



Today's Dads

NEWSLETTER OF WISCONSIN FATHERS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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Father frustrated, searching for son after mom disappears and takes toddler

[Meghan Dwyer](#) and [Stephen Davis](#),

SHEBOYGAN — Last month a local mom was criminally charged when she took off with her kids to Georgia without informing their father. It's a common problem in Wisconsin, but a review of court records show it's rare for parents who take off to be held accountable.

Two years ago James Wolfe became a dad. "There's nothing like it in the world. You're afraid at first, because you don't know, but when you see that little baby for the first time you never want to give it up," Wolfe said.

Wolfe is a truck driver. "Sometimes that means I was gone for two weeks at a time, three weeks at a time and I'd come home and I'd spend as much time as possible -- every waking moment with my son."

In January he was out on the road when he got a call from his landlord. A moving truck was outside of his apartment. My heart sank. I knew what I was walking into but there was nothing in the world that could have prepared me for it," Wolfe said. "She took all of my son's toys. Every single one of them. Every single thing of my son's is gone -- including him," he said.

The mother of his son is Latisha Anderson. She's better known in the porn industry as Darcy Tyler. James met her on a movie set -- something he says he's not proud of. It's a life he wanted no part of, so he convinced her to start a family with him in Wisconsin. The couple moved to Sheboygan after their son Ethan was born.

"I'd give anything I have just to have him back," Wolfe said. It's been 179 days since James has seen his son. "I'm doing everything that I can," he said. But everything he's done has not yet been enough. Wolfe has spent more than \$30,000 on lawyers, process servers, and private detectives trying to get custody of his son. "The police won't help. The courts won't help. There is nobody out there that's doing anything, and I'm trying as hard as I can and I'm getting nowhere," Wolfe said.

James is not married to the mother of his child, so he's been forced to spend months in court proving he's the father. "I just want my son back," he said.

When his son was born he signed the birth certificate acknowledging he's the father. His son even has his last name. *But in Wisconsin, legally, that's not good enough. "I'll find a way. I can't stop. I love my son more than anything in this world. I would do anything for him...and I never want him to go without knowing that."*

His attorney says normally the court would order a DNA test, but how do you test your child when don't know where he is? It's very concerning, that they make it that difficult for someone who has been there since the beginning, who co-parented," says his attorney [Chelsea Williamson](#).

"People need to know if you have a child out of wedlock that you need to get your legal rights established. Having your name on a birth certificate isn't always enough," Williamson said.

"It's so common and unfortunately it's accepted as common," said **Peter Kerr**, former president of [Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families](#). After spending years in court fighting for his daughter, Kerr now offers advice to other dads. "I was up to \$135,000 when I stopped counting. Not many people have got that to fight for time with their children," Kerr said. He says society should reward involved dads, not punish them. **"We really need to protect a child's rights to know both parents and that the definition of family includes fathers."** If you are trying to find your child, click <http://www.findthekids.org/pdf/prevention.pdf> for more resources.

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Making Co-parenting Work in High Conflict Families

Parallel Parenting After Divorce

Definition. Parallel [parenting](#) is an arrangement in which divorced parents are able to co-parent by means of disengaging from each other, and having limited direct contact, in situations where they have demonstrated that they are unable to communicate with each other in a respectful manner.

For intractable high conflict families, parallel parenting provides an opportunity for co-parenting, and although parents remain disengaged from each other they remain fully connected to their children. Within such an arrangement, parents may assume [decision-making](#) responsibility in different domains (such as one parent being responsible for medical decisions and the other for [education](#)). More often than not, however, they agree on major decisions regarding children's upbringing but separately decide the logistics of routine, day-to-day parenting.

In many cases, with parallel parenting in place, the passage of time allows the dust to settle between parents, to the point where parents achieve cooperative parenting from a place of initial disengagement. When parents successfully parent within a parallel parenting arrangement, and maintain their end of the parenting agreement, trust is gradually restored and parents put aside their hostilities. At that point a more collaborative and cooperative parenting regime becomes established. Parallel parenting thus provides a foundation for cooperative parenting, as parents move from a place of disengagement toward more direct communication and negotiation.

