

Shared Parenting Contact & Guidelines



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Shared Parenting Contact and Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

Determining parent access to children is one of the most difficult and problematic areas of divorce. It often contributes significantly to parent conflict and litigation. Yet, there is a limited amount of empirical research on the most appropriate arrangements for children. There is no single time-sharing arrangement that has been determined to be optimal for all children. Thus caution is important in proposing a specific visitation arrangement.

The circumstances of each family are unique, however, and recognition of their unique circumstances is central to making good parenting choices. Moreover, as will be discussed below, the leading experts in the field agree that “one size fits all” approaches to developing parenting arrangements are inappropriate and may be harmful to some families. It is NOT the purpose of this review to establish a single standard or “best” parenting arrangement. The results of social and behavioral research are necessarily generalizations and should not be automatically applied to individual families. These generalizations may usefully inform the choices of individual families and the way legislation is framed. It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to offer “customized” recommendations for the numerous special situations that may exist in particular families.

At the time of publication of these guidelines, research does not reveal any particular residential schedule to be most beneficial for children. There are no significant advantages to children of joint physical custody, but also no significant disadvantages to children of joint physical custody or of any other residential schedule. The weight of evidence, however, also does not suggest that, absent parental conflict, high levels of contact between the child and the parent are harmful to children. Parental conflict is a major source of reduced well-being among children of divorce. Research indicates that joint physical custody and frequent contact between the child and the parent have adverse consequences for children in high-conflict situations.

While age and developmental needs may be important factors in determining access, they are not the only factors that may be considered. Other factors are also important such as:

- the psychological attachment of the child to the parent
- the manner in which child-rearing tasks have been shared
- the consistency and predictability of the scheduled time-sharing
- the child’s temperament, resilience, and resourcefulness
- the child’s ability to handle change
- the parents’ work and work schedules.

The following suggestions are merely guidelines that reflect that children's needs vary from birth through adolescence. These guidelines are based on the child's age and changing developmental needs. They take into account attachment, children's sense of time, the importance of maintaining attachment over time, the need for children to have contact with parents, the needs for children to have relationships with peers, teams, clubs, and school, etc. There are also certain assumptions that are made in recommending the following guidelines; that is

- the child has a bond with both parents
- both parents have adequate capacity to parent
- both parents have the desire and the time to interact with the child regularly
- both parents can provide for the child's physical needs and emotional needs

The evidence reviewed here does not reveal any particular residential schedule to be most beneficial for children. Research clearly suggests, however, that parental conflict is a major source of reduced well-being among children of divorce.

Age Birth to 6 months

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTACT

Children between birth and the age of 6 months develop a strong bond with at least one person. This is called attachment. Bowlby (1973, 1982) first proposed attachment theory and Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al, 1978) completed empirical testing of his theory. Attachment provides the framework for relationships and explains why the disruption of the bond between the primary caregiver and the infant can result in problem behavior. Disruption can occur through loss and /or separation from the primary caregiver or even the threat of separation and loss.

Infants begin to attach to caregivers at approximately 6 months of age. Attachment develops slowly over the first year and is determined by the quality of the interaction between the adult and the child, not just by who feeds and changes diapers. It includes interest and attention through smiling, reaching, cooing, touching, etc. It is clear that children do not just attach to one person. However, there is controversy over whether children have a tendency to form a single "primary" attachment, regardless of how many other attachments they form. (Warshak, 2000; Solomon, 2005). Visitation schedules must insure that children have the opportunity to establish and maintain such attachments as well as insure that existing attachments are not disrupted or threatened.

Know How Your Child Grows

- A. Normal Developmental Stages:
Eating, sleeping, and routine are primary needs of children this age. Stability in caregivers and routines, particularly in eating and sleeping, are critical. Predictability, consistency, and stability of help to establish security and reduce tension and anxiety. Attachment begins at this stage. Bowlby (1969) suggested that between birth and two months is the preattachment stage. The infant responds to any adult. However, by six months, the infant will recognize familiar caregivers and be wary of unfamiliar people. Some of the developmental tasks of infancy between birth and six months include:
1. Physical Development
 - a. Infant begins to sit up
 - b. Reaches with both arms
 - c. Can hold objects
 2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
 - a. Starts to explore things by taste
 - b. Seeks visual stimulation
 - c. Protests if needs are not met
 3. Social Development
 - a. Smiles, laughs
 - b. Knows the difference between parents and strangers
 - c. Gestures to be picked up
 4. Emotional Development
 - a. Need to attach
 - b. Need for nurturing, love, affection, and attention

