

## SUGGESTED TIME SHARING GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

The behavior of parents during the dissolution process has a great influence on the emotional adjustment of their children. The following guidelines have been found to be helpful in achieving meaningful time sharing:

1. Remember to put your children's welfare first try to see that their emotional needs are met and that they have an opportunity to develop as "normally" as possible under the circumstances.
2. Time sharing with the other parent, normally and under the proper circumstances, is needed and helpful to your children's development and future welfare.
3. Time sharing should be pleasant, not only for the children but for both parents. Visitation should help your children maintain a positive relationship with their visiting parent.
4. The visits should not take place only in the children's home. The time sharing parent may wish the children to visit in his or her home overnight or may want to plan an enjoyable outing.
5. The question is often asked, "Should I take the children to the girlfriend's or boyfriend's house?" Time sharing should be a time for the parent and the children to be with each other, to enjoy each other and to maintain positive, steady and strong relationships. Having other people participate may dilute the parent-child experience during time sharing. Also, it may appear to the children that the parent does not care enough to provide undivided attention during time sharing. However, when other people are brought into social contact with the children in a healthy and suitable environment, it can be beneficial to them. Accordingly, you are going to have to exercise sound discretion and judgment in each situation, while always maintaining the best interest of the children as the primary criterion for your actions and conduct.
6. Keep your time sharing schedule and inform the other parent, in advance, when you cannot keep an appointment. Failure to keep a visit without notifying the other parent may be construed by the children as rejection.
7. You may need to adjust the time sharing schedule from time to time, according to your children's age, health and interest.
8. Frequently a parent asks, "Why should I visit?" He or she is hurt, as revealed by the comments, "I am no longer needed, the other spouse has my home and my children." The visit is one of the few times that the non-custodial parent has personal contact with the children and for that reason it should be a meaningful one for both the visiting parent and the children. Even though the parents have not been able to get along, the children still need both parents if they are to grow up in a normal way.
9. Often a parent questions where he or she will take the children on the visits and what he should plan in the way of amusement for them, particularly if the children are young. Activities may add to the pleasure of the visit. but most important of all is the parent's time with the children.
10. The visit should not be used to check on the other party. The children should not be used as little spies. Often in children's perception the parents hate each other and they will feel uncomfortable at the time of the visit. In their minds, if they do anything to please the visiting parent, they may invite outright rejection by the other parent. They already lost one parent in their minds and are fearful of losing the other. For this reason, parents should show mutual respect for each other.
11. The children may be left with many problems following the visits and both parents should make every effort to discuss them and to agree on ways to deal with them.
12. Both parents should strive for agreement in decisions pertaining to the children, especially discipline, so that one parent is not undermining the other parent's efforts.
13. The use of common sense in the granting and exercising of time sharing rights is required by all parties concerned. Also try to follow a long established golden rule "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You."

Keep in mind that your children's future attitudes, outlooks and emotional developments are important and that uncomplicated and as normal time sharing as possible under the circumstances is necessary. Wherever and to the extent possible, the children should know and have the love and proper guidance of both parents.

It is recognized that these guidelines will not answer every problem that arises, nor will they solve all questions raised; however, they are useful and worthy of your attention.