

Impact of Economy on Parenting & Parent-Child Contact Beyond the Bench XXI Conference December 15, 2011

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Some ideas for economically challenged parents:

Move-away situations:

- I. Traditional visitation
 - a. Longer visitations at less frequent intervals
 - b. Frequent and liberal visitations with specified notice in the move-away parent's city, town, or neighborhood
 - c. Move-away parent vacates family home for periods of visitation in move-away city
 - d. Move-away parent provides a place to stay for remaining parent in move-away city and/or provides for all or part of transportation
 - e. *Mileage sharing/coupon combining for reduced air fare, hotel stays, etc.*

- II. Communications Concepts
 - a. Cell phones for family and/or children with unlimited calling within the same network
 - b. Text messaging on cell phones
 - c. Scheduled activities on speakerphone or Skype (e.g. reading a book, chapter by chapter, on phone every day or every few days. Reading parent and child each have a copy, or if child is too young, other parent or older sibling can turn pages).
 - d. Skyping Highlights magazine activities (e.g. find the hidden objects puzzle)
 - e. Scheduled phone calls, specific dates and times (move away parent to make up missed calls at the convenience of the other parent)
 - f. Children call collect to remaining parent's home
 - g. Remaining parent obtains 800 number for calls by children from any phone
 - h. Cell phone, speaker phone or regular phone connection to all medical appointments, parent-teacher conferences, psychologist conferences, etc.

III. Computers and computerization

- a. Camera on all computers to allow other parent to just be present during normal activities of either side.
- b. Scan homework, essays, projects and teacher remarks to remaining parents.
- c. Remaining parent creates a screen saver of the other parent's picture to remain on the computer.
- d. Family Twitter or family website where all and seemingly insignificant activities are noted and recorded. Any family member can post for the child(ren) and/or the parents.
- e. IM (internet messaging) between parent and child(ren)
- f. Email capability for child(ren) and both parents. Can be done at a local library or other low cost location. Capability for emailing digital photos back and forth.
- g. IM accounts for each/all and remaining parent.
- h. Established times for computer to be on and available for receiving IMs from parent.
- i. Traditional video-taping (DVD)
 1. Video activities of children sent to parent
 2. Video activities of sporting events, school plays, or other extracurricular activities to be sent to the other parent.
 3. Video of parent reading a book to the child.
- j. MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- k. Live photograph and/or video transfer by cell phone or email.
- l. Fax or scan to remaining parent all important and interesting kid documents, awards, graded homework assignments, etc.
- m. OurFamilyWizard.com
- n. *For parents of teens who enjoy video-gaming, both parent and child can engage in one of the many MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing games). The most popular is probably World of Warcraft, which does have a fee, but there are many others that are free, such as DC Universe online, Lord of the Rings, and Ragnarok. There are also games for younger children such as Disney Toon Town or Lego Universe. This allows parent and child to have something to work cooperatively and/or competitively on.*
- o. *Read a book to your child via the A Story Before Bed website. For a fee, this website allows you to record a storybook to your child online and you can preview it before sending it to your child via email. It will work with any MAC or PC with a webcam. You can test this out with a free recording.*
- p. *Watch a favorite TV show together, either online, on TV or recorded (if time differences require) with a telephone connection if not online.*

IV. Low Tech/Time Release/Shrines

- a. Mail package send by remaining parent to a child.
- b. "Time-release" mail sent by remaining parent. Move-away parent to remove a message, thought, mini-letter, etc at regular periods as if the item were received that day.
- c. "Time-release" package. Same idea as above, but contains a trinket or small item to be given to the child.
- d. Move-away parent establishes a "shrine" or space on dresser, table or wall where picture of remaining parent and assorted memorabilia is kept on permanent display. Time-release messages and gifts can appear at the shrine on a regular basis.
- e. Child is given a stack of stamped, self-addressed envelopes or larger envelopes for child to send writings, drawings, homework, etc., to the other parent.
- f. Mail a disposable camera to the child to take pictures and give stamped self-addressed envelope to return it.
- g. "Smelly" t-shirt
- h. Traveling Teddy or Flat Stanley
- i. *Care packages need not be expensive or large. As one child put it, "I love them and they help me not just with some of the stuff in them but you're thinking of me." Depending on the child's age, you might include paper cutouts, stickers, autumn leaves, small shells, baseball or game cards, candy, homemade items, photos, news clippings/comics, magic tricks etc.*
- j. *Regular letters/cards. Is there a child on the planet that doesn't like getting personal mail? (But remember, "This is not the time to preach and teach. Parents mistakenly believe preaching and teaching proves they are good parents."*
- k. *Create a scrapbook together*
- l. *Make a "thinking of you" box, collecting items, dating them, and looking through them the next time you are together.*
- m. *Keep a running list of things you'd like to share with your children the next time you connect and encourage your children to do the same.*
- n. *Subscribe to the same magazine. Share thoughts and stories over the phone/web chat.*
- o. *Running games...play in person or online and keep a running total for ???*
- p. *Send or give a gift card to a favorite restaurant.*
- q. *Share some family history with your child in person, online or by mail.*
- r. *Provide tickets to athletic events or concerts and send them.*

V. *Non-move away situations*

- a. *Regular structured phone calls or skyping appointments. Probably the most difficult part of this for both parents and children lies in not having something to do. With video chat, parents can actively assist in homework, both written and oral (such as spelling word practice), or do hidden picture puzzles such as those in Highlights magazine.*
- b. *For very young children, painting either with water outside on a day or watercolors with both parent and child participating.*
- c. *Plan and prepare a meal or cookies together.*
- d. *Access low or no cost public events, e.g., Night on the Boo-levard or Spring Festival.*
- e. *Ice cream sundae creations. Everyone likes ice cream; Bonus points if you don't gag when they pick gross combinations.*
- f. *Go on a nature walk. Collect leaves, acorns, etc. Once at home, make leaf prints.*
- g. *People watching: Go to a mall, train station or anywhere people are coming and going. Find a comfortable place to watch. Where are people going? Where are they coming from? Who's going to work and who's going to have fun? Which ones look happy to be here?*
- h. *Library trips to get books, videos or hear story-time. Trips to a bookstore can be inexpensive, too. Read some books together and ask your child to retell the story.*
- i. *Pudding fingerpaints.*
- j. *Plant a container garden.*

Non-italicized items are taken from Judge Mize's "Move Away Conditions to Maintain Parent-Child Relationship with Non-move Away Parent. I have compiled others from various sources, listed below, in *italics*.

Other Sources:

Cabot, Heather. "Long-distance parenting: 6 New ideas for staying connected" [online: shine.yahoo.com/parenting/long-distance-parenting-6-new-ideas-for-staying-connected-2471599.html]

Stewart, Sonja. "Top 5 inexpensive ideas for a parent-toddler date" [online: parentingsquad.com/top-5-inexpensive-ideas-for-a-parenttoddler-date]

"Tips for the far away parent" [online: www.co.bannock.id.us/dmoretip.htm]

www.distanceparent.org