

Which is Better, Blue or Green?

Some separated parents are locked in dispute, each believing in their version of what's best for the child. Unable to settle matters concerning the ongoing parenting of the children, they turn to the Courts for relief. Further they present with a belief that upon extolling the righteousness of their position to the Court, their case will be won. Hence, upon taking the stand, they launch into their script.

However, the Court is not bound by the position or preference of either parent. In other words, the objective is not necessarily to choose a side although this may happen.

The objective of the Court is to determine what is in the best interests of the child. This determination may reflect one or other parent and even neither parent. In making the determination, the Court seeks to understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of both parents and their respective plans. Further, the Court seeks to understand the needs of the child. The Court then attempts to best match the needs of the child with the strengths and weaknesses of the parents and plans so as to develop an independent plan that addresses the child's needs. In other words, the parents present themselves as resources to the child and the Court selects from those resources to best meet the child's needs.

At times, both separated parents present themselves as adequate or similar resources and both may present reasonable plans. However, their plans may provide mutually exclusive alternatives, such as when parents oppose each other on the choice of school. Each parent will extol the virtue of their choice and both can be right even though different, but clearly the child may only attend one school.

These conflicts are referred to as value differences, as in one values this and one values that. There is nothing really inherently wrong with either, except for the fact that they are different.

In such cases, it is as if the parents are arguing the merits of two distinct colours; say blue and green, where each parent is determined to convince the listener that one colour is distinctly better than the other. Truth is, neither colour is better, they are just

different. Better is just a matter of personal preference, despite the arguments in favour of either.

In situations where there are only two distinct alternatives as in school selection, the Court may have to choose one over the other. In doing so, one parent may feel the winner and the other the loser. Some parents are then able to abide by the decision of the Court and others are not. Those who are unable to abide by the decision, may cry foul and present themselves as hard done by. They may seek to undo the decision by continuing to appeal, seeking other opinions, or undermining the credibility of the Court.

When parents are unable to abide by the decision of the Court, the children are continually subject to the parental animosity. Worse still, some parents induct the child into the dispute directly and thus the child feels not only the sting of ongoing conflict, but may develop the belief that the outcome is bad and hence they then feel badly for themselves.

Separated parents are to be cautioned in these situations. It is not picking blue or green that harms the child or one school over another, but rather the ongoing parental conflict in view of the decision.

Parents are advised to support the child in view of the decision and make the best of the situation. This tends to be more productive in terms of the child's well-being than seeking to reverse the decision and subjecting the child to further hardship and conflict.

Blue or green is less important than accepting the colour chosen. Harm or harmony, the choice is yours.

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW
(905) 628-4847
gary@yoursocialworker.com
<http://www.yoursocialworker.com>

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.