

Back To School Tips For Divorcing/Divorced Parents 2013

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It's back to school time. For many parents and children, it is an exciting time of the year; full of promise. It is also stressful for many children. For [divorced and divorcing parents](#), the new school year is laden with issues that they did not need to consider while they were married which could now create more stress on their child. Below are a few tips that divorced or divorcing parents should consider to make a smooth transition for this new school year.

When there is a joint or shared [custody](#) arrangement, and the child spends time in two residences, issues may arise as to where the child's personal items remain. Sometimes the parent who purchased all of the clothing for a child wants the clothing to remain at their residence. When articles of the child's clothing are left at the other parent's residence, this may annoy the parent who bought the clothing and lead to litigation at great expense to both parents – litigation which can easily exceed the cost of the clothing at issue.

TIP: Parents should have an understanding about where the child's personal items are to remain. 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. Further, the child may endure the most emotional distress, whether outwardly expressed or internalized, when the parents argue in the

child's presence. Parents should not exhibit such conduct in the presence, or within earshot, of the child.

Another back-to-school issue is the cost of the necessary items such as books, notebooks, backpacks, and other educational expenses. Most schools provide students with a list of essential school supplies that are needed at the start of each semester. The parent of primary residence will typically purchase all of the child's back-to-school clothes and school supplies. The cost of those items is generally considered an expense that is included in child support payments, unless there is an agreement to the contrary.

TIP: Make sure your child's backpack contains the essential school supplies, books, and home work assignments when the child travels between residences. Both parents have an obligation to ensure that the child has the necessary supplies needed when in their care. Both parents should cooperate with each other to avoid stress to the child. If one parent refuses to provide the other parent with the child's backpack containing the school supplies, books and homework assignments that the child needs, the child suffers; this could also have a negative impact on the child's school work. Any issues that arise concerning a child's clothing or school supplies should be addressed between the parents, without using the child as a go-between.

During a divorce, the parties will attempt to agree on the arrangement of custody including the amount of time the child spends with each parent, called a "Custody and Parenting Time Agreement". Many agreements provide that both parents are entitled to complete, detailed information from any teacher or school giving instructions to the child. Each parent should be listed as an emergency contact with the child's school. Each parent should 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 Custody and Parenting Time Agreement between the parties, each parent should assume an affirmative obligation to provide the other parent with notices of school conferences, report cards, school photographs, field trips (including requests for chaperones), and other issues related to the child's academic progress. This includes an affirmative obligation to notify the other parent of any parent/teacher appointments, notes from the child's teachers, disciplinary issues, etc.

Each parent should make arrangements with their child's teachers to attend school events such as parent-teacher conferences and sports events in which the child participates, as well as other extracurricular activities. Restraining orders obtained by one parent against the other will typically make it more difficult (but not impossible) for both parents to attend the child's school functions. In such situations, each parent can, and should, make arrangements to meet with the child's teachers separately.

TIP: Share information freely with the other parent. This will make things easier for your child. Parents should not use the child as a messenger, but should speak directly to each other.

When a Custody and Parenting Time Agreement 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 completes homework assignments. This issue, in acrimonious divorces, may be addressed and included in any Custody and Parenting Time Agreement. For example, if the child is 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 to have his homework done, or at least started, before the beginning of the other parent's parenting time. If parents do not communicate with each other, whether in person or by e-mail or text message, the parent who has parenting time may not know if the child has a particular homework assignment or project that may be due the next day. By not keeping each other informed, the child's academic status could potentially be affected.

TIP: As the school year progresses and the first marking period comes to an end, if your child's report card reflects that your child needs improvement in a particular subject, the parents should address this issue together and jointly determine if it is necessary to hire a tutor for the child. The custody and parenting time agreement could address the cost allocation between the parents. Don't avoid hiring a tutor if the cost is an issue because the child may ultimately suffer as a result. Communication between parents is good for the child.

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

