

Do I Have A Choice?

Questions and answers for children of separation and divorce who are living with one parent and are considering moving to live with their other parent

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Information for parents

This document has been assembled based on the input and collaborative efforts of many parents and children and has been produced with the intention of providing help and guidance to more mature children of divorce and/or separation who wish to know what their basic rights are when it comes to their choice of the parent they prefer to live with and what they can do to protect their right of choice.

Currently in the family court system, children are being wrongly placed under the sole custody of only one parent and are being forced or intimidated to live with sole custodial parents who keep them in situations that are not in their best interest. These children are being forced by the courts to live with a parent who is abusive and controlling. Many of these children literally live in fear of one of their parents. Most children only want to be able to live in peace and contentment a parent they know shows the greatest respect for their rights and freedoms. Very often this parent is their non-custodial parent.

Much of the cause of this destruction to these children is the family courts which set the stage for unfairness between parents. Rather than ensuring equality and fairness between parents which helps to minimize conflict, the courts have become nothing more than a battleground for parents and a source of revenue for lawyers and social workers in a winner-take-all environment. In most instances the family courts award sole custody to one parent and totally exclude the other and often more reasonable parent from any decision-making in the child's life. Sole custody to one parent does nothing except to increase conflict by allowing one parent total control over the child and over the other parent.

The information, questions and answers in this book are hopefully intended to give more mature children the knowledge and confidence to free themselves from an abusive and controlling parent and to break the bonds that interfere with their basic human rights and freedoms that many children have felt powerless to escape from in the past. Information contained in this document will not be welcomed by most in the legal community as it directly challenges the system by empowering children and parents to fight back at the system as well.

Parents, grandparents and justice minded citizens everywhere are urged to copy this book and to pass it to the members of any family who you know are trying to help a child who is being abused and being forced to live in an environment controlled and manipulated by a hostile-aggressive and controlling parent, which in most cases is the custodial parent.

All of us must do our part to help our children stop this most damaging form of child abuse being perpetrated upon them by abusive and controlling parents and the family court system that often supports these abusive parents!

“No court in this land has the power to rule against the feet and the will of a determined young child”

Hamilton, Ontario family court judge - 1996

Do I have a Choice?

Questions and answers for children of separation or divorce who want to live with their non-custodial parent or with another family member

Note: In this document, the parent or guardian with whom you currently live with most of the time is referred to as the “custodial parent” and the parent with whom you wish to move in with is referred to as the “non-custodial parent”. Generally, it is children living under the care of a sole custody parent who often want to live with their other parent and are prevented from doing so by their custodial parent. In some situations parents have joint custody but in the vast majority of cases, even in a joint custody arrangement, one parent usually is considered the primary care parent and is normally considered as having the same power and control over you as a sole-custodial parent.

I want to live with my non-custodial parent. Can I move to live with the parent of my choice if I want?

If your custodial parent (usually the one you live with most of the time) says that moving in with the other parent is OK, then there should be no problem at all. In fact, unless you have strong reasons for not simply asking about moving in with your other parent, then simply ask your custodial parent if you can live with your other parent and see what he/she says to you. You may be surprised and they may actually tell you that you can go. You may even want to secretly record your conversation just for a record of what they said to you in case they change around what they said later.

Unfortunately, in most cases, the parent you currently live with will not want you to move with the other parent, especially if they had previously gone to court to get custody of you and if they receive child support payments. Usually their reasons for not wanting you to move are for their own selfish reasons and not for your own best interests. In most cases, the parent you currently live with wants you to live with him/her because they receive child support payments from the other parent and they also get to have power and control over the other parent by having control of you. In the situation where the parent you live with now does not want you to spend more time with the other parent, then you and your other parent may have to fight for your rights and your freedom of choice.

Unfortunately, the Canadian government has established child support guidelines which are very unfair to the parent who has to pay support which is why custodial parents do not want to give up this tax free money. Also, the lawyers like this unfairness because they make lots of money when parents have to go to court.

Does my age make a difference if I want to move?

If you are under 12 years of age

If you are under 12 years of age, moving to live with another parent can be a more difficult but is still possible at almost any age, providing your reasons are good, you are able to make yourself heard and you have support network to help you. Children as young as eight years of age may have a major influence in being able to live with the parent of their choice, providing they have the courage and determination to stand up and to fight for their rights and freedoms. The bottom line is that the courts are less likely to force you to stay with a parent you do not wish to live with

providing the parent you wish to live with can provide a safe and loving environment for you. In most cases, when you are under 12 years of age, unless the parent you currently live with is agreeable to you moving, then it will likely mean your parents will have to go back to court. You should speak to the parent you wish to live with and get any of your questions answered about what may happen if your parents have to go back to court.

