



FAMILY RENEWAL RESOURCES PROJECT
parenting forever, through whatever

Lessons from A Separated Dad's Journey to Create A Dad's Home

Dad- at time of separation, two young children, shared parenting, later a blended family.

His thoughts/concerns/lessons:

Financial: ...initial issues-budgeting, paying bills, paying mortgage/rent, child support/spousal support, transportation; financial issues lead to mental health issues and relationship issues;

Try to avoid eviction- could result in interrupted parenting; credit rating issues, visa debts, etc.

Changing residences is common for a dad- difficult to parent in these circumstances; think residence through; what makes sense for you and your children; what can work? You want to establish a 'stable environment' if possible.

Can you afford a RESP if you have a young child?

Dietary: cooking skills- balanced meals, making interesting/healthy, school lunches; do your different children have special dietary needs? Part-time access dads too **often eat out**. You must learn to shop effectively, within a tight budget probably.

Home Health Care: What do you need in your new home with the children for everyday care. Think it through and if necessary, ask friends if this is not an area of strength. What are basic first aid needs for your children? Sore throats; insect bites, pink eye; bad falls; taking the child's temperature and know what is alarming or a dull to normal range- or what steps to take to bring the child's temperature down- when to go to emergency; etc.

Attend medical appointments; communicate info to the mother; make sure she knows that you want a reciprocal information flow. **Consider- no take a first aid course.** Introduce yourself to your pharmacist. Read their brochures! Read labels on use of meds- children's Advil, polysporin, band aids of every size, on and on it goes. **Get advice from different sources.**

Many separated dads now have infants and toddler age children. Many may have played a full role, *others may have a limited role in the intact family based on any number of reasons; you must gain a comfort and competence level for the sake of your child and the parenting challenges you may face, going forward.*

Don't be hesitant to ask for help from any number of people with experience over many parenting years. There may be a fear within you about displaying a lack of knowledge; HOWEVER, you need this to be the long-term parent in your child's life. Find trusted people in your life; work at filling in gaps in your parenting resume; **be proud of yourself.**

Early Stages (Hopefully) Mental Health

Do not be afraid to ask a trusted friend for their observations on your behavior. What do they see in you? You want them to be honest; you should not be hostile; process the feedback.

Most of us can handle the days and nights when we have our children. We feel like dad again! Unfortunately, when your parenting goes badly (not perfect as we envisioned), there may be several days each week without the children- the not-so-good experience can linger.

The possibility of an additional problem may depend on how you manage the days without the children. Behaviors can be harmful to you in the short and long run. Today the internet provides alternatives from on-line dating to gaming to...? The only pattern to *life is the days with children, and days without the children often outnumber the first option.*

Reckless behavior can be costly and lead to unpredictable parenting and a difficult parenting relationship with the mother.

GETTING IT TOGETHER IS A DIFFICULT BUT NECESSARY TASK IN THE EARLY MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS.

Your parenting life is not on pause and recognizing such as early as possible starts you down a path on building positive steps into your life.

0-5: Practical steps: Doctor's appointments; before school and after school appointments; early years centres; YMCA; Community centres, play groups -inexpensive programs; parent-child swim; etc.

5-12:

Find opportunities to be involved in your child's extracurricular life through coaching, volunteering, school trips, etc.

Attend all teacher open house activities; Report cards and interviews; read daily planners for all the days; access school web site; stay on top of educational issues; be aware of any learning difficulties as your child progresses; find a pattern of fun and skills activities that you and **your children will own for a lifetime.**

Do the best job possible at maintaining or rebuilding a co-operative flow of communication with the child's mother. There is a lot going on in two households for your children; if you can harmonize certain routines, life can become more predictable for everyone;

Each parent is different and may have very different parenting styles. You both likely know those difference from your time together. It is possible to employ that awareness into managing your parenting. e.g. use of video games, appropriate films, etc.

12-18: THE FUN/INTERESTING (???) TEEN YEARS:

The issues change during the pre-teen and adolescence years. Our own teen years sometimes influence how we handle discipline over the common challenges of these years: drugs, tobacco, alcohol, dating, motivation at school.

Peer relationships take precedent over family relationships. It is the natural order BUT for a separated dad who may have less parenting time to begin, it can *feel like a loss of influence and oversight.*

Adolescents in a two-home parenting scenario may go back and forth- not on the parenting schedule but on the kids' schedule. It takes effective coparenting to stay in control of parenting decisions. It takes a different kind of parenting- keeping communication lines open- knowing their friends-recognizing troubles or mental health issues-preparing them for the next stage of post- adolescence life.

Remember the teen years in an intact family are also the 'fun years'; so, don't blame yourself or the other parent or the separation for every bump in the road.

Just do your best. Do what you need to do to be the parent you desire to be!

A Dad

See the resources in the Dad, Parenting, and Developmental sections