Benefits. Parallel parenting protects children's relationships with both parents while shielding them from parental conflict. Although parallel parenting is not a panacea for high conflict, research studies indicate that it does protect children from being placed in the middle of parental conflict, and facilitates co-parenting in high conflict situations. It is not the presence of parental conflict as much as children's direct exposure to that conflict which is harmful to them. Most important, parallel parenting makes clear that both parents are equally important in a child's life regardless of the hostility and acrimony between them.

Logistics. Such arrangements call for a high degree of specificity in the initial parenting plan, pre-empting the need for parents to communicate directly with each other once the plan is in place. The higher the conflict level, the greater the structure and specificity that is required in a parallel parenting plan.

Although parallel parenting is essentially disengaged parenting, some degree of communication between parents in regard to the

[health](#) and welfare of their children will be necessary. In these cases, parallel parenting will likely involve non-direct communication methods such as email. A useful tool is a "parent communication notebook," in which each parent writes a summary of the child's emotions and behaviors during the time their child is with them, and the notebook routinely passes between the parents. Included in this notebook is information about children's health, feeding and [sleeping](#) patterns, school-related issues, the children's moods, what soothes children, what upsets them, the daily routine, and other information about children's needs. This is done in a respectful tone, with no criticisms or instructions about how the other is to parent the children. Yet another option is a "parenting meeting" with a neutral third party present, during which parents' stockpiled concerns are discussed in more detail. The latter may also be used in regard to negotiating important issues such as choosing a school, [religious](#) upbringing, and medical care.

Many more high conflict families would benefit from parallel parenting than is commonly assumed. At the same time, it is clearly not for everyone. There are varying levels of parental conflict, and couples exhibiting family violence are not good candidates for such an arrangement, especially when child and parental safety is at issue. With clear safety plans in place, parallel parenting may emerge as a consideration, but only with careful external monitoring after initial judicial determination of parenting arrangements. But even in some family violence situations, parents may eventually disengage from their conflict for the benefit of their children; thus parents in extreme high conflict and some manifesting family violence (in which the abuse has stopped and an iron-clad safety plan is in place) should not be ruled out as candidates for parallel parenting. However, a rebuttable presumption against co-parenting, including parallel parenting, in situations of interpersonal violence, is a prudent guideline for family court judges to follow in deciding parenting after [divorce](#) arrangements. A similar presumption would apply in cases where a child is found to be in need of protection from a parent.

The future of parallel parenting. As more research studies identify the importance of both parents actively parenting and containing their conflict as essential elements in children's adjustment to divorce, it is likely that parallel parenting will increasingly become the option of choice both for parents negotiating post-divorce parenting arrangements, and a preferred outcome in the arena of judicial determination of parenting arrangements. In parental conflict situations, in the majority of cases judges simply have no basis for deciding which parent should have primary custody of children; parallel parenting provides them with a viable co-parenting alternative. There is thus no reason that even in extreme cases of intractable conflict, parents cannot establish a co-parenting arrangement, particularly in light of recent evidence (Fabricius et al, 2010) that shared parenting shields children from the destructive effects of high conflict. Parallel parenting honors both parents as equal contributors to children's growth and development, even in the presence of high conflict and different parenting philoso

-phies, rules and routines, and lifestyles.

In considering the feasibility of co-parenting, parents should not be held to an unrealistic level of mutual [cooperation](#), as conflict is inevitable in divorce. As mentioned, in most cases parallel co-parenting in high conflict cases will lessen the [anger](#) between parents, with the passage of time, as neither parent is threatened by the loss of his or relationship with the children, and the ongoing hostility that prevails in the context of the “winner-take-all” regime of sole custody is avoided. In effect, parallel co-parenting in high conflict divorces begins the healing process between parents, to the ultimate benefit of their children.

Fabricius, William V., Sanford L. Braver, Priscila Diaz, and Clorinda E. Velez. 2010. “Custody and Parenting Time: Links to Family Relationships and Well-being after Divorce.” In *The Role of the Father in*

*“The Best Parent is...
Both Parents”*

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Cooperative Co-Parenting: Keys

To Making it Work

[Rosalind Sedacca](#) Divorce and Parenting Coach, Author,
Founder of Child-Centered Divorce Network

As a divorce and parenting coach, I've found that children of divorce do best when both of their parents continue to be actively involved in their lives. It's the ongoing connection that makes the positive difference for these children, minimizing the fact that their parents no longer live together.

