

and adequately meet their children's needs; or when both parents refuse to cooperate with each other. In cases where one parent refuses and the other parent is willing to share custody, children benefit most from an award of, or change of, custody to that parent who is committed to facilitating shared parenting and contact with the other parent.

The myth that shared parenting is disruptive to children because it requires them to spend time in two households overlooks the most basic principle of all: children bond to love and the people who love them. Children perceive their home as the one safe place they are always wanted, loved, and belong, where they are surrounded by the people who they love and are loved by, their family. Viewing shared parenting as unreasonable or unworkable because of the additional time, effort and inconvenience involved in transporting children between their two parents and allowing them to spend equalized amounts of time in both households prioritizes personal preferences over the reliable, consistent, loving and nurturing contact which reinforces a close relationship and strong bond between children and their parents, the very foundation of emotional stability in children.

One of the greatest obstacles to the existence of a 2-parent focus lies in the criteria and reasoning which form the basis of laws and judicial discretion which encourage moveaways. Decisions which permit a parent to separate children from the other parent in favor of benefits such as better jobs, schools, neighborhoods, or in favor of convenience or lifestyle preferences deems them to be more important than the other parent, and more important than the child's relationship and bond with the other parent. While the importance of the relationship and bond between parents and their children permit only the most urgent and compelling reasons to justify compromising or sacrificing them, orders that promote the separation of parents and children for anything less reflect a value system which subordinates the value of a parent to the value of a preference, convenience, and/or benefit. Viewed in the most fundamental sense, asserting that children need these preferences, conveniences and benefits more than they need the love of a parent presumes not only that a parent can be replaced, but renders that parent disposable, and undermines a child's concept of the roles parents and family play in their lives.

To the contrary, true shared parenting advocates that each parent utilize their best efforts to promote equal, shared access by the other parent, and to scrutinize the importance of their relationship with their children against the impact a move would have on that relationship and the necessity for moving. In doing so, a parent who chooses to move does not force the parent who is not responsible for the move to be involuntarily deprived of close physical proximity to and a close relationship with the children, and accepts the responsibility for his or her decision by accepting the separation that will result from their decision to move.

Breakdowns of components within court systems undermine the ability

of shared parenting to succeed. Many judges, psychologists, mediators, and court-appointed child attorneys fail to recognize that no aspect of parenting is too insignificant to condone its deprivation. No matter how ordinary or simple, every moment spent between a parent and their child is an important opportunity to make a difference in their child's life through sharing, supporting, teaching, nurturing, reinforcing their bond, and loving their child. Limiting, cutting short, or denying telephone calls, visitation, and other forms of contact are not trivial grievances or petty complaints, but are serious impediments to the everyday experiences that parenting is made of, and deprive parents of the very avenues on which they rely to parent. Every component of the family law system plays a critical role in implementing shared parenting. Until all components of our government and family law systems adopt a 2-parent focus as their objective, laws will continue to be legislated and enforced which perceive and treat only one parent and not both as essential to children, thereby preventing noncustodial parents from functioning fully as parents, and depriving children of the ability to grow up with the love and presence of both parents and their extended families.

The power of unconditional love could not be more evident than in a choice for shared parenting, because parents have chosen to sacrifice convenience, personal feelings, financial gain, and lifestyle preferences, knowing that nothing is more important to their children than maximizing the love and support their children can receive from both parents, and knowing that they alone can make shared parenting possible through their choice to cooperate and their willingness to sacrifice.

The benefits that children experience from shared parenting are not limited to preserving bonds with parents and family members. The happiness and good children experience as a result of the unconditional sacrifices made by their parents in jointly parenting and sharing time with them teaches children, in a way no words can, the importance of unconditional love and sacrifice. Through this lesson love becomes its own value, by sensitizing children to the welfare and happiness of others, to the value of relationships, and to the good that comes from giving. Children learn the power of unconditional love through seeing firsthand how unconditional love motivates the unconditional sacrifices made by their parents which make shared parenting possible.

Children are born with the purest form of unconditional love. It is the responsibility of both parents to nurture the unconditional love they are born with to keep as their legacy throughout their lives.

