

The Importance of Access to Parents after Separation

Information from DM Burke Solicitors blog

It's fairly widely accepted now that children who have healthy contact with both parents after separation or divorce do better than those in sole custody of one parent. Research shows they are better adjusted physically, psychologically, and socially with peers and at school – and shared parenting is the key to this outcome.

Therefore the way in which custody and access are handled in the process of a relationship breakdown has a huge effect on the outcome for children. Three of the key factors which affect children psychologically when their parents' relationship breaks down are:

1. The exposure to conflict
2. Contact with the other parent after divorce or separation
3. Contact with their extended family – including grandparents.

I am all too aware of how difficult and painful the process of separation or divorce is for parents, but it is vital to ensure that children's needs and interests are protected throughout and beyond the process.

My Tips for Child Focussed Access

If you are in the process of separation or divorce, here's what you should be thinking about from the outset:

Think from the child's perspective if possible, and try to work out a plan that best suits their interests, needs, and schedules.

- Children benefit from routine and consistency – try to work out a clear plan with defined times and days when they see and have meaningful access with the other parent. This is especially important for younger children
- Also for younger children, put an access calendar on the fridge or somewhere visible in the house – it gives a huge sense of security to the child and removes doubts. Include overnight access if at all possible, and make the child's second bedroom and home a "home from home". Let the child be involved in decorating the room, choosing furnishings etc.
- Talk to each other in a civil manner and show the child that you and your partner can get along with each other and still talk and discuss issues and make decisions about the child together – show the child that you are still both active parents in his/her life.
- Keep photographs of the other parents in visible parts of the home, for the child's sake. These don't have to be photographs of you and your ex-partner, but photographs of the child with the parent. This shows that you have not changed that parent/child relationship.
- Support each other in matters of discipline

- Where children are old enough, ask their views and involve them in the decision making about access.
Remember that as children get older, access will change and should be adapted

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