

From Position To Interest While Managing Adjustment

Some separated parents have difficulty sorting out the ongoing care of the children between them.

A parent may hold a belief that for whatever reason, what they want equals what is best for the child. However, what one parent wants may not be what the other parent wants or believes is best.

Further, some parents are tremendously angry, upset or sad about the events that led to the separation and these feelings may cloud their judgment with regards to what is in their children's true interests for a good outcome come adulthood.

Hence, in some of these cases, parents are at odds with each other, both pulling for a situation that reflects their respective position.

At these times, parents may believe they have nothing in common with each other, given how polarized their positions may be. Hence rather than discussing the appropriateness of their positions and battling it out between them, it may be better to begin a discussion with the outcomes they seek for their children, come adults.

Most parents will agree they want their children to be happy, productive, educated, responsible and able to carry on respectful adult relationships. They will likely both agree that they wouldn't want the child to have anxiety the result of worrying about parents behaviour between themselves given both in attendance at their child's graduation or wedding.

These agreements form the best starting point to helping separated parents in conflict, resolve the ongoing care of the children. With this common ground, the issue is less what either parent wants in the here and now, but more how they shall develop the roadmap to achieving the agreed upon outcome for the kids – their mutual interests.

Thus the agreed upon outcome reflects both parents interests for their child's future, rather than their current position on custody and access. So even in the view of animosity, the issue is not who has which weekend, but rather, how do we develop a plan that over time sees our children mature into well-functioning adults?

This change in perspective is aimed at changing parents view of the parenting planning process, from a here and

now perspective, to a developmental perspective based on mutual interests.

It may take a number of meetings with some parents to facilitate this shift in perspective, particularly if one or both has some emotional healing to achieve.

The challenge in helping parents make this shift is also in recognizing that one parent may be ahead of the other in terms of an emotional adjustment to the separation. In view of parents' different emotional places or readiness to move on, it may be necessary to help one parent slow down to wait for the other, while at the same time helping the other parent cope and transition through a range of feelings in the separation process to catch up with the parent further ahead in the adjustment process.

Helping parents sort out the ongoing care of the children between them is thus a balancing act, helping them resist fighting over positions in favour of developing mutual interests while at the same time managing the pace of change given their emotional adjustment to come up with a developmental plan.

The message to parents is to remember, at heart, both want what is best for the kids. Some time may be needed to truly sort out what that is and time should be afforded to each to make the necessary adjustments.

The message to helpers is to resist being inducted into a battle of positions that while resolution can bring about some degree of satisfaction for one parent, will likely miss the mark for the other and almost certainly will not provide for a durable outcome given developmental pressures that naturally arise as children age.

Helping the parents will require managing their intensity, differences in emotional adjustment and intransigence of position, until both can be aligned with mutual long-term interests.

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