If you are over 12 years of age

If you are 12 years of age or older, generally you can successfully win the right to live with the parent you want providing that the parent you want to go and live with is agreeable to the move and can provide a reasonable and safe environment for you and also providing that you understand the reasons why you wish to move and are able to tell others the truth when asked. Making the decision to live with another parent is something that you must think about carefully and be able to explain to adults if you want the support of the courts and to have other adults help you and the parent you wish to live with.

14 years of age and over

If you are 14 years of age or older, it becomes very difficult for anyone, including the parent you live with, to stop you from moving in with the other parent providing the conditions for moving support you moving in with the other parent. At 14 years of age, it is a criminal offense for anyone to lay a hand on you to force you to go anywhere unless there is a court order which orders the police to apprehend you. Even the police cannot touch you without a court order giving them the authority to do so. The courts generally will not interfere with the reasonable and thought out wishes of a 14 to 14-year-old mature person. At 14 years of age or over, the parent you live with may even use bribes and financial incentives to get you to remain with them. Such incentives may include bigger allowances, free bus passes or vacations, etc. in an attempt to bribe you with monetary gifts. When parents, especially those with sole custody, use money to bribe you before considering offering joint custody to the other parent, it is yet just another sign of their selfish obsession for money, power and control.

16 years of age and over

If you are 16 years of age or older, you have the right to go wherever you want. At 16, you have the right to move out of your parent's home and to live anywhere you want. No court order is required to allow you to live anywhere you want. The courts will not want to interfere with the reasonable wishes of a 16-year old mature person.

What are some reasons why living with my non custodial parent would be a good idea?

There are a number of reasons why you may want to change residences and live with your other parent. Some of these reasons may include:

- You just want to spend more time with your non-custodial parent but your custodial parent has been denying your wishes to do this up to this point.
- The parent you live with now to violate your rights and freedoms. You feel trapped and afraid and want to get out of the situation.
- You are not doing good or not happy attending your present school either because the school is not suitable for your needs or because you are being adversely affected by the current living arrangements or conflict caused by your custodial parent.

- The schooling where your non-custodial parent resides offers a better environment than the school where you live with your current custodial parent.
- Your custodial parent tells you to lie and keep information about where you live a secret from your other parent even though there is no real reason for keeping this information a secret. This may even include your phone number or address. Your custodial parent makes you hide this from your other parent and tells you not to be truthful.
- Your custodial parent makes you feel afraid or intimidated to express your true wishes and desires.
- There are drugs, alcohol or guns at the home of your custodial parent and you don't feel safe and secure there.
- Your custodial parent has moved you away from the school and the community in which you used to live as part of a strategy to take you away from your other parent. You are not happy with your new school or your new neighbourhood and would like to return.
- Your custodial parent says mean things to you about your other parent and tells you that you should also not like your other parent.
- Your custodial parent has a boyfriend/girlfriend that is not nice to you. Your parent's boyfriend/girlfriend may also say bad things about your other parent that hurt you don't like them saying.
- Your custodial parent smokes around the house and you don't like breathing the second hand smoke.
- There are fights and arguments going on at your custodial parent's home.
- Your custodial parent does not help you with homework or does not take an interest in things you like to do such as extra-curricular activities.
- Your non-custodial parent's home feels more like a home to you. You just feel better and more relaxed at your non-custodial parent's home. Possibly, you have more friends at the other parent's home.
- You want fairness to be restored to the parent you want to live with because the parent you currently live with refuses to agree to joint custody and is unreasonable in his/her demands for child support payments. Moving to live with your non-custodial parent will force your unreasonable parent to be more reasonable and fair. Non-custodial parents generally are discriminated against and harmed significantly as a result of child support payments which are paid to your parent, not you. Moving in with your non-custodial parent will help to end the discrimination and abuse against your non-custodial parent.

What are some reasons why living with my other parent would not be such a good idea or make it more difficult for me to do?

- The other parent does not have room for you at his/her home.
- The parent you would like to live with really does not want you to live with them.
- The other parent cannot afford to care for you, even if they get child support for you.
- The living conditions at the other parent's home are not very good.

- You will have to change schools during the school and this may adversely affect your school performance. You should think carefully if you want to move in the middle of a school year.
- The school where you would have to go if you live with your other parent does not offer the courses you need for your education.
- Your non-custodial parent does some of the same bad things as your custodial parent which makes them not much of a better parent.
- The parent you live with now has full custody of you (as opposed to joint custody). This can make moving a bit more difficult in the court system.

Do the Court treat parents the same?

Generally, the family courts are biased against fathers who are generally are treated much worse than mothers. While some mothers are mistreated, by far, it is fathers who are mistreated the most. Most children are forced to live with the mothers when parents separate and seldom are parents treated equally by the courts. In the majority of cases, mothers get sole custody of children while fathers are considered only visitors to their own children with very few rights. The courts are often the cause of conflict between parents because the courts usually give one parent power and control over the other parent. How would you feel if someone had power and control over you for many years of your life?

