

# TODAY'S DADS

2018 Edition, Issue 3

December, 2018



## 104<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE SESSION WILL BE SEATED JANUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2019

Changes are coming... Monday January 7th, 2019 will mark the beginning of Wisconsin's 104th Legislative Session that will run through 2020.

Wisconsin will have a "divided" government with Republicans maintaining control of both chambers of the Legislature. A 63-36 majority in the Assembly and a 19-14 majority in the Senate. However, Wisconsin will have a Democratic Governor for the first time in 8 years.

Only 1 incumbent running for re-election was defeated.

Senator Caleb Frostman, Senate District 1 (D - Sturgeon Bay) who won his seat in the June 2018 Special Election was defeated by

election of Representative Kathleen Bernier, Assembly District 68 (R - Lake Hal- lie) to the Senate for District 23 previously held by Senator Terry Moulton, Senate District 23 (R - Chippewa Falls) who did not run for re-election.

You may recall that Senator Moulton was the Author of 2017 Senate Bill 736 which was the Presumption of Equal Placement bill that failed to pass before the Legislature adjourned.



André Jacque (R - DePere) who has served Assembly District 2 since 2011.

Another major change is the

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## A BLAST FROM THE PAST ~ FATHERS DESERVE EQUAL JUSTICE IN THE COURTS

The following article was originally written for Today's Dads in **JUNE 1990**, but then subsequently published in newspapers throughout the country. Here we are almost 30 years later and it still rings true!

By William N. Fetzner

Bill was the 1st President and a co-founder of the organization that we now call Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families (WFCF). He also served as creator, editor and publisher of Today's Dads. Later he served again as the 3rd

president.

For the past six months, Fathers for Equality and Justice has been conducting a study of divorce records in Dane County, Wis. The findings were presented June 1 to Wisconsin's

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We are Wisconsin's Oldest "Father's Organization" having been formed in 1988. We have been hosting our Monthly Support and Network Father's Night Out Meetings since 2000 and are a 100% volunteer organization that has always and will always believe that

**Kids NEED BOTH Parents**

# A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT *Tommy Bickel*

It has been a while since the last issue of Today's Dads. We (WFCF) will be



publishing quarterly issues throughout 2019 mainly due to a founding member's generous donation, to help cover printing and mailing costs. WFCF continues to provide monthly meetings in ten cities throughout WI, to help people navigate family court issues. WFCF has also answered 292 requests for help from our web based helpline; again the majority of requests are pertaining to family court issues.

WFCF has also continued its outreach activities in the Fox Valley, as well as having a booth at the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative Summit in October. We met many groups providing support to fathers as well as having great discussions with fathers that attended. That is something WFCF will continue to be a part of going forward. We will continue to do these types of outreach as time and volunteers, make it possible.

Our lobbying activities in 2018 were greatly decreased as it was not a very active year for our legislature due to elections. This will change starting in January of 2019 as the new legislative session will start and we have several bills that will be coming out. The bills include: Equal placement presumption, Co Parenting education mandate, and

a Future contingency option for initial placement orders. WFCF will no doubt be spending time in 2019 providing our legislators with information on the value of each of these bills, and cost to our children of not enacting these bills.

We (WFCF) are a member of the ongoing Legislative Study Committee on Child Placement and Support. Meetings were held each month starting in August 2018, and are scheduled currently through January, 2019. You can read what has been discussed at each of these meeting by visiting:

*Lowering the move away distance from 150 miles down to 100 miles, will certainly help keep all members of a separated family in closer proximity.*

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/study/2018/1785>

You can also watch the meetings at Wisconsin Eye: <http://www.wiseye.org/>, click on committees.

Highlights of what has been discussed include suspending the child support obligation for fathers who are incarcerated, adding a future contingency to placement orders, issues involving our service men and women and their children, birth cost recovery program, additional training for GAL's, and initial discussions regarding shared and equal placement presumptions.

