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NEWS

Advantages of Shared Parenting

by Donald Gordon, PhD.

1. Children in positive, structured shared parenting plans maintain regular contact with both their mother and father. They get a clear message that both parents love them and both parents want them. They feel important to their family. They understand that their parents make great efforts to jointly care for them. They have access to both parents. They have psychological permission to love and be with both parents.

Very few children in a structured co-parenting plan are confused by having two households and two sets of rules. The majority of children are not confused or tormented. Research shows that most like having easy access to both Mom and Dad. They find this better than being with only one parent at intervals.

2. Studies find reduced levels of conflict in shared parenting families. Documented studies have shown the likelihood of parents going back to court is cut dramatically. Shared parenting can be a shield for children. It can soften the harmful effects of parent conflict. A child's self-esteem can remain high even in one-residence plans as long as parent conflict is low. But in shared parenting, a child's self-esteem often stays high, even with parent conflict

3. Support payments are less a source of conflict in shared parenting situations. In a recent study of support payments, only about half of the sole residential parents received support checks regularly. Of those who shared parenting, none had to return to court. (Though several would have liked more money.) Many co-parenting nonresidential parents continue to provide financial support. They have an active parenting role. They do not feel like they have lost their children. They are not denied access. The power relationship remains balanced. Most of these parents continue financial support after age 18. This is especially important for children who want to go to college. Some absent parents refuse to help with expenses. Many good students are not able to go to college when this happens.

4. Shared parenting can be a buffer against many of the problems of single parenthood. From an economic standpoint, these moms and dads can often rely on each other for substitute care and its attendant costs. One-residence parents are often forced to rely on hired child sitters.

From a physical standpoint, those who share parenting are far less likely to "burn out." Demands are intense when trying to raise children alone. Sharing this burden can be of great benefit to both parents and especially the children.

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