I'm not sure if I want to actually move and live with my other parent full time but would just like to spend more time with the other parent to see if this arrangement would work. Can I do this?

If you would like to spend more time with one of your parents than you are now then you have this right, providing all matters considered important to you are considered. If you 14 years of age you can pretty much spend as much time as you want with either parent providing both parents can provide a suitable home environment for you.

If you are being physically or emotionally abused at the parent's home where you spend more of the time, you should have no hesitation in spending more time with another parent or spending all of your time with them. No child should be exposed to emotional or physical abuse. Unfortunately, the court system usually support the position that you stay at one parent's house for most of the time, so you must be willing in most cases to fight more time with your other parent.

If it is just a matter that you would like to spend more time with another parent then you too have that right. One of the main worries that most parents have is that they will become liable for child support should you decide to live with one or the other. Ideally, 50% equal sharing of time with both parents is the most ideal situation, if possible, you should convince your parents that you would not like spending more time with one parent an excuse for one parent to get child support from the other just for spending more time at one home rather than the other. If parents are aware that child support will not be an issue, then this is not likely to reduce the chance of conflict between them.

Do I have any of my own rights as a child of separation/divorce?

Children, just like adults have certain rights. Too often however, grown ups will not tell children their rights as the grown ups do not want their children do not know when their rights are being

violated. Although the rights of children are not quite the same as adults, children are still entitled to their age appropriate rights. Generally, a parent who is controlling and hostile will not discuss your rights and freedoms with you as they often know that they are the ones who are violating your rights and don't want you to know that they are being a bad parent.

I've always been told to obey my parents but my parents are telling me different things. What should I do?

One of the most difficult things that children of separation and divorce face is making a decision when one parent is saying one thing and another parent is saying another. Most children have been raised to do as they are told by their parents. When your parents are telling you different things about where you should live then this is where you must get yourself informed and make a decision on your own. Your decision must be based on what you know is right and what you know are your own unselfish reasons. One boy by the name of Clayton Giles from Alberta Canada said it in this manner.

Clayton's rule for kids is very simple: "If your parent tries to work things out with your other parent to share your time between them, then they care about you. If on the other hand, your parent goes to court and wants to be the one who has greater power and control over you than the other parent then they only care about themselves."

In Clayton's words, "So if your dad wants to work it out, but your mother wants to go to court, go live with your dad. If that's reversed, go live with your mom. Believe me, you'll be much better off. My mother wanted the court thing and look what I went through. My dad just wanted to share me and he turned out to be the better parent and the one I was happiest with."



A picture of Clayton Giles protesting in front of the family court house. When the court would not let Clayton's father have custody of him, Clayton ran away to live with his father anyway and then went on a hunger strike outside of the court and then went on a bicycle trek across Canada fighting for the rights of children to be with both of their parents. Clayton ran away from his mother's home and still today, lives happily with his father because he chose to fight for his rights and freedoms.

I am being physically hurt by the parent I live with now and I feel that I would be safer living with my other parent. What should I do?

If physical abuse such as hitting, slapping, pushing, shoving or pinching, pulling of hair, etc. is being used against you in the home of the parent you live with now then it is important that you report this to your other parent. You should tell your non-custodial parent to get the help of an outside third party such as a child advocate or lawyer to speak to you so that other people can also learn about the physical abuse against you.

It is important that you speak to other independent people or consult with supportive family members before speaking to child welfare authorities as often child welfare authorities will just tell you to go back to where you are being abused and pretend as if nothing is wrong. Some children

have reported telling child protection (CAS) workers about abuse by their custodial parent but that the workers did nothing. In some cases children have said that child protection workers actually helped to hide the abuse by alleging the children were being coached to lie. One girl who was interviewed on videotape reported that the child protection worker told her that it was OK if her mother threw her up against a wall in anger because raising children was a lot of work for a single mother and that mothers under stress had the “right” to lose it” with their kids. Many children have reported that child protection workers seem to be helping only their mothers and doing everything they can to hurt their fathers although a small number of children report that the child protection workers seem to be working in favour of their fathers.

If you are being physically abused by a parent and you want to live with another parent to escape this abuse and nobody is helping you after you tell them, then the police should be informed and if necessary, assault charges laid against the parent who is physically harming you. Exposing the truth and making your parent responsible for his/her actions is the right thing to do. Hiding abuse will only help to ensure that the abuser keeps on abusing.

Because of my reporting abuse by my parent, child protection workers are requesting to speak to me. Is there anything I should do to prepare myself to meet with them?

Before meeting with child protection workers to discuss abuse, it is important that you get your information and fact together before meeting with them. Make up a written list of events and other information which you wish to disclose to them and be prepared to have to answer questions about incidents of abuse which have affected you. Provide workers with a copy of your written list.