CONTACT FOR BIRTH TO SIX MONTHS

One of the most important considerations is for attachment with both parents. It is important for visitation to provide opportunities to establish a bond between the child and the parent. Generally, frequency of visitation is given more consideration than duration of visitation. Making up for less frequent visits by increasing the length of time of visits is not recommended for infants (Hodges, 1991). Skafte (1985) recommended daily visits, but if this is impractical, then visits should be spaced no more than two days apart. Overnight visits are not generally recommended (Hodges, 1991; Biringen, et al, 2002). There is research, however, to show that overnight visits with the parent can occur, provided that the

parent has been a significant caretaker and a primary attachment figure (Warshak, 2000).

Suggested: Daily visits of 1 to 3 hours

WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER

- Keep sleeping and eating arrangements consistent and stable.
- Since children this age develop and change rapidly, communicate frequently with one another about eating habits, elimination, health, medicines, new behaviors, sleep patterns, etc. Use of a tablet for written communication and accessible to each parent is often a useful way to provide this information.
- Share favorite toys, blankets, etc.
- Furnish pictures of one another to have in each home.

AGE 6 Months through 18 Months

Children at this age continue to establish attachment. They begin to show stranger anxiety and apprehension. Even though an infant may have shown no signs of being upset previously, the child will now cry when the parent leaves. This starts at about 9 months and may continue until about 2 years old. Separation from one of the parents during this period might cause impairment to the attachment process (Horner and Guyer, 1993). Children continue to need familiarity and predictability. Children need love, attention, talk and play.

KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD GROWS

A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Children this age continue to grow rapidly, particularly in their mobility. They crawl, stand, and walk. Although the child will explore the environment and begin to assert himself, the parent must still provide for structure, predictability, and familiarity that will help to build trust and security. Children desire more independence, but continue to need the security of the attachment figure. Negative behaviors may appear between 15 and 18 months. The child may become more demanding, erupt in tantrums, and begin to say "no." There is an emerging sense of self as well as fear of loss of the attachment. Since anxiety begins, it is especially important to maintain regularity in the visitation and to insure that the visitation does not involve long separations (Ram, Finzi, and Cohen, 2002).

1. Physical Development
 - a. Walking, running, climbing
 - b. Can throw an object
 - c. Can grip a crayon and scribble

2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
 - a. Begins to speak
 - b. Learns by exploring
 - c. Can follow a simple direction

3. Social Development
 - a. Copies and imitates
 - b. Waves goodbye
 - c. Responds to verbal request

4. Emotional Development
 - a. Separation anxiety begins
 - b. Exhibits a temper when frustrated

CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD

AGE: Six months through Eighteen Months

Since separation anxiety begins during this period, the issue of visitation is especially important. How often and the length of time of each visit depend, in part, on the prior contact of the child and visiting parent. If the parent has participated in, then visitation can be greater in duration and more frequent. Otherwise, short but frequent visits are suggested. Skafte (1985) recommended that no more than 2 or 3 days pass without the parent visiting. Solomon and George (1999) found that a repeated overnight separation from the primary caretaker was associated with disruption in attachment. Overnight visits, while still controversial at this age, are sometimes recommended, again, dependent on the amount of, involvement, and availability of the visiting parent (Warshak, 2002).

Suggested Visits: 1 to 4 hours every other day

WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER

- Maintain a routine, especially in eating and sleeping, in each household
- Use a communication log, or notes to inform one another of new behaviors, habit changes,
- Patience, as well as firm and consistent limits are necessary

- Share favorite toys, blankets, stuffed animals, etc.
- Provide familiar articles, pictures, etc. for each household
- Insure a safe environment and supervise the exploring child
- Try to spend some time of a visitation doing a care taking activity in the home of the primary caretaker (such as feeding, bathing, bedtime)

AGE 18 Months to 3 Years

Children at this age continue to explore and establish increasing independence and mobility. These are “toddlers” that will start to become individuals and begin to establish some separateness from their parents (Sroufe, 1979). Children continue to require consistency and firmness from parents. They can remember people they have not seen for days, so children can tolerate longer times between visits.

