



**FAMILY RENEWAL RESOURCES PROJECT**  
parenting forever, through whatever

### **Family Renewal Resource Project (FRRP)**

*For separating and changed families*

#### ***Parenting: Holidays, special occasions, etc. and Parenting Plans***

- 'Special days' are often a source of sorrow, loss and grief for one or both parents, children and extended families following a family separation.
- Special days make clear that the family is now separated, and things are no longer the same, even in separations that are relatively friendly.
- These days may be in stark contrast to being family friendly to days that are tense even dreaded.
- Consider 'special days' for parents: birthdays, anniversaries, school graduations, commencements and weddings, religious ceremonies, other life events.
- Children may live in fear of something or someone triggering an emotional event.
- Consider all the statutory holidays that are associated with family gatherings and celebrations.
- Family vacations, Christmas holidays, March break, and summer school holidays for children.
- FRRP includes PA days for our children for they often create the opportunity for parenting long weekends.
- FRRP also includes school trips where parents may accompany and supervise their own child and other students.
- Consider the never-ending opportunity/demand on children now with 2 families and re: new stepparents and families (see blended family section).
- An effective Parenting Plan (PP) must accommodate all of these 'happenings' and dole out fairness and opportunities in an equitable way... or NOT.
- The NOT outcome often leads to conflict, hurt feeling, anger, sadness and sense of abandonment. Even with an objective fairness standard in place, the above set of emotional outcomes may still occur and to be truthful are likely to occur.
- Children often feel that their life is meeting the adult requirements of access. Again, read or *reread the resource 'After my parents divorced...'*

#### **Solutions/Ideas or HELP!**

- Returning to a 'normal' family life without constant chaos must be our sooner than later goal. So mixed in with parenting equity, extended family opportunities and children's needs is the goal of **calm over chaos**.
- The FRRP and any joint PP requires a fair, consistent *formula to be included in the eventual PP to settle on-going disputes*. Change is inevitable and in a two-family home it almost always has more complications.

- Separating parents and a support professional can work out a schedule- the schedule can be your family's version of fairness and what works for you on celebrating a child's birthday, or a parent's birthday or a nanna's birthday or a poppa's birthday.
- Schedules can be *explicit in order to accommodate almost everything* or be *simple and just go by the calendar dates and hope that equals fairness... most/some of the time (luck of the draw)*.
- Parents often go by even/odd years for varying important holidays such as Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.
- Some families are big on Christmas Eve and less so on Christmas dinner. Birthdays on the actual day may have importance or not be as important.
- Battling over something that is less important for you is a dangerous strategy. It occurs when one parent feels they are not being met half-way by the other parent. **Flexibility and compromise to find win-win outcomes** is a better approach. It is not easy, but the more often done the easier it becomes. *Remember the move from chaos to calm goal.*
- In all of this it is important that these special occasions are *about building inclusive family relationships in a dad's home and a mom's home. This is not easy; but these special occasions offer the opportunity for special times provided a child is not caught in a battle between parents and extended families.*
- How this works out- **calm or chaos**-depends on the commitment of the parents and their belief that their child needs and deserves every opportunity to have a flourishing *relationship with all the essential, supportive family relationships?*
- See the Parenting Plans in different sections designed for accomplishing a Mom's Home and a Dad's Home.

### Blended Families

- Families have traditions, so where possible, one should try to accommodate these family traditions.
- Christmas was a tradition in my family life- opening of gifts, grandparents, brother's family, dinner, type of tree, etc. These were a few 'demands' that I made of my new partner on our first family Christmas with my children. It worked out, sort of; but my wife was pressured to accommodate to my previous life traditions i.e. not her traditions.
- The kind of Xmas tree was very important, I thought. I insisted and my wife reluctantly agreed on my children's family of origin Xmas tree.
- When my children had families and their own Christmas tree 'tradition to begin' - not one of the three chose the so called 'traditional, family Christmas tree.
- I learned over time, that new traditions are more than OK. What seems incredibly important are often not nearly as important in the long run.
- Blended families at Christmas and birthdays, etc., may suffer from children doing a comparison of gifts. Children from blended families are often in a measuring faze of costs.
- For blended families, this can be a constant source of conflict in many areas of life.
- In blended families, where a step-child is in the home less than other children, their sense of belonging is often affected by their perceived sense of being lesser than; or other children in the home full-time may believe the parents are buying the other child off. To the children it can be viewed as who is loved the most.

- It is important to find ways to communicate your love and their gift of being with you as a blessing in your life. For all the difficulties that life throws at you and your child, they must know that you value, care and love them... through whatever.
- There is a wonderful little film called Eighth Grade (2018). It is an understated film about a dad and his about to graduate 8<sup>th</sup> grade daughter. There is a moving scene near the end of the film that captures the daughter's perception of her life and how she believes dad feels about her. He then explains to her his reality. It is a magical moment where a parent pushes away life getting in the way and focuses on what really matters.
- **It is more than worth seeing/ hearing again and again. It was magic to this separated parent.**

#### **A Separated Parent rarely seeing their child (ren) or severely interrupted parenting**

*These situations unfortunately occur too often - especially between a dad and child. We recommend maintaining contact for birthdays and other special occasions. This may require emotional strength, so I understand this may not be possible for everyone. I would include in a card an enquiry about what they are doing and an update on your life. If you feel like you wish to continue to give them a gift I would do so. The tragedy for the child is the damage caused by feeling abandoned. Remember their sense of what resulted in the separateness may not be reality.*

*You can't be obsessive, but you can consistently deliver the only message perhaps available- that they are always a part of your thoughts and life.*

#### **Recommended readings:**

1. **After my parents divorced.... (Globe & Mail) Listen to her voice and what she is describing that took her down the path to this essay. Read the comments by the readers.**
2. **How divorced parents can have a happy Thanksgiving (and existence). (Globe & Mail, Oct. 6, 2011)**
3. **Five Steps Divorced Parents Can Take to Cool Down Holiday Conflict.**
4. **Kids 'n' Dad Shared Support Christmas Essay: My Complicated Family Turns 20 (Kids n Dad Essay)**
5. **A Christmas Message 2017. (Kids n Dad Essay)**

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