Many children have reported that child protection workers will ask only selective information, often intended to discredit you or one of your parents. You should also not meet with workers for the first time unless someone you trust is with you in the meeting or you have your own recording device with you to record your meeting with them. You have the right to refuse to meet with child protection workers if they tell you that you cannot have a support person or recording device with you when you meet with them. Although there are some honest child protection workers, many children have reported that workers will lie to the court about what the child said at a meeting with the worker. Having a witness with you or having a recording device with you will help to ensure that the worker does his/her job right and that he/she does not lie about what you tell them. At the earliest possible time, you should have someone (other than your parent) help you write a letter to the child protection worker giving them a detailed description of how you have been abused and to resubmit your written list. This should be faxed to the office with the fax receipt kept to prove that you sent a letter to them. Be truthful at all times and under no circumstances should you lie about anything. Lying will only hurt you and possibly hurt others.

Who should I speak to first to tell about my wishes to live with my other parent?

It is normal for you to feel a bit afraid about speaking about making a move or changing the access schedule, especially to the parent you want to move away from or spend less time with. Telling someone about your desire to live with another parent can be very scary at first. You should first speak to someone that you trust and feel most comfortable with. This person should be someone you know will listen and respect you and not make you feel bad for telling them your true feelings. For most children, this person will usually be the parent they wish to live with but in some cases it

may be grandparents, brothers or sisters, aunts or uncles, etc. If you are afraid of the parent you currently live with finding out about your wishes, then this person should also be someone you can trust to keep your conversation with him/her confidential from those you don't want to know. The person you first speak to should also understand the reasons why you want to move and be willing to discuss with you the consequences of your decision to move. Again, police and child welfare people cannot be trusted to keep this information secret so you should speak to someone like a child advocate who is willing to help you first before going to some of regular professionals.

Are there persons outside of my family that can also help me?

In all cases, no matter what your age, it is advisable to have an outside third party or child advocate who is supportive of you and willing to provide assistance to you when you are sure that you really do want to live with your other parent. Once you have disclosed to someone you trust your desires to move, you should tell that person to also get help from an outside third party. A trained third party can provide additional information and experience to ensure that your wishes are heard and respected and to provide information you will need. Persons who help children are called child advocates. They often go to court to speak up for you and to help to see that your wishes are respected.

In almost all cases, the parent you wish to live with should contact his/her lawyer and discuss the situation as well. The lawyer will give that parent help from a legal perspective that may also help to ensure that your move goes smoothly and without problems.

When should I tell the parent I live with now that I want to move to my other parent's home?

When it comes to telling the parent you live with now about your wish to move to another parent's home you have two choices. You can either tell your parent before you move or tell them just after you move. This depends on your age and circumstances. Whatever choice is best for your situation, you should be sure to have the agreement and understanding of the parent you wish to live with first.

Circumstances for telling your parent before you make a move to the other parent's home

You should tell the parent you live with now before moving if:

- You are confident that the parent will not physically abuse you (hitting, pushing, shoving)
- You are confident that the parent will not emotionally abuse you (yell, scream or make threats against you, take away privileges)
- You are confident that they will not put pressure on you to continue to stay with them.
- You are confident that you will not feel afraid for your safety when you tell them and that you will not get punished for wanting to live with your other parent.

Circumstances for not telling your parent after you make a move your move to the other parent's home

You should tell the parent you live with now after you have made the move if:

- You feel afraid that your parent may get angry enough to physically harm you

- You feel that the parent may yell and scream at you and emotionally abuse you.
- You will feel afraid in any way.
- You feel that your parent may try to keep you from seeing or speaking to the other parent once you tell them
- You feel that your parent may impose restrictions on you such as removing your privileges.

Should you feel that it is necessary to tell the parent you live with now after you have moved in with the other parent, then it is highly advisable that the help of a third party such as a child advocate be obtained so that the parent you want to live with is not accused of keeping you at their home without your consent or in violation to a court Order.

What kind of a reaction can I expect if I tell the parent I'm living with now that I want to spend more time with my other parent?