KNOW HOW YOUR CHILD GROWS

A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Toddlers between the ages of 18 months and 3 years significantly improve their communication skills, begin to toilet themselves, eat with use of a spoon and fork, play by themselves, and become somewhat more resistant and self-centered. They may refer to themselves by name, all part of becoming separate from their parents. They are often easier to discipline through humor and distraction.

1. Physical Development

- a. walks well, goes up and down stairs
- b. attempts to dress self
- c. becoming independent in toileting and eating

2. Cognitive (Mental) Development

- a. Says words, phrases, and simple sentences
- b. Avoids simple hazards
- c. Understands simple directions

3. Social Development

- a. May refer to self by name
- b. Can play alone

4. Emotional Development

- a. Self-centered, possessive, often negative
- b. Enjoys affection
- c. Often resistant to change

I. CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD AGE: 18 Months to 3 Years

Children this age can handle visitation that is less frequent than for infants. Visits should continue to be consistent and frequent. At 18 months a child can visit for several hours at a time and research supports an overnight visit in the older children in this category www.coloradofivorcemediation.com, Warshak (2000). Skafte (1985) believed that full weekends were too long for three years olds. Long visitations and travel to distant geographic locations are not recommended (Hodges, 1991).

Suggested Visits: One weekend day, including overnight; two weekdays for 3 hours. For example, Saturday, 10 AM to Sunday, 10 AM and Every Monday and Wednesday, 5:00 PM to 7:30 PM.

II. WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER

- Insure safety in the environment
- Make sure that overnights include the bedtime routine similar to that practiced in the primary residential home
- If a parent has not had regular visitation because of geographic distance, then visitation should be short, regular visits for part of the day in the custodial parent's location
- Communicate through use of a log to provide feedback to the other parent on changes in habits, new tasks, etc.
- Have some of the child's favorite things available in each home

Age 3 to 5 (The Preschool Child)

Preschool children enjoy predictability. They like fairness and well-defined and consistent guidelines set by parents. Visitation needs to follow these same tenets.

Know How Your Child Grows

AGE: 3 through 5 Years

A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Preschoolers have large vocabularies and show significant growth in their communication. They can tell simple stories, ask endless questions, and are interested in their environment. They have a more secure and greater sense of personal identity. They move from play by themselves to cooperative play and begin enjoying the company of others. They are beginning to be adventuresome, but need controlled freedom. They are eager to carry out some responsibility and feel pride in their accomplishments. Routine and consistency continue to be very important.

1. Physical Development
 - a. Runs, climbs
 - b. Begins to ride tricycle, similar vehicle
 - c. Begins to write own name
2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
 - a. Communicates well verbally
 - b. Asks questions
 - c. Tells simple stories
3. Social Development
 - a. Seeks peer interaction
 - b. Talkative, versatile
 - c. Cooperative play
4. Emotional Development
 - a. Likes to follow rules
 - b. Enjoys responsibility

CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD

AGE: Three through Five YEARS

Preschoolers are more aware of the differences between parents. Although they can tolerate overnight visits developmentally, parent conflict may interfere significantly with visitation and smooth transitions. Parents need to make greater effort to insure that preschoolers witness appropriate behaviors between parents.

Suggested Visits: Every other weekend and one weekday overnight, i. e., Every Thursday overnight and every other weekend, Friday to Sunday, 6PM. Or, Every Thursday overnight and Every other weekend, Friday to Sunday overnight. During the summertime, preschoolers may be ready for a full week visitation.

WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S VISITATION EASIER

- Provide mementos, including photos, from each other's homes
- Become involved in preschool and increase access through activities
- Provide a lot of reinforcement and opportunities for approval and recognition
- Insure that transitions from one home to another are smooth and without conflict
- Make sure that the child calls the other parent daily

AGE: Six through Eleven Years

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTACT

(Ages Six years to Eleven years)

Children between the ages of six and eleven are focused on becoming hard-working and independent. Achievement in school tasks and acceptance from their peers, therefore, is critical. Parents must be certain that visitation schedules are consistent, predictable and organized (Amato 1991). This will allow the child to focus on the very important school and social tasks that are foremost in their life at this stage. Children of this age are developing moral reasoning, and socializing independently for the first time. Attending and becoming involved in school and extra-curricular activities are important, and must be encouraged by both parents during their contact time with the child/ren.

