



## Teens and Visitation

By Brette McWhorter Sember

If you and the other parent divorced while your child was younger, the teen years can present some challenges in terms of your visitation schedule. A schedule that worked for an elementary school age child is not going to fit a teen. And, if you and the other parent have split during your child's teenage years, it can be difficult to devise a plan that will work for everyone involved simply because the teenage years are so difficult to parent during.

### Big But Not Big Enough

The first thing to remember is that teens may look and act a lot like adults, but they aren't yet completely mature. They still need to have two parents and they still need to have those parents involved in their lives. Teens are working hard at learning to be independent, and this means that they do need special consideration, but it does not mean that you and the other parent should throw up your hands and say "there's nothing we can do." It can be difficult to continue to parent someone who doesn't want to be parented, but that's your job right now.

### Flexibility Is Key

Friends, school, sports, activities, dating, and jobs are essential to teens. If you have a visitation schedule that severely restricts your child's ability to enjoy those essential activities, all you'll end up with is resentment. Instead, you need to try to create a balance in your teen's life. He or she should have plenty of time to do the things that matters to him, but he's also got to make some room for spending time with his parents.

When you all lived in one house you probably did not tell your daughter she had to skip the field hockey game because you wanted to spend time with her. You didn't tell your son he couldn't hang out with friends on Friday night because your spouse wanted to spend time with him.

As the divorced parent of a teen, you've got to flex the parenting schedule to incorporate the things that make your kid who he is. If your spouse has visitation this weekend, but your teen has a dance to go to, the parent whose scheduled time it is should take the teen to and from the dance, and spend the rest of the available time with him. You need to find a balance between your teen's need to be a kid and the need for him or her to have time with both parents.

### Create a Minimum

Since teens schedules are busy and your and the other parent's schedules are also probably pretty packed, it's important to agree to some kind of minimum time per month with the non-custodial parent. For example,

decide that you'll try to arrange things so that the non-custodial parent sees your child for at least four overnights per month and 4 other evenings or afternoons - this is the flexible way to fit in the "every other weekend and one night a week" plan into a busy life. Fit parenting times in where they go the easiest. Be creative with your time sharing. Take turns taking your daughter to basketball practice. Have one parent commit to teaching him how to drive. Have the other parent be involved with weekend band or cheerleader activities. Some parents have a hard time being so flexible because it feels like a loss of control. In fact it is just the opposite - you set a minimum and then work with your child to make it work for everyone. It takes a bit more cooperation, but in the end, you will both have a better relationship with your child and he or she will feel more fulfilled and connected.

#### Stay Connected

Teens are big on technology, so the non-custodial parent can maintain a close relationship with text messaging, cell phone calls, and instant messaging. Non-custodial parents can have a difficult time staying connected during the teen years - teens certainly aren't know for being open with their parents! And, if a family divorced when the daughter was 7, she's a very different person at 15 and it can be hard to stay in the loop. Find out about her interests and activities and make yourself a part of them - either by showing up to cheer, by offering help, or just by asking friendly, non-intrusive questions.

Surviving the teen years requires a mutual understanding - you take your teen's life seriously and he or she will take both parents seriously as well.

Brette McWhorter Sember is a retired family attorney and mediator and nationally known expert about divorce and parenting after divorce. She is the author of *The Divorce Organizer & Planner* (published by McGraw-Hill), *How to Parent With Your Ex: Working Together for Your Child's Best Interest* (published by Sourcebooks) and *No-Fight Divorce: Spend Less Money, Save Time, and Avoid Conflict Using Mediation* (McGraw-Hill). Her web site is [www.BretteSember.com](http://www.BretteSember.com).

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