What to expect from a hostile-aggressive and controlling parent

A hostile and controlling parent is generally used to getting their way by ruling the household with fear and intimidation. Generally, a hostile and controlling parent will use the elements of fear, intimidation and guilt in an attempt to get you to remain with, or return back to them. These kinds of parents are like spoiled brats who get angry when they don't get their way. Some of these types of parents are what is referred to as sociopaths. Some of the things that a hostile and controlling parent may do are the following:

- Tell you that if you move that this is going to create all kinds of problems for them because they will not get as much child support or that this will financially hurt them. If you have brothers or sisters, your custodial parent may even tell you that your brothers and sisters will suffer and this might cause them to lose their house, etc.
- Some hostile and controlling parents may take the opposite approach to parents that become angry and become overly nice. They will use tactics to try to bribe you to stay with them. These sorts of parents might try to bribe you with things such as expensive holidays, new clothes and clothes, cell phones, allow you to have a boyfriend or girlfriend sleep over, buy you a pet, etc. Unfortunately, hostile and controlling parents usually revert back to their old ways once they feel that the threat of you leaving them has passed.
- Some hostile parents may get short tempered. The thought that you want to live with the other parent makes them think that you reject them as a parent. They may get angry and upset with you and may yell at you when you are alone with them. Generally, hostile and controlling parents will not yell when other people are around because they still don't want others to see how they are behaving.
- If getting angry and threatening you does not work, some parents may cry and try to make you feel guilty about your decision to leave them. They may cry and tell you that this is going to be very hard on them.
- Some disturbed parents may tell you that they will kill themselves. A parent who would go so far to make you feel guilty by saying that they will kill themselves has serious mental problems and likely is in need of immediate professional help. It is dangerous to continue living with a parent who tells you that they will kill themselves if you move.

- Tell you to never come back to their house again and tell you that they never want to see you again and that you have been disowned from the family.
- Tell you that they are going to rent out your room to another person and that there will be no room for you anymore at their house.
- Refuse to let you take your clothes and personal belongings from their house and tell you to tell the other parent to buy new clothes and personal possessions for you
- Stop buying you clothes and other material things in the interim before you move to the other home and after you have moved in with the other parent.
- Refuse to put any more money into any education saving funds.
- Will call the police and try to force you back to their house every time you try to spend a bit of extra time with your other parent.
- May physically hurt you once they have you back at their home alone and where no one can see them abusing you.
- Tell other brothers and sisters that you are a traitor to the family.
- Punish and/or threaten any your siblings who may support your wishes or give you honest advice or information.
- Threaten other children in the family, especially younger children, that they had better not consider doing the same thing.
- Throw out or destroy some of your clothes or personal belongings.
- Destroy your personal computer files such as pictures of your friends and family and tell you that they got accidentally erased or that they have no knowledge of how they got erased.
- Withdraw your money out of any bank accounts in which they have signing authority in addition to yourself.
- Take away cell phones so that you will not be able to have private conversations with the other parent.
- Let other children take control of your personal belongings and tell the other children that they can have your belongings.
- Try to confront you at your school and try to force you to go back home with them.
- Will discourage attempts by outside third parties to help you and may actually get angry at outside parties who may try to help you.
- Refuse to parent in a cooperative manner with the other parent.
- May stop you being able to see the other parent by blocking your access and time with the other parent
- Restrict your access to the internet to limit your ability to communicate with your other parent.
- May move away to another community and force you to move with them. This helps the parent have total control over you.

- Try to provoke you into arguments and fights so that they can label you as a problem child.
- Call children's aid officials and using the excuse that you are a bad child, attempt to force you into a foster or group home. Your hostile and controlling parent may go so far as to make false allegation against your other parent just so that children's aid officials will not be able to place you with the other parent.
- Refuse to give their consent to allow you to register in a new school at your other parent's home and put as many barriers as they can to you moving to another school.

If your parent reacts with some of the things indicated above then that parent would be considered as a hostile-aggressive and controlling parent. It is not good for you to be living under the control of a parent who behaves in this manner. In many cases, parents who engage in any of the above mentioned behaviours may be sociopaths and likely suffer from a serious mental illness. In this case, that parent's role as a responsible and loving parent must be challenged. Parents who would do any of the things to you that are contained in the list above are poor parents and bad role models for children. Parents like this will likely want to fight it out in court with the other parent which will force you to have to go against this parent. If your parent has reached a point where they are abusing you, then it is vitally important that you get out of that situation as quickly as you can. Some parents have been known to make false allegations against their own child in order to force their children into the care of a children's aid agency, just so that the other parent cannot have the child.

In many cases, however, hostile and controlling parents will modify their behaviour and become better parents once they see that their child will not yield to their pressures.

What to expect from a reasonable and understanding parent

A fair, reasonable and understanding parent will react in one or more of the following ways:

- Tell you that they appreciate your decision and that they will accept your choice.
- Tell you to try it out at the other parent's house and to let you know that you are welcome back should you change your mind.
- Offer to help you in getting set up at the other parent's home.
- Will tell you that they will always be there for you should you need them.
- Will not constantly put pressure on you to move back home with them.
- Will welcome you when you go back to spend time with them.
- Will speak to the other parent and discuss what the parents can do to best make the child happy under the circumstances.
- Work cooperatively with the other parent to change your living arrangements including working out any legal arrangements.
- Will allow you to speak to any reasonable third party you trust and wish to confide in such as an outside child advocate

If your parent generally reacts in the ways listed above, then consider yourself very fortunate to have such an understanding parent. A parent who appreciates your wishes and desires and is willing to accept your reasonable wishes and preferences, is truly a parent who understands and

respects your best interests. Chances are that this kind of parent will be able to cooperatively work out a solution with the other parent without having to go to court.

