

5 Back to School Tips for Divorced or Divorcing Parents

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All [divorcing](#) or divorced parents need to focus again on their children as they prepare to go back to school.

Start early in purchasing your children's back to school wardrobe and school supplies to avoid the last minute rush such as to find the latest fashions! (An added advantage is that parents on a budget will have ample time to figure out what can be spent.) Appendix IX-A of the 2012 edition of the Rules Governing the Courts of the State of New Jersey (the Child Support Guidelines) tells us that children are entitled to share in the current income of both parents, and children should not be the economic victims of the dissolving of their parent's relationship. The child support guidelines represent the average amount that intact families spend on their children, which includes the child(ren)'s share of expenses for housing, food, clothing, transportation, entertainment, unreimbursed health care up to and including \$250 per child per year, and miscellaneous items. Clothing expense includes all of the children's clothing and footwear. However, when only the parent who is the recipient of support purchases all of the clothing for the children, this often leads to problems when the children desire to leave clothing at the other parent's (the payor's) residence. Sometimes the parent who purchased all of the clothing for the children wants the clothing to remain at their residence. When articles of the children's clothing are left at the other parent's residence, this may lead to annoyance leading to

litigation at great expense to both parents – far exceeding the cost of the clothing at issue.

TIP: Have an understanding with the other parent about this issue, because the cost of the clothing left at the other parent's home is not worth the litigation expense or the emotional turmoil it will engender.

Miscellaneous expenses also include books and magazines, and education expenses. Most schools provide their students with a list of school supplies that are needed to start the new school year. The parent of primary residence will typically purchase all of the child(ren)'s back to school clothes and school supplies, and the cost of those items are expenses that are included in child support paid by the parent of alternate residence, unless there is an agreement providing otherwise. Parents should make their child(ren)'s transitions between residences, especially during the school week, as smooth as possible.

TIP: Make sure your children's backpacks contain the essential school supplies, books, and homework assignments when the child(ren) are in both parent's residences. Both parents have an obligation to insure that their children have the necessary tools they need when in their care. Both parents should cooperate with each other to avoid adverse repercussions upon the children.

In a truly shared custody arrangement, both parents should purchase school clothing for their child(ren) and share in purchasing school supplies. A child should not have to worry as to whether or not they will have new school clothes and the necessary school supplies when they are staying at mom's or dad's house. Divorce itself affects the children in even the most amicable situations – it should not be made more difficult for them by piling adult issues of money on to them.

Many parenting time agreements contain a provision that provides that both parents are entitled to complete, detailed information from any teacher or school giving instructions to their children. Each parent could be listed as an emergency contact with the children's school(s). Each parent could be notified by the school of all school conferences, extracurricular activities and programs, with each parent having full opportunity to participate in all such matters and activities.

TIP: In any parenting time agreement entered into by the parties, each parent should assume an affirmative obligation to provide the other parent with notices of school conferences, school photographs, field trips (including requests for chaperones), and other issues related to the children's academic progress. This includes an affirmative obligation to notify the other parent of any parent/teacher appointments, notes from the children's teachers, disciplinary issues, etc.

Each parent should make arrangements with their child(ren)'s teachers and to attend school events such as parent-teacher conferences, sports events that their child(ren) participate in as well as other extracurricular activities. If there is a restraining order obtained by one parent against the other, it makes it more difficult (but not impossible) for both parents to attend their child(ren)'s school functions. Each parent can make arrangements to meet with the child(ren)'s teachers separately.

TIP: Share information freely with the other parent. It's good for your children and will make them feel better. Parents should not use the children as a messenger but should speak directly to each other.

When a parenting time arrangement includes weekday parenting time (or overnights) at the non-custodial parent's residence, issues may arise as to which parent is responsible to make sure the child(ren) complete their homework assignments. This issue, in acrimonious divorces, may be addressed and included in any custody/parenting time agreement. For example, if the children are with dad on Wednesdays from after school until 8:00 p.m. or overnight to Thursday morning, dad is responsible to make sure that homework assignments have been completed. If weekday parenting time is one weeknight for dinner between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m., it may, depending upon the facts in your case, make more sense for the child(ren) to have their homework done or at least started before the start of the other parent's parenting time.

TIP: Prior to the start of the new school year, it is a good idea to have your children resume their back to school routine of getting to bed early and getting up early so that they become accustomed to the schedule ahead of the start of the school year, which makes for a smoother transition into the new school, for the children as well as the parents.

Regardless of the feelings that divorcing or divorced parents may have towards each other, school is stressful enough for the children, and these tips may help make the transition from summertime to school-time easy for all – especially the children.

