

As national sponsor, The Children's Rights Council is promoting the observance of Equal Parents' Week September 22 - September 28, 2003. Organizations throughout the country are tying purple ribbons to send the message that parental rights and responsibilities be shared equally by unmarried parents and advocating legislative reform to promote and protect the civil rights of parents and children. The Children's Rights Council encourages everyone to wear purple ribbons and tie them anywhere they can be seen to send this urgent message.

The Children's Rights Council encourages everyone to support National Parents Day in recognition of its important mission to strengthen the role parents play in children's lives and advocating family values, objectives shared by the focus of Equal Parents' Week.

*"Parents' Day serves as a catalyst for creating awareness, programs, events and activities to support parents, strengthen families and build communities....to make [parents] aware of the important role that they play in not only raising their children, but the future leaders of our nation."* Belinda Rollins, President, Parenting Coalition International

We all need to care about what happens to parents and children when they walk into court. We as a society all share the responsibility for creating a system which makes the principle 'the best parent is both parents' a reality by embracing the civil rights that protect unmarried parents and their children individually, as well as their right to exist and function as a family. It is long overdue that we recognize that "the best interests of children" cannot be met unless we maximize the ability of both parents to raise and nurture their children and afford children the maximum parenting effort and involvement each parent is willing and able to contribute in raising their children.

Equality imputes values -- civil rights, conscience, and responsibility. We all have a responsibility to keep families together by promoting a system that values and protects both parents. Families will be in crisis until the unconditional love and sacrifice, the need for both parents and for families to continue to function as families, individual self-respect and respect among all family members, are lived by each of us, and promoted and protected by our laws and by every component of our local and national governments and justice

systems. The message each purple ribbon sends is a message of equality, responsibility and values. The message behind the message is one of civil rights, conscience, and love.

*"If we as a society fail to recognize that there is no substitute for the love of a parent in children's lives, and there is no substitute for the equal presence of both parents in children's lives to meet their children's need for that love, we have lost the ability to see, feel, and touch the very thing we live, breathe and feel as the very heart and soul of our humanity: our own human love. This is what we mean when we say*

*"The Best Parent Is Both Parents."*

## THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Children's Rights Council (CRC) is a nation-wide, non-profit IRS 501(c)(3) children's rights organization based in Washington, D.C.

CRC works to strengthen families through education and advocacy. We favor family formation and family preservation, but if families break up, or are never formed, we work to assure a child the frequent and continuing contact with two parents and extended family the child would normally have during a marriage. Our motto is "The Best Parent is Both Parents."

For the child's benefit, CRC favors parenting education before marriage, during marriage, and in the event of separation. We work to demilitarize divorce between parents who are involved in marital disputes; substituting conciliation and mediation for the adversarial process, and providing for comprehensive child support. We also favor school-based programs for children at risk.

Formed in 1985 by concerned parents who have more than 40 years collective experience in custody reform and early childhood education, CRC has chapters in 32 states and three national affiliate organizations: Mothers Without Custody (MWOC), Parents Without Partners (PWP), and the Stepfamily Association of America (SAA).

For further information regarding the CRC, contact:  
**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS COUNCIL**

CRC National Office: (301) 559-3120

Or A Local Chapter Near You

Visit our website at <http://www.gocrc.org/>

SEPT. 22 - SEPT. 28, 2003



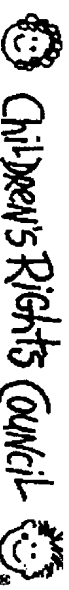
## EQUAL PARENTS' WEEK:

It's about more than purple ribbons...

It's about more than equity, equality and laws...

It's about what children need most....the love and support of both parents...

HELPING PARENTS HELP KIDS



CRC International Coordinator, Equal Parents' Week  
(909) 591-3689: [pattidiroff@att.net](mailto:pattidiroff@att.net)  
<http://members.tripod.com/epweek/>  
National Office: (301) 559-3120

The world of "custodial" and "noncustodial" is the forum for parental rights and responsibilities of parents who are divorced or never married. Although joint custody is intended to provide for sharing of parental rights and responsibilities, it has evolved to create a "one parent", "one household" syndrome which devalues the parent who becomes the noncustodial parent.

In most cases, custodial parents are granted the majority of custodial time, and noncustodial parents are granted "every other weekend" orders. Once they become a noncustodial parent, most noncustodial parents cannot obtain more time than this, and have little or no recourse if they are denied custody of their children, since many judges are unwilling to enforce custody orders.

