

# Custody vis-a-vis Access !

Divorce is far from final when there are children involved and ex-spouses who have decided to play an active role in the children welfare. The struggle for custody goes on. The parent's decision to have or to surrender custody of the child will have affected the child's well-being. This is the dilemma that faces a parent. In this article, the writer seeks to examine this dilemma and to offer food for thought.

The decision to be custodial parent should be made in the best interest of the child. In the event of a break-up, the child is the deprived and innocent party. He should not be subjected to the trauma of having to make the painful decision of which parent to follow. Neither should custody to be given to the unfit parent.

A parent should have enough custody of the child to meet his own selfish interest like

1. a desire to get even with the ex-spouse.
2. forming a nuclear family in order to get a HDB flat
3. a desire to avoid being labeled as the “bad parent” and then have serious reservation about it.

The decision to give up custody of the child because of the following reasons is also because of the following reasons is also undesirable.

1. To avoid a custody battle
2. A lack of self confidence
3. Economic pressure
4. Guilt feelings

A child knows when he is wanted or rejected by the parent. The custodial parent who gains custody in order to spike his ex-spouse is likely to weaken the bond between the child and his other parent and may even encourage negative thinking about her. The child is likely to end up confused and torn. On the other extreme, he could become an over indulgent parent in order to preserve the “good guy” image thus spoiling the child when a firm handling would have been better.

The parent who has custody thrust upon him is also unlikely to make a good parent. The feelings of resentment will spill over to the child.

You may want to consider the following pointers in your decision to be the custodial parent.

## 1. Preparedness

When you are psychologically prepared you are likely to be more successful as a custodial parent. Be prepared for the tremendous burden you will have to face but also be aware of the comfort and joys the child can give you once you are able to develop a close parent-child relationship.

## 2. Positive Attitude

Accept that the non-custodial parent is also important to the child and be gracious enough to share the child with her. The custodial parent who is so embittered by what life has offered him is likely to alarm the child's sense of well being; making him an anxious child with a negative view of life. A confident, positive parent on the other hand will generate similar traits in the child.

### **3. Seek Support**

Acknowledge that carrying the burden alone is very difficult. Don't feel too proud to accept support from relatives, friends, church and support groups.

## **Pitfalls The Custodial Parent Should Avoid**

### **1. Living with parents or in-laws after a divorce**

This may not be a wise move as the tendency is to over depend on grandparents and to expect them to play the role of surrogate parents to the child while the custodial parent slips into a complacent routine of working and coming home late. This is not being fair to both the grandparent and the child.

### **2. Remarriage**

The custodial parent should never remarry because he wants his children to have a mother. Marriage for purpose of getting help to raise the children is courting trouble. One day the children will grow up and leave the nest. What else is there left? He should marry to have a companion for himself and not a parent for his children.

### **3. Resentment**

Resentment over having to care for the child can affect the parent-child relationship adversely. The child must not be made to feel that he is a burden to the parent. He is far better off in a home where there is love and security.

## **The Non-Custodial Parent**

The parent who chooses to be the non-custodial parent can still play an active role in the welfare of the child. However, the non-custodial parent may have to overcome problems like:

### **1. Guilt feelings**

The non-custodial parent often faces guilt feelings and stigmatization because of her choice. Society may not be able to understand that it is for the best interest of the child. If she allows feelings of guilt to overwhelm her, she is not likely to be an effective parent. It is important that she should get on with her life while giving the love and support to the child when he goes to her. Attempts should be made to write, call and keep in touch so that the child knows that she still cares.

## 2. Anger and Depression

Like guilt feelings, anger and depression can be destructive and affect the non-custodial parent so adversely that she may choose not to see the child anymore in order to lessen the pain. This is not a wise move as the child will feel dejected and let down. Research has shown that the one who recovered fastest were the ones who play an active role in the children's lives.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, the child is the victim in this traumatic tug of war between the parents. In choosing whether to be the custodial parent, the interest of the child is of paramount importance. Fortunately, the child is if both parents agree on this and remain in touch with the child by continuing to give him the love and support he will need to live a healthy balanced life.

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