**Responsibility +  
cooperation +  
sacrifice +  
unconditional love =  
SHARED PARENTING**

**Shared parenting is about parental responsibility.  
Shared parenting works when we put children first.**



HELPING PARENTS HELP KIDS

*JUST SAY YES!* to the first responsibility of being a parent.

*JUST SAY YES!* to unconditionally loving and sacrificing for your children.

*JUST SAY YES!* to shared parenting.

*JUST SAY YES!* is the Children's Rights Council's campaign which advocates that a parent's first responsibility is to put their children first...a responsibility which requires both parents to unconditionally sacrifice to enable their children to receive the maximum involvement each parent is willing and able to contribute in raising them...a responsibility which requires saying yes to shared parenting.

*JUST SAY YES!* seeks to raise public awareness that it is everyone's responsibility to make 2-parent families a reality.

*JUST SAY YES!* advocates that a 2-parent focus which maximizes the involvement that both parents are willing and able to contribute in raising their children should be mandated as our national priority.

*Parents are empowered as individuals with the freedom and ability to make choices.*

*Parents have a responsibility to acknowledge their empowerment to make choices, the responsibility to exercise that empowerment by making choices, and the obligation to accept responsibility for every choice they make.*

*The choices parents make are based on their values and priorities.*

*A parent's first responsibility is to meet their children's needs and to ensure that the focus and consequences of their decisions puts the welfare of their children first.*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**  
Children's Rights Council National Office (301) 559-3120  
Or a Local Chapter Near You

Parents play many important roles in their children's lives. They function as a guardian, caregiver, role model, teacher, and nurturer. In addition to all the roles a parent plays in meeting their children's needs, parents share an irreplaceable bond with their children, a bond which provides their children a special emotional importance and a form of love which cherishes them uniquely and belongs only to them. The need to be loved in this special way that conveys a unique importance and unconditional love is not only a fundamental vulnerability, it is one of the most urgent, yet fragile needs possessed by every child. In the face of all the relationships children have with other family members and adult role models in their lives, children instinctively and urgently need to know that they hold this special place in the hearts of both their parents, and turn to both their parents to fill this need.

The unique bond between parents and children is the most fundamental bond for children. It is the first bond that a child forms in his or her life, and provides the most basic and critical elements which create, develop, and preserve positive emotional attachments and emotional stability for children. The love, support and nurturing children receive from this bond teach them the importance and meaning of love, how to love and to trust. The deprivation of this bond through the loss of even one parent, regardless of the reason, creates an emotional void for many children, which they can carry for the rest of their life. For some children, this loss is so devastating it permanently affects their emotional development, inhibiting or preventing them from forming a true sense of self-worth and positive self-image.

There is no substitute for a parent in the life of a child to meet the needs of children, especially their urgent need to be cherished and loved in the special way that only parents can. Children are born needing both parents to completely fulfill their emotional, psychological, and developmental needs. A parent's marital status does not change or diminish their children's need for both their parents. For children of non-intact families, the absence of a parent is no less a loss, a truth that must be recognized by all levels and components of government, our legal system, society, and parents themselves.

Tragically, few laws and courts apply a true 2-parent focus which acknowledges the equal importance of both parents and enables both parents to function equally as parents, nor are they designed to implement true shared parenting. By designating one a parent as a custodial parent, one parent is conferred preferential status and greater rights. By contrast, the very term, "noncustodial" identifies that parent as not possessing custody at all, only "visitation," a quantity and quality of time so limited it grants rights far inferior to parenting custodial time.

Parents know that if they become the noncustodial parent, regardless of what is ordered, in reality the only parental rights they can exercise are those permitted by the custodial parent, and the only time they will spend with their children is the time the custodial parent permits. Most parents know if they become a noncustodial parent, little if anything will be done

if they are deprived of their parental rights and access to their children, since few custodial parents are held accountable for violating custody orders, and rarely do they have custody removed even in the face of the most malicious and egregious violations, because most judges do not consistently enforce noncustodial parental rights. Accordingly, a parent who becomes a noncustodial parent finds their life changed forever and undergoes one of the most degrading experiences imaginable by losing their right to function fully as a parent and knowing those few parental rights they retain can be denied by the other parent at any time. Because most fathers not only become noncustodial parents, but face stereotypes that understate their parental abilities, skills, and devotion to their children, they lose their fatherhood, an experience that is nothing less than dehumanizing.