Between the ages 6½-8, children will often openly grieve for the departed parent. Children have fantasies that their parents will happily reunite in the not-so-distant future. Children in this developmental stage have an especially difficult time with the concept of the permanence of the divorce. Between the ages of 8 and 11, feeling of anger and a feeling of powerlessness are the main emotional response in this age group. Like the other developmental stages, children at this age experience a grief reaction to the loss of their previously intact family. Research by Lerman (1989) explores the adjustment of latency age children finding that children who believe that they were rejected from the absent parent was a significant predictor of a child's self-esteem. There is a greater tendency this age children to label a 'good' parent and a 'bad' parent. At this age children may attempt to take care of a parent at the expense of their own needs. (Wallerstein 1989)

Know How Your Child Grows

A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Children are in a psychosocial age of industry where they want to please their parents with their efforts. They are developing their ability to think logically, and are beginning to understand the concept of fairness. Moral reasoning is beginning and children are concerned with rules. They have a growing awareness of right and wrong. Independent thinking starts, and becomes more constant along with predictable feelings. Social feelings are developing and children can begin showing empathy and sympathy for others.

1. Physical Development
 - a. Growth is slow and steady.
2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
 - a. Moving toward understanding abstract ideas. Things are often “black or white” - there is very little middle ground.
 - b. Look to adults for approval.
 - c. Like encouragement and suggestions for improvement.
 - d. Need Opportunities to share thoughts and reactions.
 - e. Thinking is concrete, but beginning to think logically
3. Social Development
 - a. Like to join organized groups.
 - b. Beginning to take responsibility for own actions.
 - c. Decision-making skills are being developed.
4. Emotional Development
 - a. Strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile.
 - b. Beginning to build and understand friendship.

Know How Your Child Grows

SIX to EIGHT YEARS

1. Physical development
 - a. Physical play very lively; sporting skills develop quickly
2. General behavior
 - a. Bathes, dresses, sleeps, and eats well; talks to strangers; takes part in team sports; drawings show some proportion and perspective.

3. Language
 - a. Reads with understanding; learns spelling and grammar; starts to add and subtract two or three digit numbers and multiply and divide single digit numbers.
4. Typical personality
 - a. Self reliant, sociable and outgoing; active; may be critical of others.

Know How Your Child Grows

NINE to ELEVEN YEARS

1. Physical development
 - a. Skilled with hands and fingers; special skills such as in sport and music become evident.
2. General behavior
 - a. Well behaved; works or plays hard; self-sufficient and may enjoy being alone.
3. Language
 - a. Masters basic techniques of reading, writing, adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing; reads stories and writes brief letters to relatives.
4. Typical personality
 - a. Sensible; self motivated; may be shy in social situations; may talk about sex information with friends; interested in body organs and functions; less afraid of dark; not afraid of water.
5. Common normal 'problems'
 - a. Worried and anxious; has physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches when has to do disliked tasks; rebels against authority; sex swearing beginning; perseveres with tasks.

After Divorce Needs

In terms of divorce, children of this age wish their parents to reunite (90% of seven-year-old children) and may still attempt to reunite their parents. They fear losing both parents and may still blame themselves for the divorce. They often react to the divorce with sadness. It is common for children of this age to have difficulties concentrating in school because they are thinking about the loss and

reunification and they may have some academic risk. Children of this age can typically move between two homes with minimal stress. Most children at this time need a home base where they can work on basic academics, do homework consistently and have their friends easily available. They need routines and schedules. Children in grades 1-3 are often more able to interact with a same-sex parent around hobbies, interests and feelings than younger children who depend on basic care. For primary school age children, the parenting schedule should minimize the interference with peer relationships. To do otherwise may cause your child's resentment and rejection.