The future contingency option affects over 100,000 fathers each year in Milwaukee County. Over 100,000 babies are born where fathers are not married or living with the mother. Approximately 400,000 babies are born throughout WI, in exactly this situation. This information is on this site: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/wisconsin/2014/measure/factors/82/data>

The chances of all those children having the opportunity to have two involved parents in their lives are very, very low. It is very difficult for a father to have significant placement when an infant is involved. Typically then the father petitions later to have placement changed, as the child gets out of the infant stage. Now couple that with the common presumption that it is in children's best interest to not change an in place placement order, unmarried and not cohabi-

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tating fathers have almost no chance at a significant relationship with their new child. A future contingency option allows the two parents to agree on placement initially when the child is an infant, and then have the placement automatically change to more significant time with the father as the child becomes older. About 400,000 children in WI each year need that legislative change to have a chance to have two parents in their lives.

*(Continued on page 3)*

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT CONT'D

(Continued from page 2)

The shared and equal placement presumptions will be discussed in depth at the January 2019 meeting study committee meetings. Three draft bills regarding this were initially discussed in November (these can be viewed on the committee website given earlier). The committee will potentially discuss each more and then vote on each bill, or additional draft bills will be submitted. Knowing the huge increase in the chances of negative outcomes for children with only one parent significantly involved in their lives, the state of WI must promote two parents significant involvement in children's lives as the children's best interest. Promoting two parent involvement (and involvement is directly connected to parenting time), greatly benefits children with separated parents, benefits both parents, and ultimately benefits the tax payers of WI (tax payers pay for resources to deal with

teenage pregnancy, school truancy, police involvement, drug addiction difficulties, and councilors to address teenage depression). WI needs more fathers with shared parenting options (from 25% placement up to equal placement), and our legislature should be promoting this option for all children with separated parents. WFCF will be doing everything possible to help successfully bring about this change.

Chuck George in the Fox Valley is working on starting up a youth group in the Fox valley that gets kids with separated parents together, to discuss issues of concern and ways to improve things. Rick Frazer and Jim Pease (both individual FNO managers) have connected and attended meetings called Focus on Fathers. The initial intent of this group is to get feedback from fathers regarding problems and perceptions with child support. Small group meetings will be convened around the state to solicit input from fathers, to establish

and identify specific needs for further actions. More info will follow as Rick and Jim attend the December meetings on organizing these forums.

So we (WFCF) have been very busy over the last six months, and that will only increase as we enter 2019. We are a 100% volunteer organization and are always in need of help, assistance, and input to continue moving things forward. If you can help PLEASE step up soon! You can click on this link to let us know:

<http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/volunteering.htm>

## 4 THINGS ALL DIVORCED DADS SHOULD DO FOR THEIR KIDS

Divorce is incredibly difficult, but it is important for you to keep in mind how your breakup is affecting your children.

As a father, the best interest of your children is always your top priority. You should never lose sight of that.

With that in mind, here are four things all divorced d a d s should do to help their kids adjust to their divorce.

Don't expose them to any breakdowns

Two of the most common emotions associated with divorce are anxiety and depression. There is just so much emotional turmoil to overcome that it is impossible not to end up a little stressed and sad.

It is critical to your well-being to avoid bottling up these emotions. That is one of the most self-destructive habits you can develop during this challenging time.

However, it is important that you find appropriate outlets to vent about those feelings. Reach out to family members

and close friends. It is certainly worth looking into seeing a therapist to help you sort through what you are experi-

encing.

**Do not**, under any circumstances, use your children as a sounding board. This is already a heartbreaking process for them, and they should not be expected to talk you through your struggles.

This does not mean you should try to

feign fake emotional strength. It is healthy to admit that you are sad to your kids and show your vulnerabilities, so that they know it is OK to feel that way too. But any emotional breakdowns you might go through should be away from their eyes and ears and in the company of a trusted confidant

*Father's points of view will be well represented by both WFCF and Ben Kain of IFW.*



who is more emotionally equipped to help you.

**Work with your ex to co-parent effectively**

Children of divorce are at risk for a num-  
(Continued on page 5)

## WFCF NEEDS YOU, YOUR EXPERIENCE MATTERS...PLEASE PAY IT FORWARD

Are you or do you know a Family Law Professional,?