That's why co-parenting is so universally encouraged after divorce as a significant way to reduce the long-term emotional impact on children. Co-parenting styles and arrangements can differ widely from family to family to suit their individual needs. However, most all professionals agree that co-parenting will only succeed if some basic agreements are made and kept and significant mistakes are avoided. Here are some good rules to follow:

1. Don't deny your child personal time with both of their parents.

If you want your child to weather the challenges that come with divorce and disruption of the family dynamic, allow him/her as much time as possible with both you and your ex. Your child will thank you, have fewer behavioral problems, and grow up happier and emotionally healthier when you honor their love for both of their parents.

2. Don't argue or have tantrums around your child.

Be a positive role model for your child by exhibiting mature behavior. If you have issues, gripes or reason for angry words with your co-parent, plan a private time alone, far from your child's eyes and ears, for those conversations. The consequences when you do otherwise will be significant and long-lasting.

3. Don't make your child your confidant or friend!

It's hard enough for adults to unravel the complex emotions connected to divorce. Think of how unfair it is to expect your child to bear those burdens on your behalf. You rob your kids of their childhood when you confide or share your feelings about your ex with them, especially when you're trying to influence them in your direction. Need to rant and vent about your ex? Do it with a friend — or better yet, a professional with an objective ear.

4. Don't make your child the messenger.

When you have issues to discuss, discuss them directly, not through your children. Not only can the kids mess up the messages, they can also intentionally change the messages due to guilt, anxiety, fear, resentment and other emotions related to protecting one or both parents. This is a big no-no that can lead to no good.

5. Don't think like a sole parent; you're a parenting team.

When you were married you were one of two parents. You still are. When parenting issues come up, ask yourself what would I do as a parent if I weren't divorced? If that still makes sense, respond accordingly. You're a parent first and a divorcee second. Parents who continue parenting as a team create an easier transition and better post-divorce adjustments for their child.

6. Don't be rigid; flexibility is fruitful.

Every time you bend, go with the flow, compromise and cooperate with your co-parent you model the kind of behaviors that benefit both of you in the long-term. Flexibility reduces defensiveness and builds bridges toward better parenting solutions. Remember, every time you forgive and indulge irritating behavior without creating an issue, you are doing it to make life easier for your child. Isn't he or she worth it?

7. Don't exclude the other parent whenever you have a choice.

Even when you are the primary residential parent that doesn't mean your ex can't be included in special occasion celebrations, school activities, sports and other events in your child's life. Think about how pleased your child will be having both Mom and Dad on hand to enjoy significant moments in their life. When it makes sense for both parents to be together on behalf of your child, be cordial and mature. This lifts an enormous weight off your child's shoulders. They'll thank you when they are grown.

Sometimes it helps to think about co-parenting as a business relationship that has to work. You make accommodations on behalf of your partner for the higher cause of business success. This can be a valuable perspective for co-parents after divorce. When you put all your efforts into making it work, your children reap the rewards.

Isn't that a bottom line result worth your commitment and attention?

Fathers Night Out (Madison)



Wisconsin Child Custody/Placement

Information Provided by: [Max D. Harris, Esq.](#)

In Wisconsin the term "legal custody" refers **not to where the children are to live but to the allocation of decision-making authority** among the parties with respect to major decisions. The term "**physical placement**" is used to refer to where the children are to live, and the term "periods of physical placement" refers to the time the children are placed with a particular parent or custodian

Legal custody may be sole or joint, or mixed sole and joint (joint in some areas but sole in others). **Joint legal custody means both parents have a right to participate in major decisions affecting the children**; sole legal custody means only the parent with legal custody has the right to decide major decisions affecting the children. Occasionally the court will grant joint legal custody on most issues but identify certain areas where one parent has sole legal custody.

The court may grant joint legal custody if it finds that it is in the best interests of the children and either both parents request it or one parent requests it and the court finds all three of the following: 1) both parents are capable of performing parental duties, 2) no conditions exist which would substantially interfere with the exercise of joint legal custody, and 3) the parties will be able to cooperate in the future decision-making required by joint legal custody.

