

Restricted access? Consider the long-term...

Many parents with severely restricted access hold tremendous rage or anger at agencies, institutions, courts or the custodial parent. However, their limited access may be more a consequence of their responses to problems, than the problems directly. Provocation by others cannot be used to excuse their own behaviour if inappropriate or worse, criminal.

First and foremost, parents in such situations must learn to manage their behaviour so that it cannot be used against them. No matter how provoked a parent may feel, they must never act in such a way as to undermine their own self. Parents must consider the consequences of their responses PRIOR to responding and with a view to acting in their own long-term interest rather than the immediacy of the situation.

Secondly, parents in such situations must learn that relationships are a lifelong endeavour. So even though difficult today, parents must be helped to think long-term. They must act now to prepare and build for a relationship even if in their child's later life like adolescence or adulthood. Don't miss the chance for something later, by creating new problems today.

To maximize the opportunity for a lifelong relationship parents with restricted access can do the following:

1. Use whatever access is available. Children cannot live by excuses. Being there whenever possible lets children know you value them. This is a primary responsibility.
2. Never bad mouth the other parent or caregiver. Putting down someone else will never elevate you. Concentrate on the children directly and your activities in the moment. Do not place them in a situation of revealing matters of family life that you think you can use in your case. This will only heighten their mistrust of you and add to a poor relationship now and forever.
3. Leave your anger outside the visit. Children want the opportunity to see you, not your anger. Also, your anger may scare them, which will only cause them to want to stay away.
4. Remember all birthdays, holidays and special occasions with a card or gift that is appropriate to their age and interests.
5. If allowed, maintain regular contact in-between visits by telephone or email or letters. Again, remember to leave your feelings aside and concentrate on enjoying listening

to your child. Sometimes such contact is only a matter of seconds. Do not expect lengthy conversations. It's the contact that matters, not the length.

6. Never hit your child, scream or yell, but do learn and use only appropriate behaviour management techniques. Remember, you are also a role model so what you do in all aspects of your life matters most. Your children will learn by watching you or being told about you, so always act appropriately.
7. Maintain a life journal with pictures and notes that you can use to share memories together of good times. If you do not have access to your children, still make a journal of your life showing what you were up to on their birthdays, holidays or special occasions. Keep it positive and include a birthday card that you would have sent. Then when you see your child, be it now or when they are an adult, you can demonstrate they were always in your thoughts and you can catch up. In such situations these actions can help your then adult child feel better about themselves and help you forge an adult-adult relationship. This can make up for some of the lost time and you both can feel good about it.

Finally, consider counseling. You may need help or support to work on the suggestions contained in this article or to fully understand all the needs of children. Remember, your children will benefit when you put your issues aside and concentrate on working towards a lifelong relationship that is aimed at meeting their needs first, be it now or for the future. It's only too late when you give up or act inappropriately.

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Buy the book:

To order Direnfeld's book, *Raising Kids Without Raising Cane*, send a cheque or money order in the amount of \$12.00 to:
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