Have You or do you know someone who has (a parent (Dad or Mom)) been through the Family Court Process?

Are you or do you know a Mental /Behavioral Health or Education Professional who works with Parent(s) and/or Child(ren) from divided homes?

WFCF needs more volunteers no matter how much or how little you can give your experience and contribution can make the differ-

ence for someone else..

A small contribution from more people truly makes it easier for everyone to continue the mission of WFCF.

We all know the everyday demands of our personal and professional lives are extreme. This can be further compounded by the stressors of going through the family court process. Struggling with a non-cooperative co-parenting relationship can be physically and mentally exhaust-

ing as well.

What types of volunteers do we need:

Short Answer...Anything and Everything

Long Answer...Fundraising, Legislative Outreach and Education, Community Outreach, Membership Recruitment, Financial Sponsorships. If you have a skill or passion and are interested in assisting WFCF in growing their presence in affecting change for the children of Wisconsin facing the effects of living in a divided home please visit:

<http://www.wisconsinfathers.org/volunteering.htm>

*Kentucky now leads the nation in protecting children's best interests when parents' divorce or separate.*

## DCF (DEPT. OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES) INITIATES A FOCUS ON FATHERS IMITATIVE

The Department of Children and Families, Bureau of Regional Operations (BRO). BRO works in a number of programs to include Child Support, Child Welfare, Child Care and Wisconsin Works, also known as W-2. Secretary Anderson has been a strong advocate for fathers being more engaged in the lives of their children and she along with Division Administrator John Chapin are wanting to hold a focus group for non-custodial fathers to engage in conversation with fathers about the challenges/barriers they face in regards to child support and un/under employment.

WFCF is very interested in helping facilitate gathering this survey information. Rick Frazer our Fathers Night Manager for Green Bay and Fond du lac, as well as James Pease our FNO manager for Racine FNO are both in the group that is discussing how to gather this information. Using our Fathers Night Out meetings as places where fathers can attend and complete the surveys to be submitted for consideration seems like a natural combination.

We are hoping this can be started right after the first of the year. Please watch

our Facebook page for information as well as the Fathers Night Out announcements that go out each month for all 10 meeting sites. Our Facebook page is at:

<https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinFathersForChildrenAndFamilies/>

The potential questions that may be part of the survey are:



1. What is your opinion or impression of the child support program?
2. What has been your experience with the child support program over the past year?
3. What is your biggest challenge when it comes to making child support payments?
4. What can you tell us about other services you've received from child support, such as employment services, fatherhood programs, job training, communication skills, parent-

ing skills, mediation services?

5. What can you tell us about any experiences you've had with adjusting your child support order?

6. What can you tell us about any mediation services you may have been offered?

7. How could the child support program better serve you?

8. If you were in charge and could make one change that would make the child support program better, what would you do?

The intent of the surveys is for people sharing respectful thoughts, ideas and feelings about what the child support program can do to assist NCPs (non-custodial parents) more. In the last year both federal and state government agencies have been looking for more ways to help all children have two involved parents in their lives. This is a great opportunity that WFCF will be following closely and one we will work diligently to help become an effective tool to help the system work better for everyone involved.

## ≡ REMINDER DONATIONS TO WFCF ARE ≡



## 4 THINGS ALL DIVORCED DADS SHOULD DO FOR THEIR KIDS

(Continued from page 3)

ber of negative consequences, but those risks can largely be negated by having two active and involved parents involved in their lives.

Effective co-parenting requires clear communication, flexibility, patience, and a commitment to doing what is best for your children regardless of how you and your ex feel about each other.

This is obviously more challenging if there are hard feelings between you and your ex. A lot of couples are utilizing co-parenting counselors to help figure out this process.

“Co-parenting counseling is a specific kind of counseling intended to teach parents who are separated or divorced to communicate more effectively,” said Cordell & Cordell divorce attorney Jamie Spero. “The purpose of it is to talk about the kids’ best interest in a neutral environment with a neutral third party who has special training, and this person is supposed to help

you learn to communicate more effectively, so you can co-parent your children easier.”

You might be in a spot where your ex is just too disagreeable to co-parent with. In these scenarios, it might be worth employing a parallel parenting model, which is designed for high-conflict couples.