Divorce at this age group can cause confusion and some feelings of blame. Children's initial concern is who will be there for them. They are concerned about basic needs such as where they will stay. They need a feeling of security at home in order to deal with issues at school or with friends. (Bauserman 2002)

Divorce brings many challenges to children of this age. Younger school-age children tend to feel the loss of the family as a unit and may experience sadness and crying. Older children in this age group may be more likely to experience anger and choose one parent over the other as a way to hold on to their self-esteem and relationships. Your child may feel directly responsible for your divorce, especially if she is put in the middle of your conflict. Some children will show more severe symptoms, including tantrums, regression, sleep problems, behavioral and academic problems in school, withdrawal or aggression with peers, and depression. (Buchman, Maccoby and Dornbusch 1996) Some of these children do not want to grow up, and instead remain emotionally immature. Children in this age group believe in fairness and want to please their parents. They may feel overwhelmed by your conflicts and try to fix them, yet they cannot. If one of the parents is depressed, your child may try to take care of that parent's emotional problems.

- Exchanges should *minimize* your child's exposure to conflict. School or other neutral places are excellent transition places between Mom's house and Dad's house.
- You must find ways to keep your children out of the middle of your conflicts. Do not have your child deliver messages to the other parent, or ask your child to tell you what the other parent is doing. Communication needs to be between the parents only, even if this requires help from a neutral professional.
- To the extent you can, there should be a plan for co-parenting. If your conflict is more extreme, a pattern of parallel parenting and avoidance of each other is best

CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD

AGE: SIX through Eleven YEARS

1. Every Other Weekend
(Friday 6:00 p.m. to Sunday 6:00 p.m.)
4/28 overnights

In a review of a decade of research Kelley (2000) cites the benefit of being close to each parent. This option establishes 12 days separation from the second parent. Divorce research indicates that this is often too long for many children, and may diminish the second parent's importance to the children – with fewer opportunities for involvement in their day-to-day, school and homework activities. (Shafke,1985) In addition, this option provides little relief to the first parent from children responsibilities. This option may be preferred, however, given the parents' history of involvement, available time for parenting, present parenting resources or, as a transitional approach to timesharing.

Every Other Weekend plus Midweek Visit
(Friday 6:00 p.m. to Sunday 6:00 p.m., with every Wednesday 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.)
4/28 overnights

Every Other Week
(Friday 6:00 p.m. to following Friday 8:00 a.m.)
14/28 overnights

This parenting plan option creates seven days separation from the other parent, often quite difficult for children younger than six or seven years of age. It eliminates the opportunity for face-to-face parental conflict by minimizing transitions, and allows both parents and mature children to “settle” into a routine. The children's switching residences can, of course, complicate management of scheduled lessons, activity commitments and daycare arrangements.

Note: changing households on *Friday* after school often works better than on the traditional Monday after school approach (allowing for a “winding-down” at the time of transition, rather than requiring “gearing-up” at that time). Serious reservation of this seven-day option must be given in cases involving parental alienation.

Summer Vacations

When parents live in separate communities, it can be difficult to plan a schedule. If you have a long-distance relationship, your child will need to be in one home during the school year, and visit the other parent during non-school time. Consider the travel time and your child's age and activities when you develop your schedule. If you are the “summer parent,” try and spend some time with your child every three months. If your child is young, you might need to do most of the traveling. Once your child is old enough to travel alone, it is still important to visit the child at least once or twice a year. Use three-day weekends for

monthly contact during the school year if you live close enough, or longer holiday breaks such as Thanksgiving or Easter if you live farther away.

If you are the “school year parent” and live a long distance from the other parent, try and enroll your child in a year-round school. This allows for more frequent travel to be with the other parent, yet won’t take the child away for as long as the traditional summer break. Consider the day-to-day activities in both communities, since working parents need daycare or planned activities when children come to visit. Your child is likely to do well if your child has all but one week of each break with the long-distance parent. That leaves the child some time to be with friends in the child’s home community and time for vacation trips with each parent.

