

## SUGGESTED VISITATION GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

The behavior of parents has a great influence on the emotional adjustment of their children. This is equally true after the dissolution of marriage. The following guidelines have been found helpful in achieving a meaningful visitation:

1. Remember to put your children's welfare first – try to see that we meet their emotional needs and that they have an opportunity to develop as “normally” as possible under the circumstances.
2. They need the visitation with the other parent, normally and under the proper circumstances, and helpful to your children's development and future welfare.
3. The visitation should be pleasant, not only for the children but for both parents. Visitations should help your children maintain a positive relationship with their other parent and it is a part of your obligation as the primary parent to make this happen.
4. Unless you have significant reasons to the contrary the visiting parent is entitled to have the children visit his or her home overnight, may want to plan an enjoyable outing. Moreover, the visiting parent may travel with the child or do other events or activities as that parent may choose during his/her parenting time.
5. Parents often ask whether taking the children to a new girlfriend's or boyfriend's house is okay, especially during the duration of the proceedings. Visitations should be a time for the parent and the children to be with each other, to enjoy each other and to maintain positive, steady and strong relationships. Having other people participate may dilute the parent-child experience during a visitation. Please discuss this with me before you introduce the children to your “new friend.” Additionally, this advice is true for the custodian parent during the dissolution proceedings as well.
6. Keep your visitation schedule if possible. Inform the other parent, in advance, when you cannot keep a scheduled parenting time. Failure to keep a visit without notifying the other parent may be construed by the children as rejection. Try to arrange for an exchange of missed time with the custodial parent. Let me know if you consistently are unable to “swap” times.
7. You may need to adjust the visitation schedule from time to time, according to your children's ages, health and interests.
8. It is common for a parent to ask “why should I visit? He or she is hurt, as revealed by the comments, “I am no longer needed, the other spouse has my home and my children.” The visit is one of the few times that the noncustodial parent has personal contact with the children and for that reason it should be a meaningful one for both the visiting parent and the children. Although the parents have not got along, the children still need both parents if they are to grow up in a normal way.

9. Often a parent wonders where to take the children on visits and what to plan in the way of amusement for them, particularly if the children are young. Activities may add to the pleasure of the visit, but most important of all is the parent's time with the children. Giving of oneself is more important than giving material things.
10. Do not use visits to check on the other party. Your children should not be used as little spies. If your children have the perception that their parents hate each other, they will feel uncomfortable at the time of the visit. Also be prepared that your wonderful children will lie to you . . . if the children believe you are so angry with the other parent that you "want to hear bad things about them," the children will often lie and create those "bad things." Do not jump to conclusions if the children tell you something bad. First, try to decide the circumstances in which the statement was made to see if it is true. If you believe an issue may be true that is of concern to you, let us know.
11. The children may be left with many problems following the visits and both parents should make every effort to discuss them and to agree on ways to deal with them. Expect some difficulties with the children's transition between the households.
12. Both parents should strive for agreement in decisions about the children, especially discipline, so that one parent is not undermining the other parent's efforts.
13. Both parents should use common sense in granting and exercising visitation rights. Try to be flexible with the other parent and to follow the Golden Rule "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Others Do Unto You."
14. Your children's future attitudes, outlook and emotional development are important. Visitations that are as uncomplicated and "normal" as possible under the circumstances is necessary to their emotional health. To the extent possible, the children should know and have the love of and the proper guidance of both parents. Only you can make this happen.

We know that these guidelines will not answer every problem which will arise, nor will they solve all questions risen, but if they help you in a time of crisis and stress, then they are useful and are worthy of your attention.

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