I'm afraid to tell the parent I live with now that I want to live with my other parent. What should I do?

Most children are afraid to tell their custodial parent that they don't want to live with them anymore but instead want to live with the other parent. This is not uncommon. This is a warning sign that the parent you live with uses fear to control you and likely others around him or her. Children are never afraid to discuss anything with a loving and understanding parent. A supportive parent will support their child's wishes to live with another parent if the reasons are good.

The first thing you should do is to tell the parent you want to live with that you are afraid of saying anything to the custodial parent. Tell them you need their help to leave your custodial parent and them what you are fearful of.

Another possible solution is to get a third party to intervene on your behalf. A person who advocates for children would be a good choice. This person may speak to both parents and try to work out the differences between the parents without running the risk of the parents getting into further disagreements or help work out a plan that will lessen the chances of conflict. You should also get the support of as many members of your family as possible so that they can give support to you when you make the move.

What can I expect from the parent I live with now after I move away to live with my non-custodial parent?

Generally, you can expect one of two kinds of reactions depending on whether your custodial primary care parent is a hostile and controlling parent or a reasonable and understanding parent.

Reaction of a hostile and controlling parent

Below are some of the reactions that you should expect from a hostile and controlling parent after you have made the move to live with the other parent:

- Will try to convince you to return back to their home with them. Most times they will call you in the days following your move, all the time trying to get you to change your mind. If they do then they are not respecting your choices.
- May try to entice you with presents or extra privileges if you stay with them. They might try to bribe you with things such as expensive holidays, new clothes and clothes, bus passes, cell phones, allow you to have a boyfriend or girlfriend sleep over, buy you a pet, etc. Unfortunately, hostile and controlling parents usually revert back to their old ways once they see that their attempts to bribe you to come back do not work.
- Tell you that this is going to create all kinds of problems for them because they will not get as much child support or that this will financially hurt them. Your custodial parent may even tell you that your brothers and sisters will suffer and this might cause them to lose their house, etc.
- May continue to say bad things about you to your siblings who still live with the other parent.
- Will try to take the other parent to court in an attempt to put additional financial pressures on the parent. Parents who do this will go so far as to try to destroy the parent you have moved to in an attempt to force you back to live with them. Such actions may include having the

other parent hunted down for overdue child support payments, pushing to have the other parent's drivers licence suspended or even throwing them in jail.

- May refuse to speak to the parent you are living with now.
- May not communicate with you such as by phone or e mail and will put off answering your questions about your parenting arrangements. The parent may even totally refuse to communicate with you for weeks or months. A hostile and controlling parent may do things such as not answer the phone, not return your phone calls or letters and generally not acknowledge any communication from you.
- May call child welfare protection agencies and make false claims that you have been coached to lie by the other parent and that your leaving their home was because of undue influence by the other parent. Even worse, your custodial parent may claim that you have been sexually abused by your other parent or by someone else while in the care of the other parent.
- May try to make you feel guilty by telling you that you are turning your back on the family, including your other brothers and sisters by going to live with your non custodial parent.

If you have a parent who acts in a hostile and controlling manner as outlined above, then they really do not understand what is in your best interest and are not a very good role model for you. In most situations, children will develop happier and better adjusted when they are not living under the influence of the hostile and controlling parent. Being subjected to a hostile and controlling parent is child abuse and this is a violation of your rights and freedoms.

Reaction of a reasonable and understanding parent

A reasonable and understanding parent will do one or more of the following:

- Will support your decision not put any pressure on you to return home
- Will be always willing to communicate with you such as by phone or e mail and will promptly and honestly answer your questions about your parenting arrangements.
- Will not attempt to bribe you with gifts and special privileges if you return back to the other parent's home.
- Will cooperate with the other parent in moving you.
- Will try their best to improve their parenting skills and to be the best parent they can
- Will at the very least give you a reasonable period of time to live with the other parent so that you can be sure if your decision was right. A reasonable and understanding parent will give you time to weigh the good point and bad points in each home and to let you decide for yourself.

What are some of the things I should do after I move in with my other parent to help improve my relationship with my former custodial parent?

- Establish regular access visits with the other parent as soon as possible. Let the other parent know that you still want to see them and that you still feel that they are important in your life. (This may not be possible if you were being abused by your former custodial parent but depending on the extent of the abuse, it is always desirable to maintain some form of contact with the other parent.)