If your child is in a typical school-year/summer-vacation schedule, your child is likely to have two weeks of vacation at Christmas, another week or two during the spring or near Easter, and about twelve weeks off in the summer. If the child is under age eight, consider having an equal split of the Christmas break, and most spring breaks with the long-distance parent. Try breaking up the summer into three segments: the first and third with the long-distance parent and the middle one with the home parent. This may prevent the child from feeling homesick during the child’s trips. If the child is older and used to being away from home, the child might do well spending most of the summer with the long-distance parent, assuming the child enjoys it there and has a good relationship with that parent. Both of you need to consider the child’s interests, summer camp desires, and vacation needs as you develop your plan. (Lye1999)

WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD’S VISITATION EASIER

Children of this developmental stage benefit from parents who:

Make sure your child knows which parent will be picking them up and taking them home. If both parents will be attending an activity, allow the child to visit with both parents during that event. Develop a system where both parents are informed of school conferences, and extra-curricular activities.

1. Establish a homework routine, with assistance as necessary. Be sure to pack all books, school projects, uniforms and extra-curricular sports gear. Establish with the other parent the procedure for when children leave any of the abovementioned at the other parent’s home. Decide who will be responsible for getting this to the child.
2. Establish a consistent homework time, bedtime, and mealtime at both homes. Attempt to provide similar diet at both homes. Television, computer, and playtime should be consistent. Agree on similar punishments for poor academic progress and unacceptable behavior.

3. Allow the children to have telephone access to the other parent when they desire. Be considerate of when you call the children, as not to interrupt bedtime or wake-up routines. If needed establish a schedule for the other parent to call.

AGE: 11 through 18 Years

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTACT

Children between the ages of 11 and 18 usually seek more independence as they get older and prefer to do more things with less adult involvement. This pattern becomes more obvious as the children age. As children move through this stage, a good balance of supervision and flexibility is essential. Parents must be sure that visitation schedules are flexible and consider the natural tendency of the child toward increased independence from both parents. As children become more active in school and social activities, visitation likely will need to be reviewed and even restructured from time to time.

Know How Your Child Grows

A. Normal Developmental Stages:

Children in this age range are called “adolescents,” with 3 different stages as described below. Generally, adolescents move through the following tasks during this period:

Establish a sense of autonomy (self-sufficiency) and personal identity;
Achieve emotional independence from parents and other adults; and
Begin process of individuation (separateness) from immediate and even extended family.

1. Physical Development
 - a. If puberty has not occurred yet, it likely will occur during this period, bringing rapid changes and “swings” in the child’s hormones and emotions, together with common physical changes of puberty.
 - b. As physical development proceeds, especially sex-related physical changes, the child will likely want more privacy. Boundaries regarding physical contact by parents may occur. For example, the parent’s hug that once was natural and welcomed by the child may now be met with a very different response, including withdrawal and even some rejection.

2. Cognitive (Mental) Development
 - a. Concrete initially, more capacity for abstract thinking develops throughout adolescence
 - b. Greater critical thinking that may result in frequent comparisons and evaluation of others' behavior, appearance and preferences (including parents) with child's own preferences.
 - c. Brain development continues; for much of this period, the portion of brain that supports rational judgement, organization, emotional understanding and decision-making is not fully developed.

3. Social Development
 - a. Peer relationships take on a *much* greater importance.
 - b. Increasing independence from family is sought and demanded.
 - c. Though focused on independence, still concerned with meeting parents' expectations and need assistance in coping with age-related demands.
 - d. Increased interest in sexual matters and sexual identity.

4. Emotional Development
 - a. Increased ability for introspection (self-examination and understanding).
 - b. Identity formation occurs as the child explores various alternatives and makes choices that affect self-concept. Identity formation may include sexual, ethnic and career aspects. For some adolescents, this can be a time of role or identity confusion.
 - c. Puberty and incomplete brain development may result in significant emotional volatility ("moodiness") and, in some cases; this moodiness may be or seem extreme.

11 TO 13 YEARS (EARLY ADOLESCENCE)

1. Physical development: Sexual characteristics of puberty occur or continue to develop; boys typically have higher physical self-concept (recognition of physical ability) than girls.

2. General behavior: Behavior largely decided by or compared to friends and schoolmates; social interaction outside of family more important; as part of individuation, children will more often challenge parents' values and authority. Girls tend to feel better

about themselves in social situations than do boys. Same-sex peer groups are more important than opposite sex.

