

## **Shared Parenting from a Child's Welfare Perspective**

There can be no formula for the organisation and amount of parenting time that meets the needs of all children in all circumstances.

Parenting time needs to be sufficient in 1) amount, 2) quality and 3) organisation to meet the following list:

1) The arrangements should preserve, to the fullest extent possible, good parenting that they may have experienced before parental separation, both in amount and in terms of the activities shared with their parents

The children should be able to feel emotionally close or very close to both parents. This includes the parents being both or equally 'on hand' both for major things, like discussion of the choice of school, and day-to-day things which may affect or impact on the children, like playground accidents or spats with friends.

The children do not feel they have to obey or please one parent possibly to the detriment of the other.

The parents' legal right to equality in the eyes of public and private agencies, such as nurseries, schools, doctors should be backed up by parenting arrangements that enable both parents to have actual involvement with them. The same applies to relationships with the children's and the parents' friends and neighbours.

The principle of 'diminishing returns' should be applied. Viz that 'at the margin' children will get more benefit from seeing more of a parent they see less of than one that they already spend most time with.

There should be no aspect of the children's lives, for example schooling or recreational interests that one parent is excluded from by virtue of the organisation of parenting time

The children should be able to see the lives of both parents 'in the round', for example that they need to earn a living as well as have their own leisure and interests as well as a role as parent.

A child should not normally be put in daycare, or be babysat, or be put in the charge of adults outside the family if parental care is available. This stipulation would obviously not apply to school or recreational activities under a tutor or coach.

Children should have enough time with both parents to have an adequate relationship with their wider family both sides

Children should have a right to be with the relevant family members at special times, such as their parents and grandparents' birthdays, Mothers Day with their mother, Fathers day with their father and so on. If the children are of mixed heritage, for example their faith, they should be allowed to be with the relevant side of the family for special days within each tradition. Where there are shared special days, such as the children's own birthdays, Christmas etc, there should be either sharing, equal division, or alternate arrangements. The same should apply to events where children are expected to be accompanied by a parent or parents, such as school sports day.

The arrangements should not encourage the development of gender or other stereotypes, such as a father's role is financial support and the giver of treats, and mothers have responsibility for everything else.

Where achieving one aspect of an 'ideal' situation (not that any post-separation arrangement can be that) involves compromising another aspect, there needs to be conscious and articulated balancing exercise. For example, shared parenting usually involves travel time and trouble. Children vary a lot in what they feel about this, but avoiding travel should be balanced against loss or restrictions on their relationship with both parents.

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