- Try to maintain regular contact with your former custodial parent. Even if your former custodial parent does not return your calls, keep trying to establish contact with your former custodial parent. If your former custodial parent refuses to communicate with you, then try to contact members of his/her family and tell members of his/her family that you are attempting to contact your other parent. Generally, members of your other parent's family will put pressure on the other parent to respond to your efforts to contact them. Remember that your former custodial parent may be telling people that you are being influenced by the parent you are living with now. When you call other members of the family on your own and let them know that you are trying to contact your former custodial parent, then this dispels any misconceptions by others that you are being unduly influenced by the parent you are living with now.
- If there were issues of emotional or physical abuse which make you have ill feeling against your other parent, then at least be willing to give your former custodial parent the fair opportunity to correct their past behaviour. Be willing to attend counselling should your former custodial parent indicate that they would like to mend issues from the past which caused you leave them.

The parent I live with now tells me that the living arrangements or the parenting schedule cannot be changed because there is a court Order. Is this true?

Often, parents tell their children that they cannot let the children spend additional time at the other parent's home and cannot be more flexible with dates and times. Parents tell their children this because they want the children to think that the parent is not the cause of the problem. If a parent tells you this then they are lying to you to make themselves not look bad in your eyes. In all but the rarest of circumstances, parents can be flexible with the dates and times set down in a court Order if they both agree to it. Hostile and controlling parents are the ones who most often say "we can't change because the court order says we can't"

Do I have to obey my parent's court Order if I don't want to?

Although you should not disobey a **fair and just** court order, should you not be happy where you live now and should you feel that the court Order between your parents is not fair and just one, then you do not have to obey it. Court Orders are against parents, not the children. Laws are supposed to be reasonable, fair and just to all members of a family. Laws are supposed to protect parent's reasonable rights, including those of children. When court Orders are not reasonable, fair and just then they do not deserve to be respected. In most cases, the court never listens to kids and bases its decisions on what people outside of your family have to say and in most cases these people know less of what is going on than members of your own family do. It is well-known by many parents that the family court is unjust and many court Orders are not in the best interest of the children they are supposed to be helping but only in the best interest of just one of the parents. The bottom line is that if you are not happy and have good reasons for wanting to live with your other parent, then you can do what you want providing one of your parents support you and you have outside support as well. If either parent tells you that you must do what the court Order says in an attempt to scare you to stay where you are living now, then don't believe them! Do what your heart tells you, even if it means defying your parent's court Order. Kids must have a reasonable say in their own destiny.

I'm thinking of running away to my other parent's home. What will happen to me if I do?

If you run away there is a good chance the parent that you ran away from will try to get the police or child welfare protection workers to force you to come back home. It is always better to have the parent you want to live be aware of your wishes and to help you do things right so that you will have the least amount of hassle with the police as possible. If you do feel that you have to run away then read the next question which tells you what to do if the police show up at the home of the parent you ran away to. Although running away does work if done properly and with proper pre-planning, it should only be used as a last resort to escape from abuse or when dealing with a hostile and unreasonable custodial parent. Age all makes a difference. Above 14 years of age, nobody can force you to go anywhere without a court order to apprehend you.

What if the police show up at my parent's house and tell me that I have to go back with the parent I don't want to live with?

If you move without the consent of your custodial parent whose home you left, one thing that often happens is that the custodial parent will call the police in an attempt to get the police to force you back to their home. Parents who go to this extreme are usually parents who fit into the category of being very abusive and controlling. These kinds of parents have no respect for your rights and only want to fully control you, your life and your other parent's life. These kinds of parents have no hesitation in attempting to get you and your other parent in trouble with the police.

Unfortunately, the police will often try to scare you and your non-custodial parent with whom you want to live. The police will tell you that you must move back to the other parent's home immediately and come with them. They may even tell you that if you don't go with them and do as you're told that they will place you in a foster home or have your parent arrested for kidnapping. They may tell you that you must return with them in the police cruiser. If the police tell you that you have no choice except to return, then they are lying to you and they should not be respected. An understanding police officer should just see for himself/herself that you are safe and tell you that they will let your other parent know you are OK and tell your parents to take matters to court. If a police officer tries to intimidate you and uses scare tactics against you then he/she is unfairly helping only one of your parents and is not being fair to you or to the parent you wish to live with. In this situation the police officer is taking sides and this is not right. Police officers do not understand all of the reasons what made you want to move in the first place and should not be pressuring you to do something when they have absolutely no idea as to what is in your best interest. Police officers who force kids to go back into abusive situations without fully understanding of all of the details are only helping to foster disrespect for the law by children and cause children to be abused. How can children look up and respect the police when it is the police who are trying to scare and intimidate children into going back to the home of an abusive parent.

You do not have to go back to a parent's home if you feel that you are being emotionally or physically abused even though many uncaring police officers will try to convince you otherwise. Just tell the police officer that you are not going to go back and that if they try to force you back against your will then you will only run away and return to the home of the parent you want to live with.