3. Language: Reads with greater understanding; may use language and abstract thinking to write about and report on emotional experiences.
4. Typical personality: Peer relationships and acceptance become increasingly important; complaints about parental restrictions and supervision increase; mood swings common; may vary between need for and rejection of parental affection and expectations.
5. Common or “normal” problems: forgetfulness; minor rebellion against parental rules and restrictions; lack of organization regarding school and home spaces (messy room, locker and/or desk)

14 to 16 YEARS (MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE)

1. Physical development: Puberty completed or nearly completed.
2. General behavior: Increased romantic and/or sexual feelings toward others; Mixed-sex group activities increase; Self-centered; undecided at times regarding issues of separation and independence. Wants greater role in decision-making on issues affecting them.
3. Language: Increased use of language to report on emotional experiences and complaints. Prefer to communicate with peers over parents; may increase use of computers and other technology to maintain regular communication with peers.
4. Typical personality: Increasing efforts to achieve independence from parental restrictions and rules; attempts to bargain regarding attendance at social activities; critical thinking patterns may result in frequent judgments and “black and white” evaluations of issues.
5. Common normal ‘problems’: May begin to associate greater physical maturity with adulthood, leading to increased risk for harmful or premature behaviors; parent-child power struggles, especially around issues such as dating, curfews, household chores and driving privileges. Experimenting with drug and alcohol use and/or sexual behaviors; incomplete

understanding of impact of potentially unsafe behaviors (sex, drugs, alcohol,).

17 to 18 YEARS (LATE ADOLESCENCE)

[Note: actually through Age 20]

1. General behavior: Increased romantic and/or sexual feelings toward others; Individual relationships with others begin to become more important than peer groups; frequently challenge parental authority and restrictions.
2. Typical personality: Self-centered idealism; right and wrong thinking, begins to become more other-oriented. Mood swings of puberty and early post-puberty may stabilize somewhat.
3. Common normal 'problems': School (including college planning) and social activities may compete, causing stress; experimenting with drug and alcohol use and/or sexual behaviors; incomplete understanding of impact of potentially unsafe behaviors (sex, drugs, alcohol, reckless driving).

After Divorce Needs

The needs of adolescents after divorce depend, in part, on whether divorce occurs during this stage or occurs earlier in their development. If the divorce occurs at this stage of development, the need for some structure, consistency and reassurance of each parent's involvement is more important. Anger and blame may be common as adolescents become more judgemental.

However, as children move into and through adolescence, they may become more focused on the "fairness" of a plan for parental contact and they will likely consider it "fair" to include them to some extent in plans that are made for where they will spend their time. Whether or not parents are married or divorced, adolescence is a time of increasing importance of peer relationships, social activities and independence, a fact that must be considered in any after divorce family.

Parents must be ready to: support their teen's attempts to achieve developmental tasks; accept the teen's beliefs, feelings and attitudes without being judgemental; set appropriate limits on behavior but not on those beliefs, feelings and attitudes; foster empathy with the teen by remembering (not necessarily reciting) your own feelings and behaviors as a teen; allow their teen to be different than the parent is or was at that age or now; acknowledge and support the teen's need for independence and autonomy

CONTACT BASED ON KNOWING YOUR CHILD

FOR ALL ADOLESCENTS:

Perhaps more than any other age range, and particularly in later adolescence, the flexibility recommended in the literature makes a strict schedule difficult and even harmful to the adolescent's development, in some cases. Longer vacations or contact periods, more creative time-sharing alternatives, and even equal time-sharing may be options, depending on the particular needs of a child and the relationship established before the divorce. All contact arrangements should be negotiated in good faith, keeping in mind your child and the special developmental tasks of adolescents. The suggestions that follow, as mentioned in the introduction, cannot be viewed as appropriate for each situation and each child.

11 TO 13 YEARS (EARLY ADOLESCENCE)

Every Other Weekend

(Friday 6:00 p.m. to Sunday 6:00 p.m.)

Many adolescents prefer one primary home (in a large part to avoid confusion for their friends), and only wish to spend weekends or evenings with the other parent. Much of this will depend on the history of the relationship and the availability of the parent to meet their needs.

Every Other Weekend/only one weekend overnight

(Friday after school to Saturday 6:00 p.m.) or (Saturday noon to Sunday 6:00 p.m.)

