

MANDATORY BEHAVIOR FOR DIVORCED PARENTS CONCERNING PHYSICAL CUSTODY AND VISITATION

1. Do not poison our child's mind against the other parent by discussing his or her shortcomings. Continuing anger or bitterness toward your former partner can injure your children far more than the dissolution itself. The feelings you show are more important than the words that you use.
2. Assure our children that they are not to blame for the breakup, and that they are not being rejected or abandoned. Children, especially the young ones, may feel that some action or secret wish of theirs has caused the trouble between their parents.
3. Do not force or encourage your child to take sides. To do so often hurts the child by creating frustration, guilt and resentment.
4. Marriage breakdown is always hard on the children. They may not always show their distress or realize at first what divorce will mean to them. Parents should be direct and honest in telling children what is happening and why, and do so in a way a child can understand. This will vary with the circumstances and with each child's age and comprehension.
5. The guilt parents may feel about the marriage breakdown may interfere in their disciplining the children. A child needs consistent control and direction. Over-permissiveness or indecisive parents who leave a child at the mercy of every passing whim and impulse interfere with a child's healthy development. Children need and want to know quite clearly what is expected of them. Children feel more secure when limits are set. They are confused when grown-ups seem to permit behavior which they themselves know to be wrong and are trying to outgrow.
6. Encourage our children to spend time with the other parent. Your spouse divorced you, not your children. The children should have and be allowed to display photos of both parents.
7. Time with your child by the non-custodial parent, or the non-residential parent in joint custody cases, is for the benefit and better development of your child. No matter what the difference of feeling or opinion between the parents, physical custody or visitation shall not be withheld or threatened to be withheld. Failure to receive child support is NOT grounds for withholding physical custody or visitation.
8. The parent with whom our child lives must prepare the child both physically and mentally for the physical custody or visitation. The child should be available at the time mutually agreed upon, or the time specified in the Judgment of Dissolution or the most recent order effecting visitation, or the Joint Parenting Agreement relating to physical custody.

9. Your former spouse is entitled to make his or her personal plans during your physical custody or visitation. Do not interfere by failing to abide by the terms of physical custody or visitation. Be on time. Return the children on time.
10. Do not fail to notify your former spouse and your children as soon as possible if you are unable to keep your visitation. It's unfair to your children to keep them waiting -- and worse to disappoint them by not coming at all.
11. Make your time with the children as pleasant as possible by NOT questioning them regarding the activities of your former spouse and by NOT making extravagant promises which you cannot or will not keep.
12. Never miss an important date -- Christmas, birthday, graduation, etc. If you can't be there, call or write.
13. If your ex-spouse has plans for the children that conflict with yours, be adults and work out the problem together. Consider the children's wishes, but don't ask them to take sides. (Reread Guideline #3.)
14. Do not expose your children to any immoral conduct between you and any member of the opposite sex with whom you may be emotionally involved.
15. Do not use your pick up or return of the children as a means to continue arguments with your former spouse. You are the role models for your children. Conduct yourself accordingly.
16. Do not be in the presence of your children if you are intoxicated. Do not visit your children at unreasonable hours.
17. Under no circumstances shall the question of alimony or child support payments be raised in the presence of the children. (Reread Guideline #1.)
18. Be prompt in paying child support as ordered. You will not be credited with presents, clothes, etc., as part of the child support. Withholding of physical custody or visitation is NOT grounds for withholding child support.
19. Think first of your children's present and future emotional and mental well-being before acting. This will be difficult because of your own feelings, needs and emotions, but try -- try -- try.
20. Don't overlook the fact that you are only human. You won't be able to make a 100% score on being the perfect parent. No one ever does -- in good or bad times. When you fail in your attempts, acknowledge it, and resolve to attempt to improve day by day.