

It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel every time we travel from point A to point B

And likewise, it is not necessary to reinvent with each new custody and visitation case what research validates to be the optimal parental involvement of the non-residential parent.

I am sometimes asked how I am able to arrive at recommendations regarding a visitation plan having interviewed only the non-residential parent, which sometimes occurs because this is frequently the only party who is willing cooperate with and participate in the assessment and/or therapy. My answer to this question is evident: you do not need to reinvent the wheel every time you want to travel from point A to point B. And specifically related to the question at hand, that of a visitation plan between a child and the non-residential parent, my response is that by our knowledge of child development dictates that it not appropriate for a child to make this decision. We do not have to be re-invent what we know about child cognitive and emotional development with each new case of visitation dispute. And this knowledge base about child development dictates that we do not delegate to children such momentous and complex decisions, which must reside on a parental and/or professional level. We do not ask the child, "How often do you plan to attend school?" or "Are you willing to comply with medical treatment?" How is it, then, that we so freely abrogate our professional and parental decision-making responsibility to a child in such a critical area as family relationships, specifically the relationship with the non-residential parent?

The reason children should not be empowered to make a decision about visitation with a parent is as obvious as why no one would feel comfortable having only 18 year olds sitting in judgment of us. A child's judgment, insight, perception, reality testing, and emotions only barely reach maturity by the END of adolescence. One only has to read the epistemological research and studies undertaken by Jean Piaget, philosopher and developmental psychologist, who wrote the "Bible" upon which educators rely to understand the cognitive development of children. Children do not have the emotional and cognitive abilities do evaluate for themselves what is in their best interests; to theorize what it would be like to have a parent eradicated from their lives; to be able to discriminate what is rational, truthful, and moral amidst all the information their parents and other adults impart to them---especially about the malicious, fabricated, and fanciful data from the alienating parent. Children, for example, think very concretely until the age of 8; that is why they actually do believe, "Step on a crack, break my mother's back." Not until much older, can they discriminate reality from fantasy, which is why they should not see horror shows until much older. The ability to think abstractly starts at the beginning of adolescence and is still insufficiently mature by 18. Children lack wisdom! And children further do not have the emotional wherewithal to contradict the residential parent---as they are so dependent upon that parent.

Instead, we determine the visitation plan based on the assessment of the competency, commitment, availability, intentions, desires of the nonresidential parent.

We now have significant research that indicates that children of divorce have the most favorable outcome when physical custody approaches 50-50. I direct the court to just one quote here from the chapter entitled, "Custody and Parenting Time: Links to Family Relationships and Well-Being after Divorce", written by William V. Fabricitus, PhD. Et al., in a book edited by Michael E. Lamb, entitled, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*: "In the typical family, more parenting time than the traditional alternating weekend visitation is required to achieve the well-recognized benefits of two involved parents, each with a close relationship to the child. An emerging consensus is that a minimum of one third time is necessary to achieve this criterion on and that benefits continue to accrue as parenting time reaches equal 50-50 time" (P. 231).

Other research articles are attached here which confirm that the child's emotional, cognitive and physical stability is enhanced in direct correlation to increased time with the non-residential father. I might add that the attached supporting documentation was used in support of the case for passage of the shared parenting and 50-50 physical custody arrangement, which was just enacted into law in the state of Arizona.

The importance of fathers to their children was thoroughly documented in the Yale University research summarized by child psychiatrist Kyle Pruitt (2000) in his book entitled, *Fatherneed*. Dr. Pruitt confirms that the child's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being and development increase in direct relationship to the father's involvement and that marginal or nonexistent involvement creates significant deficits in these areas.