Adolescent children often have multiple projects and school assignments requiring their effort, as well as a number of options for peer-group contact on weekends. Parents may consider structuring weekend overnight visitation on an evening when it is more likely that the child will not have to decline social invitations.

Phone calls should be encouraged and permitted at all reasonable times.

Some contact should occur each week or, at a minimum, every other week.

If the child is not used to having individual and continued contact with the nonresidential parent, consider allowing a friend to join the child on some occasions.

Other contact:

If at all possible, offer your child some input into the planned summer vacation contact schedule. Offering a choice between two equally appropriate options can give a child a feeling of some control over his or her time, meeting their need for greater independence. If an extended summer stay with the non-residential parent is likely, that parent should make efforts in advance to locate social and recreational outlets for the child.

During extended time away from either parent, phone calls and email exchanged with that parent may be helpful. This communication should not focus on negative messages about either parent.

School breaks of one week or more should be structured in a way that takes into account the needs of the child noted above.

14 TO 18 YEARS (MIDDLE AND LATE ADOLESCENCE)

Weekly contact:

Contact should occur each week. Contact should be structured with some consideration of child's school and social activities. During earlier stages, consistency and predictability are very important; at this age, some flexibility by each parent becomes more important.

Older adolescent children often have multiple projects and school assignments requiring their effort, as well as a number of options for peer-group contact on weekends. Parents may consider structuring weekly contact on a day when it is more likely that the child will not repeatedly have to decline social invitations.

Overnight stays may become increasingly uncomfortable for older adolescents, especially older adolescent girls staying with fathers with whom they have not had open communication and interaction prior to or during the divorce. For this reason, shorter periods of contact should be considered as an alternative.

To avoid frustration, it is helpful for the child and both parents to keep a calendar that outlines visitation as far in advance as possible and be prepared for reasonable changes to be requested by the child.

If child requests additional contact with non-residential parent, contact should be permitted.

Phone calls and appropriate emails, text messages, and other forms of communication should be encouraged and permitted at all reasonable times.

Due to reported and researched risks associated with teenagers who drive without adult supervision, transportation to and from the non-residential parent's home should be coordinated and completed by parents whenever possible, whether or not your child has a driver's license. This requires that parents are courteous to and respectful of each other as the transfer occurs.

If the child is not used to having individual and continued contact with the parent, consider allowing a same-sex friend to join the child on some occasions.

Other contact:

If at all possible, offer your child some input into the planned summer vacation contact schedule. Offering a choice between two equally appropriate options can give a child a feeling of some control over his or her time, meeting the need for greater independence.

Some children as young as age 14 may view summer as a time to earn extra spending money through part-time work. Some consideration should be made for this possibility.

School breaks of one week or more should be structured in a way that takes into account the child's increasing movement toward independence. While you still are the child's parent and have a valuable relationship with your child, the real fact is that most children at this age become less and less interested in having long discussions and extended contact with their parents.

Particularly as a child moves into late adolescence, parents may find the child is increasingly occupied with peer and school activities, leaving only occasional time available to spend with either parent, regardless of their designation as the residential or parent.

Compensate for changes in physical contact by liberal use of phone calls, messages that do not require a response but offer the child encouragement, limited text messages (if parent views a cell phone as

appropriate for his or her child), e-mails, greeting cards, notes and letters.

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WAYS TO MAKE YOUR CHILD'S CONTACT WITH NON-RESIDENTIAL PARENT EASIER

Children in adolescence benefit from parents who both:

Commit to be and are *flexible* about visitation and understand their child's need for greater time with peers and social activities. Though a regular contact schedule appears to encourage more frequent non-custodial parent contact, adolescents report a very strong preference for flexible, unrestricted access.

Offer and accept a greater role by children in determining some details of contact with the secondary residential parent, while continuing to encourage a relationship with each parent as much as possible.

Work diligently to be cordial to one another and minimize conflict.

Do not use adolescents as messengers for information or couriers for documents and records. Parents should work to create a co-parenting relationship that includes respectful discussion and cooperation as it relates to their roles as parents.

Plan for activities that offer some social stimulation to the child; adolescents frequently report being "bored" when their time with the non-custodial parent consists only of "watching TV" or "talking."



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