### Avoid bad-mouthing your ex in front of your kids

It does not matter how terrible your ex is, you should never speak ill of her in front of your children. Kids tend to idolize their parents and love them unconditionally. When they hear you breaking her down, it creates confusion and can result in a toxic relationship and even parental alienation.

Again, keep in mind that the best way for you to ensure your children avoid the negative effects of divorce is by en-

suring they have a loving relationship with both you and their mother. The negativity between you and your ex should stay between the two of you.

### Encourage your kids to talk about your divorce

Just like you, your children need to have a place to talk about the feelings they have about your divorce. Seeing their parents fall out of love and break up is confusing and can lead to heart-ache, anger, sadness, and a number of other unpleasant emotions.

You should communicate that it is OK for them to feel all of these things and make sure they know you are always available to talk if they need to. Understandably, they might not be comfortable opening up about some things with you, so you might need to find a teacher or counselor who can listen to your children and help them make sense what they are going through.

## LAW CHANGES SUPPORTED BY CHILD DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

*(Continued from page 1)*

Equal Justice Task Force, which has been seeking evidence of gender bias in state courts. They represent solid evidence of de facto discrimination against dads, the same kind of discrimination that prompted the establishment of affirmative-action programs for others. We discovered that of the 252 cases examined, 99 percent were settled out of court by agreements between the parents, including questions of custody, contact with the children, child support and maintenance. Only 9 percent of the fathers emerged from divorce with a primary role in their children's lives. The rest settled for various forms of sole and joint custody which left them in a subordinate position with regard to the care and custody of their children.

University of Wisconsin researchers Sara McLanahan and Karen Booth concluded in their own research that "evidence overwhelmingly suggests that children who grow up with both parents are better off as adults than children who live apart from one parent." The typical divorced Dane County father, however, is not going to the mat to give his children that important edge in life. We have no reason to believe that fathers in other communities try harder.

Cynics may argue that men simply don't care and are content to let their children go for selfish benefits. We don't believe that. Our experience in counseling thousands of men over the past 2 1/2 years indicates that men surrender without a fight because they feel the system is stacked against them. A majority of these men would be living with and raising their children if they had confidence the courts would give them an equal opportunity.

Evidence of judicial gender discrimination also appeared incidentally during our study. In a 1987 decision

which led to an appeal, a circuit-court judge said, "All other things being equal, children normally go to their mother." Another judge, according to the trial transcript, laid the problem open for men by stating, "We're really unfair to men. We treat women differently. We treat them with kid gloves."

The message that men can't win in divorce courts is passed on to already discouraged men by their lawyers. What sensible father will risk thousands of dollars and the welfare of the children he loves in a hopeless custody battle?

Gender discrimination in family law is the insidious counterpart of gender discrimination in the workplace. Even when legislators write gender-neutral laws, they can be twisted and interpreted in the courts according to longstanding, subjective notions of how men and women should behave.

Discrimination lurks in language and customs. For instance, the word "nurturing" suggests female parenting. Behavior more typical of mothers, such as emotional support, is commonly used as a primary criterion to evaluate fathers contesting custody, thus devaluing the uniqueness of father love and care. The very word "fathering" suggests only the act of creating a child, requiring men to prove that they can "mother" to qualify for custody or significant time with their children.

Most family-law professionals will admit that it simply isn't enough to be a good dad. For a father to win a custody battle, the mother must be proved unfit. Since most parents are as fit as anyone can judge, mothers who want custody almost always get it.

Why not have laws that prohibit taking away custody except when a par-

ent is proved unfit? Then the natural state of joint custody would be presumed, and good parents would never be deprived of the responsibility and the right to care for their children. Putting the burden of proof upon those who seek to exclude a parent from a child's life would mean far fewer children growing up without two contributing parents.

If fathers can't or won't do it, what about society's stake in the psychological health of its children? If, as representatives of society, we accept the premise that two parents are very important, what laws, rules, and practices should we favor to promote continued joint custody and care? How can scared, unprepared, or overwhelmed fathers be helped to go on trying for the love of their children? Today, there is no carrot for fathers - only the stick. The same philosophy that says that women are needed in the workplace should say that fathers are needed in the home. Both sexes should be actively assisted to cross gender barriers.

