

Custody Sharing



Jo Ann
Volk Lederman

FAMILY MATTERS

Dear Jo Ann:

My wife and I are going to get a divorce. We have twin boys age 2 and they are the love of my life. Since they were born, I have cut back on overtime so that I can give them quality and quantity time. It has been great for me and the children are very attached to me. I think I am every bit as important in their lives as their mother, and I believe that the twins should spend half of their time with me and half with their mother. My wife opposes the idea and thinks she should have the children full time, and I should visit with them every other weekend and one day during the week. Do I have a chance to get 50 percent custody of the twins? Will going back and forth between their mother's house and mine be bad for them?

James B.

Jo Ann Says:

When parents divorce, the whole family gets divorced, even the small people who had no hand in the decision. Barring the possibility of reconciliation, I advise in the strongest terms that you and your wife sit down with each other and create a co-parenting plan that takes into account the emotional and physical well-being of your children. Typically, you will need to heal the ragged edges of your defunct marriage in order to perform well together.

Will a plan of time sharing and joint custody work for you? It worked for Susan and Sam, who gave me permission to use their story. This young couple came to my office on the verge of

divorce with two children age two and three. The goal of therapy was to heal the parents' unresolved anger, and teach them how to foster feelings of well-being in their children.

Wanting their children to experience the least amount of disruption and confusion, Susan and Sam recognized that spending substantial amounts of time with each parent would be important. To accomplish equally shared custody, and fewest changes in friends, school and neighborhood for the children, Susan and Sam bought homes on the same street two blocks from each other. They agreed on a reliable time-sharing schedule, with cooperative flexibility when needed. Therapy helped diminish acrimony, and Susan and Sam could jointly attend school events, holidays and parties.

Judith Wallerstein in her book *Surviving the Breakup* describes factors that appeared to promote good adjustment in children studied five years post-divorce. One of the most important is a stable, close relationship with both parents where the friction between the parents had largely dissipated. The visiting pattern was likely to be regular and dependable, and related to the child's needs and interests. In these arrangements, the child or adolescent essentially enjoyed the support of the intact family. You are still a family. You just live in different places. Make this work.

Jo Ann Volk Lederman is executive director of South Miami Psychology Associates. In private clinical practice for 25 years, she specializes in marriage and family therapy, couples therapy, infertility issues, behavioral medicine and business consulting. To contact Volk Lederman, call 305-666-8833, send mail to 7800 Red Road, Suite 205A, Miami 33143; or address email to JoAnnVolkLederman1@juno.com.