support agreements that work both financially and emotionally, without the tension and fear of court imposed decisions, financial devastation or compromising the bond between them and their children. And by forming a new cooperative relationship, they avoid many future disagreements and the probability of fighting over their children in court. But perhaps the most important piece is knowing that you put the best interests of your children first. As parents, you can and should be in control of the decision making, which really matters since you and your children are the only ones that will have to live with the outcome.

Divorcing mothers and fathers alike face tremendous pressure from family, friends and even co-workers to conform to standards that may or may not be right for them. Even attorneys advocate for this type of divisiveness. Sadly, these same parents, who are overcome by fear take advice that sounds good without knowing whether it will work out for them in the end. You have the opportunity to not become one of these parents by learning, understanding and making decisions based on facts rather than fear.