Judith Wallerstein, who in "Second Chances" recently reported a poor long-term prognosis for children of divorce, wrote: "To state it plainly, we are allowing our children to bear the psychological, economic, and moral brunt of divorce." The divorce system is broken. More mother custody won't fix it. Children need their fathers, and fathers will respond when they are assured of equal justice in the courts.

Representative Bernier has always been a champion supporter of legislative initiatives near and dear to the membership and followers of WFCF.

Also re-elected for the eighth time was

Representative Jeffrey Mursau, Assembly District 36 (R - Crivitz). Representative Mursau and his staff worked very closely with WFCF during the last legislative session while authoring 2017 Assembly Bill 940 regarding mandatory

co-parenting classes. He has already committed to re-introducing this legislation during the coming session only this time much earlier in the session with the hope that will be more successful.

# Join Today ~ \$30 Lifetime Membership

## WFCF Lifetime Membership Application

Name					
Date of Birth		Gender <small>(This data may be used in reporting membership population)</small>		Male	Female
				Prefer Not to Disclose	
Physical Street Address					
City		State		Zip	
Mailing Address <small>(If Different than Physical Address)</small>					
City		State		Zip	
County of Current Residence					
Relationship to Child(ren) Affected					
Phone					
Personal E-Mail Address					
Check Here to be Contacted about Volunteer Opportunities with WFCF					

### Applicant Demographics

### Wisconsin Family Court Case(s) Information (Optional, If Applicable)

County of Court Action	
------------------------	--

### Order

Qty	Description	Unit Price	Extended Cost
1	WFCF Lifetime Membership ★ Includes E-Mail Subscription to "Today's Dad's Newsletter"	\$30.00	
	3 x 11 ½ in. Removable Vinyl WFCF "Kids NEED BOTH Parents" Bumper Sticker	\$3.00	
	1 ¼ in. WFCF Logo Lapel Pin	\$5.00	
1	One Time Donation to WFCF 501(c)(3) Not for Profit Organization		
<i>\$ Membership Fees and Donations are IRS Tax Deductible \$</i>		<b>Total</b>	

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## MONTHLY FATHER'S NIGHT OUT MEETINGS

WFCF IS NOW OFFERING **120 MEETINGS** IN PERSON MEETINGS  
ACROSS THE STATE PER YEAR

**Milwaukee:**

Last Monday of the month  
7:30 - 8:30 PM at:

**Stagecoach Inn**

W61N520 Washington Ave, Cedarburg, WI

**Madison:**

*Third Monday of the month*  
6:15 PM at:

**World Buffet at South Town Mall**

2451 W Broadway, Monona, WI

**Fox Valley:**

*Third Tuesday of the month*  
6:30 PM at:

**El Jarpeo Mexican Restaurant**

1727 Freedom Rd, Little Chute, WI

**Central WI:**

*Second Monday of the month*  
7:30 PM at:

**Korner Kitchen**

4890 Hwy H, Edgar, WI

**NW WI (Eau Claire):**

*Third Thursday of each month*  
6:30 PM at:

**Taquera La Poblantia**

2436 London Rd, Eau Claire, WI



**Green Bay/NE WI:**

*First Wednesday of the month*  
6:30 PM at:

**Townline Pub**

2544 Lineville Rd, Green Bay, WI

**La Crosse:**

*Second Thursday of the month*  
6:30 PM at:

**Sheninigans**

2100 Dawson Ave, La Crosse, WI

**Janesville:**

*Second Thursday of the month*  
6 PM at:

**Denny's**

2020 Milton Ave, Janesville, WI

**Racine:**

*Third Friday of the month*  
7:30 PM at:

**Asian Buffet**

3701 Durand Ave, Racine, WI

**Fond du Lac:**

*Second Monday of the month*  
6:30 PM at:

**Schmitty's Oar House Bar and Grill**

N7044 Winnebago Dr, Fond du Lac, WI