Under certain circumstances the court may transfer legal custody to a relative of the children or to an agency if the court finds that neither parent is able to adequately care for the children. This third-party custody decision under a divorce decree is rare but seems to be becoming more common as more and more children are left with relatives by distressed spouses prior to divorce.

The court will want the children to spend time with both parents, and by statutory law must allocate periods of physical placement between the parties unless the court finds that physical placement with a parent would endanger the children's physical, mental or emotional health. Absolute denial of periods of physical placement is very rare, but if ordered, may provide a basis for eventual termination of parental rights.

In most cases each parent is awarded periods of physical placement of the children. The actual placement arrangement may take one of three basic forms:

- **The Traditional Form** - One parent has primary placement of the children and the other parent has periods of placement which usually take the form of every other weekend during the school year plus extra time in the summer. There is also usually an alternating of holidays and a sharing of Christmas.
- **Shared Placement** - In recent years the idea of the parents sharing placement of the children more equally has grown in popularity. This may take the form of equal shared placement, such as alternating week or two-week periods, or some other form of shared placement which is not equal but in which the parent with less time has substantially more time than the noncustodial parent under the traditional form. Parents who work different shifts may also find shared placement an effective way of sharing responsibility and care of the children. There is a special shared placement child support rule which lowers the child support obligation in recognition of the additional care and support provided by a shared placement format.
- **Split Custody** - Occasionally, and for a wide variety of reasons, children are split up between the parents, with each parent having periods of placement with the child or children primarily placed with the other parent. With split custody, the visitation schedules are usually set up to have the children together every weekend and for substantial times in the summer. There is a special split custody child support rule which offsets and nets the child obligations of the parent.

Factors for Determining Placement

If the parties cannot reach an agreement about the placement arrangement for the children the court may have to decide the issue after a trial. The interests of the children are represented at the trial by an attorney, known as a guardian ad litem, appointed by the court to represent the children's interests. A custody study is usually prepared for the benefit of the court and plays a significant role in the guardian ad litem's position and the court's decision.

The court shall consider the following ten factors in making its determination:

- The wishes of the parents.
- The wishes of the children.
- The relationships of the children with the parents and other significant persons. (*continued on page 6*)

- The children's adjustments to home, community, school and religion.
- The mental and physical health of the parties and the children.
- The availability of child care services.
- Whether one party is likely to unreasonably interfere with the children's relationships with the other party.
- Whether there is evidence that a party has engaged in child abuse.
- Whether there is evidence that a party has engaged in inter-spousal battery.
- Whether either party has a significant problem with alcohol or drug abuse

Blended Families--Tips to Help You All Get Along

Reflect on your values as a family. Figuring out what you want to stand for is the first step in successfully blending a family. Have a family discussion about the key values you want to live by as a newly minted team. Some values to get you started are: honesty, togetherness, fairness, respect for each other, and so forth.

Create ground rules together and encourage buy-in. Next, hold a family meeting and figure out the rules your blended family will operate under. For example: Make your bed in the morning, say "please" and "thank you," eat dinner as a family whenever possible, no cell phones at the table, own up to your mistakes, apologize if you hurt someone. Let everyone give input into these ground rules and be respectful of everyone's needs

Make sure the adults are a collaborative unit for the kids. All adult members of the child-rearing team should work together for the good of the children. This can be tricky for non-residing stepparents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc., but it truly does take a village to raise kids. So try to enforce ground rules, protect all boundaries, and keep squabbles, hurt feelings, and disagreements out of the process

Allow each family member to establish their own boundaries... "A boundary is a limit that exists to honor your own needs, and everyone de-

serves to lay out their boundaries and have others respect them," says Mattinson. "I have a boundary that no one swears at me. Maybe you have a boundary that no one borrows your car without permission. Let every family member list their boundaries so everyone knows each other's wishes."

...and respect everyone's boundaries. Everyone deserves to have their boundaries respected and adhered to, even the kids. Mattinson urges families to make a game out of it, by saying "ouch" whenever someone crosses the line. This technique teaches children to respect each other from a young age and creates a "shorthand" language to keep each family member in check.

