



The “Child-Up Parenting Plan”

Facilitating child development post-separation...

Meaningful parental involvement provides for a lifelong relationship with children. For separated or divorced parents this can be achieved by a dynamic “child-up parenting plan” approach.

The “child-up parenting plan” approach assumes children need and want the best relationship possible with both parents and that the involvement of both parents is important to the emotional health of children now and for their future. Essential to achieving a plan then is an understanding of the developmental needs of children from current age to when they leave home.

Parents may require education on their children’s needs and how these needs change as they grow. Needs may be related to education, religion, health, extra-curricular activities, residence and daily care. The child-up approach takes all these into account and then builds upon the resources, availability and desires of each parent to meet these needs over time. If either parent is lacking in knowledge, skill or ability, the plan may also include counselling or parenting classes. The basic belief is that parents will do whatever is necessary to best meet their children’s needs and will undertake activities to prepare themselves if necessary.

Parents will have to adapt to different stages according to their children’s development. The parenting plan must therefore be dynamic, as it will need to change with time.

With infant children, one parent may be more relied upon to provide day-to-day care. However, the other parent should be provided opportunity to bond and form attachments through frequent visits. As children become toddlers, pre-schoolers and then school aged, they are increasingly exposed to the world. So rather than an arbitrary rule that provides a mid week visit, parents can negotiate and share responsibilities for transportation or swimming lessons or after-school activities. Sharing responsibilities pragmatically changes parents’ duration, frequency, time, activity and exposure to their children in a way that is natural.

In other words, parental time with children is as much task-specific as time-directed. As the demands of school increase, one parent may provide assistance with math homework, while the other with English.

The key is to develop the parenting plan for meaningful, goal directed and structured activity aimed towards meeting the needs of children at particular ages. Close parent-child relationships form through positive involvement with typical daily tasks.

Other benefits of sharing parental responsibilities through a “child-up parenting plan” is the reduced risk of one parent taking on the role of the disciplinarian while the other parent develops a kind of fantasyland relationship. Children benefit from access to both parents according to their needs and parental abilities. Further, it distributes the demands placed upon parents and can reduce their stress.

Ongoing parental involvement throughout childhood will determine how well children are able to accept parental guidance and direction come adolescence. This will be vital and protective at this time in their lives. While many people think that peer pressure has more influence on teen behaviour, this is only true for teens who have tenuous parental relationships. Parents who have long established, good and significant relationship with their children can actually have more influence on them during adolescence than their teen peers.

Involvement now will determine relationships and well-being later. If a “child-up parenting plan” is developed and followed, both parents can be dancing at their children’s wedding and then taking turns babysitting grandchildren!

(This approach will work best with parents who are able to freely negotiate.)

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Gary Direnfeld is a child-behaviour expert, a social worker, and the author of *Raising Kids Without Raising Cane*. Gary not only helps people get along or feel better about themselves, but also enjoys an extensive career in public speaking. He provides insight on issues ranging from child behaviour management and development; to family life; to socially responsible business development. Courts in Ontario, Canada consider Gary an expert on matters pertaining to child development, custody and access, family/marital therapy and social work.

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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