

**Why does Wisconsin have the highest amount of shared parenting for separated parents in the United States?** Actual child placement outcome studies have been done in the state by the University of Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) to discover where children live after their parents separate, and, if they live with both parents, how much time is spent with each. To make this determination, IRP representatives went to every county in Wisconsin and reviewed a statistically significant sample of actual placement agreements to tally real actual outcomes. ( [Meyer Daniel et al \(2019\) 2018-1010 Child Support Policy research Agreement Task 12 - Changes in Placement after Divorce and Implications for Child Supp.pdf \(wisconsinfathers.org\)](#) ). We are very fortunate to have such detailed information here in WI.

Why is shared parenting for children with separated parents so commonplace here in Wisconsin? There can be multiple reasons and I'd like to explore each.

- Is it because 97% of Wisconsinites feel shared parenting is best for children? A recent poll shows WI citizens overwhelmingly feel two parent involvement is in our children's best interest. [NPO-WFCF Wisconsin Polling Report3.pdf \(wisconsinfathers.org\)](#).
- Is the large amount of shared parenting caused by the legislative changes in 2000 which was spearheaded by WFCF members? Add a statutory change explicitly directing the courts to maximize the time with both parents?
- Also, joint custody was defined as in a child's best interest, and it was clarified that gender could not be a determining factor when deciding placement, was it those changes? Fathers were made aware of these changes and realized the positive effects for children and fathers. ([List of shared parenting legislation - Wikipedia](#))
- Was it the change in social norms for involvement by both parents over the last 30 years and the roles of each parent have become more similar than ever before in many areas – in lieu of the more traditional “you do this, and I'll do that” approach? Both parents' significant involvement with all a child's life is more common than ever before.
- Is it because separated parents are both providing significant financial contributions now, more than ever before and are often very close to equal in earning power? Parents see themselves as equals in the financial realm and it's also easy to see parental responsibilities as an equal burden for both parents. This happens especially within the 30–40-year-old parent age group.
- Do parents now place high value on both parents' involvement in a child's life as being in the child's best interest and feel that it would be detrimental for children to not have both parents involved? This is validated by many studies showing that the likelihood of poor outcomes for children increases dramatically when one parent is not involved: (<https://www.timetoputkidsfirst.org/why-children-need-shared-parenting>)
- Do separated parents now value their individual free time equally? Previously the mother shouldered most day-to-day child responsibilities while, historically, the father shouldered a significant financial burden and had more free time than the other parent to do other things. In the 2000's both parents seem value their free time and appreciate that same value for the other parent as well. Again, this promotes shared parenting as a perfect solution. Good for the children and good for both parents!
- Thirty years ago, did fathers feel that one home was best for their children? This Dane County study ([TD June90.pdf \(wisconsinfathers.org\)](#)) showed that in 1990 99% of parents arrived at a placement agreement without a Judge's decision (stipulation). This may have been because

fathers felt they could not get more placement or as mentioned previously, fathers may have felt that one home was best for children. However, in the 1990's fathers started to clearly see the huge value to their children of frequent and consistent direct contact with both parents. Kids most often do the best when they share two homes with both parents – despite this requiring them to be more flexible than when they had one home. This also promotes organizational skills in all family members.

- Also, in the 1990's, Wisconsin started utilizing a Shared Parenting Support Calculator for any placement orders that are 25% overnight or more. To acknowledge that both parents will incur direct costs when they provide separate homes for their children, the amount of support that is calculated to be paid from one parent to another is decreased proportionately instead of the standard 17%/25% of gross income for one/two children. The decrease in support required to be exchanged is based on placement time in each home, and that absolutely makes sense. The result is that the new calculations based on placement time have made it possible for both parents to be able to afford to have a home for their children and themselves and in turn address the best interests of the children in both homes.

Still, some parents feel their shared children are better off being primarily with the other parent. OK. Other parents experience great difficulty navigating the family court process if the other parent does not want both parents significantly involved. This is not OK, and too often a very costly battle ensues with a possibility of collateral damage to the children when they feel the negative effects of parental animosity toward one another. WFCF volunteers have provided an email, phone and in person meeting helpline for 25 years now. I personally have manned the WFCF email helpline since 2016 and have communicated with over 1000 separated parents. We help people understand the family court process and take actions to ultimately provide a shared parenting experience for their kids, that closely mirrors the parent-child relationships of intact families.

We know the value of shared parenting and the positive effects it has on our children. Wisconsin may have more shared parenting outcomes as compared to other states, but we cannot and should not overlook the many children who still do not have this same advantage. How do we leverage the positive advantages that shared parenting brings to benefit more children's lives?

We need to clearly identify that shared parenting is best for children if it is safe and viable, through legislation as was done for child custody. When parents first begin navigating separation and placement decisions, we should encourage them to work together to achieve the best possible outcome – shared parenting that maximizes their child's time with both parents. By stressing that this ideal is best for their child's positive and healthy growth, we also disincentivize parents to consider isolating the other parent.

Instead of only half of children with separated parents benefiting from two parents' involvement we can easily get to 75% by simply reinforcing this message. Kids do better, kids have less trouble, are more successful with two engaged and involved parents. Without spending a penny of WI tax dollars. we can do this by simply declaring that shared up to equally shared parenting is what our kids deserve and need. More and more parents can and will deliver a win all the way around for everyone. Kids benefit, Parents benefit, Society benefits.