A closer look at what happens to parents undergoing divorce reveals that the laws and components of family law systems not only fail to provide parents an incentive to share parenting, they all but remove the motivation and reasons to jointly parent their children. When addressing shared parenting, many laws and judges apply an oversimplified rationale: namely, that shared parenting should be denied when animosity exists on the part of either parent. Even in states which provide for shared parenting, many judges are unwilling to grant shared parenting absent a strong desire by both parents, an unrealistic expectation given the prevalence of acrimony in divorces.

Because parents walk into court knowing that nothing requires them to share custody or jointly parent with the other parent, and because many laws and judges deny shared parenting if one parent "vetoes" shared parenting, prospective custodial parents who harbor anger towards the other parent are encouraged to "veto" shared parenting, resulting in denial of shared parenting to noncustodial parents who are devoted, responsible parents for reasons having nothing to do with parenting issues. Denial of shared parenting based on parental veto rewards a custodial parent who ignores their children's need for both parents and engages in irresponsible and selfish behavior, while punishing a responsible parent who is willing to cooperate and act reasonably, thereby depriving the very parent who is willing to make shared parenting possible of the right and ability to co-parent.

Anti-shared parenting laws and judicial discretion based on parental "veto" not only perpetuate destructive and hostile behavior, they disregard two principles integral to custody decisions: (1) although the conflict inherent in most divorces often motivates at least one parent to refuse to share parenting, parents are required to set aside their hostility because their first obligation is to put their children first, and (2) because courts themselves are charged with the responsibility to put the best interests of children first, they are required to use their authority and resources to effectively intervene and effect compliance by both parents with the custody arrangement which maximizes or most closely resembles shared parenting, including use of mediators, sanctions, and particularly, to change custody to the parent most willing to share custody.

Shared parenting requires both parents in non-intact families to fully share their parental rights and responsibilities through participation in all aspects of parenting, including physical contact (physical custody) and decision-making (legal custody), thus enabling both parents to fully function as parents. It is not the purpose of shared parenting to merely to provide children contact with both parents. True shared parenting maximizes the involvement each parent is willing and able to contribute in raising their children, fully enabling each parent to function as a parent, and fully preserving each parent's bond with their children.

Shared parenting applies a 2-parent focus which presumes that both parents are entitled to share parenting rights and responsibilities equally, and requires custody orders to incorporate schedules which enable each parent to share custody of their children as closely to equal as possible by using the most reasonable, workable, and flexible time schedules in order to maximize the time each parent is willing and able to spend with their children. A system which consistently and effectively enforces the 2-parent focus of shared parenting enables parents to walk into court knowing that neither will be punished by a custody order which disregards their limitations, schedules and the amount of time they are willing and able to spend with their children in favor of an inflexible, oversimplified order which minimizes their time and maximizes the other parent's time, and precludes judicial bias which indulges a parent's desire to reduce or deny the parental rights of the other parent.

Shared parenting is the only custodial arrangement which enables both parents to continue to function as parents, and provides children continued access to and preserves their bonds with their extended families. Accordingly, shared parenting maximizes the ability of a non-intact family to function in a manner most closely resembling an intact family. Because families cannot exist and function as a family without preserving the ability of both parents to function as parents in their children's lives and maintaining bonds with their extended families, shared parenting is integral to preserving non-intact families.

Shared parenting advocates parental responsibility not only in promoting maximized contact between parents, but extends that responsibility by requiring parents to promote and preserve the bonds between children and extended family members. It is the responsibility of parents to maximize the love and nurturing available to their children from family members, promote bonds between their children and extended family, and provide their children the maximum social and emotional stability possible through maximizing the family's ability to function as a family.

The issues involved in granting shared parenting cannot be oversimplified. Shared parenting is not a proper custody arrangement when one or both parents engage in physical and/or emotional abuse of the children and/or each other, or are unable to function responsibly