Work to build trust among all family members. All families work if they come from a place of mutual respect and trust. Parents should be in charge of this ongoing mission. To build trust with all of your family members, be impeccable with your word. In short, this means honoring promises you make to your kids. For example, if you promise them a trip to a theme park in exchange for one month of completing their chores, you *must* fulfill your part of the agreement. Going back on your promises (even small ones) teaches others that you waver and dissolves your trustworthiness. But fulfilling agreements, being candid and truthful at all times, and adhering to the boundaries you've all agreed upon builds mutual respect and trust among everyone.

Check in with family members regularly and reassess rules. As the summer passes, revisit your charter and encourage each family member to assess whether they're fulfilling their part of the family vision. Make sure that all ground rules are still relevant and update each other about new boundaries that need to be respected. Every family is changing all the time, so be willing to evolve and compromise right along with it.

"Even though belonging to a blended family can be tricky, you can make it work and make it work well,"

Questions/Answers

.....*My question is what should we expect out of **mediation**, as we are new to this. I know you probably cannot offer legitimate legal advice. However, if you have some examples of what we might expect out of personal experience we would appreciate it. Currently (due to moving) we cannot obtain legal aid, as we cannot afford it.*

Thank you for your time, and consideration.

Respectfully, an outraged mother fighting for the rights of good fathers,

Welcome to the bizarre family court system. Things turn out OK for some people, while for others the experience is *nightmare-ish*. The tragic reality is that many of the things we're taught as students (e.g., equal protection under the law, liberty and justice for all, citizens have civil rights that can only be taken away pursuant to both procedural and substantive due process, etc.) are considered to be relevant in this system. Always prepare yourself for the worst possible outcome. Learn WI Statutes 767. Start attending our monthly Fathers Night Out dinners, held in various places around Wisconsin. Learn what you can from our Web site at wisconsinfathers.org. Some WI counties have helpful information on their Web sites, so learn from those too. Talk with as many people as you can who have been through the system. Never say or do anything in the presence of the ex that can in any way be used against you.

Although things are getting better, the system still discriminates against dads at times. It's a complicated system, compounded by the reality that it's arbitrary and capricious, in that the outcome is very heavily dependent on the people assigned to your case.

Document everything you can that may help your case.

Shared parenting is supported by 43 peer reviewed papers, 110 world experts and **more than 70 percent public support**. Studies show children denied shared parenting have higher substance abuse, behavioral issues and physical, social and emotional problems. Shared parenting is practiced in a number of states. In 2012, Arizona implemented laws encouraging judges to maximize the time children spend with both parents, and in 2015, Utah implemented a law providing a minimum of 40 percent time with each parent.

Further, fatherlessness is an epidemic. Researchers from Princeton, Cornell and Berkley published "The Causal Effects of Father Absence," concluding problems experienced by children of divorce are caused by father absence with others examining the correlation between fatherlessness and school-shooting perpetrators.

Recently, actor and economist Ben Stein wrote "A World Without Fathers: That's Why Our Country is Falling Apart." In introducing a shared parenting bill in Missouri, Republican Sen. Wayne Wallingford plainly said, "*Most fatherlessness is not caused by abandonment; it's created by an outdated court system.*"

Fathers Night Out

Support and Social Dinner Meeting

Milwaukee: Milwaukee area meetings are held the *second Wednesday of the month* 7:00 PM at:
Brisco County Wood Grill, N96W16865 Cumberland Ct., Menomonee Falls, WI 53051

Madison: Madison area meetings are held the *third Monday of the month* 6:15 PM at:
World Buffet, South Town Mall, 2451 West Broadway, Monona, WI 53713

Fox Valley: Fox Valley area meetings are held the *third Tuesday of the month* 6:30 PM at:
5th Quarter, 2101 American Dr, Little Chute, WI 54140

Central WI: Central WI area meetings are held the *second Monday of the month* 7:30 PM at:
Korner Kitchen, 4890 Hwy H, Edgar, WI 54426

NW WI: Northwest WI area meetings are held the *third Thursday of each month* 7 PM at:
Milwaukee Burger Company, 2620 E Clairemont Ave, Eau Claire, WI

Janesville: Beloit/Janesville area meetings are held the *first Tuesday of the month* 7 PM at:
World Buffet, 2701 Milton Ave, Janesville, WI

Visit: www.wisconsinfathers.org
for more information

Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families



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