

# **Child Custody – Are You Putting Your Children First?**

**By Rosalind Sedacca, CCT**

When facing divorce as a parent child-custody issues can become quite challenging and emotions regarding divorce-related issues can easily become charged. I recently came upon an article about proposed changes to child custody legislation pending in some states. An investigative committee was being formed to consider whether “shared parenting may be the best custodial situation for all children of divorcing parents.”

While I am a strong advocate of shared parenting – it worked very successfully for me – I do not believe it’s the right or only answer for everyone. Because every situation is different when it comes to divorce, I certainly don’t believe legislation should be determining custody outcomes for any family. These are issues that caring, conscious parents should be deciding together with only one goal in mind – the very best interest of their children.

Unfortunately, too many parents approach this issue as adversaries. When child custody becomes a battle, everyone loses. Parents are pitted against each other and innocent children inevitably pay the price. The holidays are often a time when things come to a boil.

When custodial decisions move into contention, creating a scenario where lawyers, legislation and courts determine the direction of your children’s future, you not only lose power in your life, you lose harmony within your already fragile family structure.

There is another way. When you create a child-centered divorce, your children win – on every level. Parents who make a concerted effort to sit down with each other and discuss the future well-being of their kids together, keep their perspective where it really belongs – on the children. To do this, they must take into account and ask themselves some very serious questions:

- What’s best for our children today, tomorrow and in the years to come?
- How can we minimize the physical, emotional and spiritual damage inflicted upon our children as a result of our divorce?
- How can we best support our children through this difficult time?
- How can we show your love and compassion for them as they move through challenges they did not ask for -- or create?
- What can we do to boost their sense of security, self-esteem and well-being during the transitions ahead?
- Who can provide the least traumatic home environment for the children – and for what percent of each day, week, month and year?
- How can each of us best contribute our assets – physical, emotional and spiritual – to create harmony, good will and peace within the changed family structure?

- How will our children look back at this divorce a year, five years, ten years and more from now? Will they understand?
- How can we make life better for our children after the divorce than it was before?

The answers to these questions are not simple, nor are they black and white. They require honest communication between two mature adults who have their children's best interest at heart. And yes, it may likely take more than the two of you to come to resolution on all the child-custody details. That's where you can enlist the aid of professionals -- mediators, therapists, counselors, life coaches and clergy. These experienced and knowledgeable experts will approach your divorce from a child-focused perspective. They have the tools and insight to help you reach agreement on issues that will affect the total well-being of your children in the least-derisive manner.

As tough as this process may appear, wouldn't you prefer to make these decisions together, before you approach the court – and lawyers – rather than having them made for you?

When parents let the negative emotions they're feeling toward their spouses – hatred, hurt, disappointment, guilt, shame, anxiety, frustration, mistrust and more – influence their decisions about child-custody issues, they are sabotaging their children. It is selfish, insensitive and extremely unproductive to let your personal vendetta determine the relationship your children have with their other parent. You are allowing personal satisfaction to get in the way of your parental responsibilities toward your kids. And the cost – to them as well as to you – will be high. (Many children, as they grow, come to resent a parent who keeps them from having a positive relationship with their other parent, leading to alienation and other negative outcomes.)

It's always essential to keep your children's emotional needs in mind as you make critical decisions that will affect their well-being. Keep resentment, grudges, anger and other negative feelings at bay and choose to create a future with love, security and harmony for your children. They deserve nothing less.

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