

Will Tom Cruise Ever See Suri Again?

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Pop media periodically informs us to the fact that Tom Cruise has not seen his daughter, Suri, in several years. One has to wonder how this affects his daughter, especially since it seems, at least from photographs in the media, that prior to his divorce, he spent quite a bit of time with her. What will happen if he decides he wants to see her at some point in the future? Will she remember him? Will she, or her mother, Katie Holmes, be concerned that he will have some contact with her and then abandon her again?

The Supreme Court of the United States and New Jersey courts have held that the preservation of the relationship between a parent and child is of paramount importance. Despite a parent voluntarily severing his relationship with his child, he will always retain the right to have a relationship with her.

Conversely, a child has a right to have relationship with both parents. But what would a court do if it were presented with the circumstances of Tom Cruise and his daughter Suri, where the parent has not seen the child for years?

A court will take great pains to make sure that a child has a relationship with both parents; however, the court will always be mindful of its powers as *parens patriae*—its authority and responsibility to protect the best interest of the child.

More likely than not, a court would want to ascertain several things in this situation:

1. Is it in the best interest of the child to be reunited with her father or mother?
2. Will the father or mother behave appropriately around the child?
3. If so, should the contact be supervised or unsupervised?

After such a long separation, the court, will, on one hand, want to reunite a parent and a child. But it will also be concerned about whether or not the parent who has abandoned the child once will abandon the child again, causing unnecessary psychological harm to the child. All too often, one hears about children who are disappointed time and again when a parents fails to appear for parenting time with the child.

As I have said in prior blogs, every case is different and the facts which are case-specific will determine the result. It could be that the parent has had mental health issues or addiction problems which have caused the separation. If that is the case, a court will want to make sure that the parent is psychologically stable and not abusing substances such that contact would place the child in danger. It could also be that the absent parent has “woken up” and decided that now that the child is older and not as physically needy as a young child or baby, he or she wants to see her.

Regardless, the court will go to great lengths to make sure that reunification is in the best interest of the child and if the parent is emotionally and physically able to have an appropriate relationship with the child. This will be accomplished with the help of reports or testimony of psychological, psychiatric, or addiction experts. Most times, if reunification is appropriate, it will take place over a period of time under the supervision of a psychological expert.

Will Tom Cruise undergo such scrutiny if the time ever comes where he wants to see his daughter again? Will he ever want to reconnect with his daughter? Time will tell. Stay tuned.