Child support laws in many states have changed in two major respects: (1) levels of support now exceed what many middle and lower income parents can afford; and (2) affordability to the paying parent is not a factor in calculating child support (basic living expenses such as rent, food and car payments are often disregarded in calculating the amount of support for the paying parent).

Consequently, many middle and lower income noncustodial parents fall behind through no fault of their own. They become unable to meet their own basic living expenses, and child support arrearages accrue monthly. The financial pressure becomes a never-ending cycle and permanent hardship...one they face every day...in extreme cases, it becomes unbearable. Some states impose punitive consequences such as loss of vocational and driver's licenses--without regard to the reason for the arrearages. When parents are denied return of their vocational or driver's license--or are incarcerated--because they are unable to pay off support arrearages, they can lose their jobs, as well as the ability to regain employment. They then become unable to pay any child support, and ultimately, their livelihood is destroyed. While millions of dollars of child support arrearages are deemed owed by "deadbeat" parents, rarely do statistics distinguish between those parents who willfully evade paying child support, and those arrearages which result from inability to afford the amount of child support ordered--which, in reality, accounts for the majority of arrearages.

Lack of attention to and resolution of the problems faced by noncustodial parents with respect to custody and support, as well as other problems such as false abuse

allegations, parental alienation, and casual/bad faith move-aways, originate from a misperception which prevails throughout society and our justice system: unmarried parents are not given equal status as parents.

Equal treatment of parents mandates that they share their rights and responsibilities equally. Equality, however, is not just a legal concept. Issues of equity and equality of unmarried parents address a genuine focus on the needs and rights of children by virtue of this fundamental truth: issues that adversely affect a parent's ability to raise and nurture their children adversely affect children.

Parenting is a way of life...it is the spirit of unconditional love and sacrifice embraced by parents in the day-to-day commitment of making their children their first priority. Financial hardship or devastation of a parent's livelihood adversely impacts the financial and emotional resources of parents. The child support and custody problems faced by noncustodial parents are not only unjust, they take a toll on their ability to meet their children's needs and function as parents.

"Every other weekend" orders--which allow parents to spend an average of four days a month with their children--along with lack of involvement in day-to-day co-parenting, force many parents and children to undergo an inevitable and destructive adjustment: detachment. When noncustodial parents are reduced to visitors, their children do not fully perceive them, emotionally and psychologically, as true parents. Known only too well by parents--but often disregarded by judges and psychologists--once this happens, their bond with their children deteriorates, or becomes destroyed. Lack of contact with siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents disintegrates the bonds among family members and destroys the ability of families to function as a family. For those parents, children and family members who struggle to maintain their family bonds, the choice to love is a choice to live with the pain of not having in their lives and being in the lives of the people they love...a pain that never goes away.

Noncustodial parents want to have the time and opportunity to give their children as much love as they have for them. They want their children to know how much love they have to give them. Most of all, they want their children to benefit from the love they are able to give, not from the love they are limited to giving.

Our values are our choices, and our choices are our values. It is through day-to-day living experiences that we set an example of right and wrong, what we believe and how we should live. It is through our everyday choices we set an example of the values that govern our decisions and our lives.

Children are not taught values by schools, government, businesses...or elsewhere. Children learn the meaning of right from wrong from their parents. Values children do not live with they often do not learn. Clearly, an absence of values contributes to increases in juvenile crime, drug use, teen pregnancies, and decrease in social morality.

When we are friendly to people who do not behave in kind...when we choose to compromise and it is a choice to live with hardship...when we choose to sacrifice because the welfare of another outweighs the burden it places on us...when we choose to resolve conflict with reasonableness and patience, not ego and aggression...children learn that these are the right things to do.

When children see us make the choice to listen and understand others, and know they can turn to us and we are no less willing to be there for them, we have done more than teach them one of the most important lessons in life...we have taught them the meaning of love.

*In doing all these things, the most important thing you have done is to be a parent.*

Equal Parents' Week is a call to awareness of a simple truth parents have known all along: the most important role that parents can play, and must play, is to parent through contact and time spent with their children.

The request for equal parent status is a request for the time and ability to do these things. It is a mandate for the time it takes to love, nurture, and teach our children the values the only way we can...a mandate for the ability to be a parent...and a mandate for justice.