If you think that the police may come to your other parent's house after you move, then tell your parent to have other people come to the house to witness the police and have video camera's handy to record the actions of the police. Having family members present in support is very helpful.

Having a child advocate at the home to speak to police or to send a written notice to the police before hand will also help. Police cannot come on the property of your non-custodial parent without the non-custodial parent's permission or a search warrant. You don't even have to let them in the door so if you want you can have your non-custodial parent have the police stand at the door and to speak to you while you are some distance in the house. Be polite and let the police see that you are OK but don't let the police come close enough to you where they can grab you.

You may lock yourself in a bathroom if you feel that this is necessary and only talk to the police through the door. It is highly unlikely that the police will break down a door or haul you yelling and screaming out of a parent's home if it is clear that you are safe and in a good environment with the parent you wish to live with, especially if there are witnesses in the room to witness what the police do to you. The police don't want to be seen breaking down a door or hauling you out into their cruiser yelling and screaming if people in the room are recording the police on video. To the police, their public image is more important than forcing you back. If you have the courage then lock yourself in a bathroom and just don't come out then the police will most likely leave. Stand up for your rights and show the police that you will not be bullied by them!

What do I do if authorities tell me that they will arrest my non-custodial parent if I don't go back to my custodial parent's home?

The authorities, especially police and child welfare authorities may tell you that if you don't return to your custodial parent's home that your non-custodial parent will be arrested. They will try to scare you into thinking that bad things will happen to the parent you most love if you don't cooperate with them. Usually they will tell you these things when they have you all alone as they don't want others to witness what they are saying because they know it is wrong. If you are being told this, then those who are telling you this are only trying to threaten and intimidate you. Police and child welfare authorities should not be telling you what they are going to do to your non-custodial parent. In this situation, just tell authorities, that you are not scared of their threats and that you will only make a decision after you speak to your non-custodial parent. Never give in to intimidation or threats by police or CAS workers. The decision as to where you want to live is yours (providing it is based on good reasons) and your non-custodial parent's.

In some cases where there are no witnesses or family support persons, the police may actually arrest your parent in order to force you back to the other parent's home. If this happens then run away to the home of another family member next time you get the chance. The authorities have only so many people and only so much time to deal with you. After a while they will give up chasing you because the cost in time and resources will be too much for them to be able to afford. And if the police do arrest your parent then don't ever forget who did this to your parent. This only shows that the police really don't care about kids like they pretend they do and police should not be respected.

It is always a good idea to record your conversations with police and CAS workers so that you will have proof of what was said should they try to threaten or intimidate you.

My non-custodial parent lives in another school district. What kind of problems will that present?

Having to change schools can make things a bit more difficult. If the parent you want to live with does not have custody then that parent will likely experience difficulty being able to register you in the school close to his/her home. This is one of the ways in which the system and your custodial

parent can impede your wishes and make it harder for you to live with your non-custodial parent. If you try to live with your other parent you may find you can't get into school so the school authorities may have you apprehended for not going to school. If you go to live with your non-custodial parent and are not able to get back in school quickly, your custodial parent will blame the non-custodial parent and allege in court that you are being deliberately kept out of school by your non-custodial parent.

Besides the legal issues, it does not make sense to switch schools mid term if you really don't have to as this will only affect your school. The only time where switching to another school would make sense is when you are not doing good at the school where you currently go to. If you are doing bad at the school you go to now it can make sense to switch to a new school even in the mid term.

If the parent you want to leave is an abusive and controlling parent they will probably fight you and the parent you want to live with as much as possible in court. If the parent you want to live with has sought legal advice and has prepared for you to live with him/her, then your parent should be able to quickly get a court Order to allow them to register you in your new school. If you are older (usually over 12 years of age) then things are easier to obtain in court.

If the parent you want to live with feels that there will be problems getting a court Order quickly enough to prevent problems with you not being able to attend school, then it would be better to wait for a while and plan to make your move during the summertime when the parent you want to live with has more time to get a court Order. Moving in the summertime also makes more sense from a schooling perspective.

I'm afraid that when I go back to my former custodial parent's home for the first time that they may punish me for leaving them. What should I do?

It is important that you try to rebuild your relationship with the parent you left as soon as possible or at the very least maintain some kind of reasonable relationship with the other parent. Sometimes this may not be possible right away as the parent you left may have feelings of anger against you as well as against the parent you are now living with. Before you go back for your first visit it would be advisable to have a third party speak to the parent you may be afraid of so that you can get the parent's agreement and understanding first, that they will not harass you when you come back to their home. Do not agree to return to your former custodial parent's home until there is some kind of understanding, possibly written, where the parent agrees that he/she will not abuse or intimidate you when you come back.

Prior to going back for the first time, you should also have an emergency escape plan should you encounter problems when you go back to the parent's house for the first time. This will involve making a plan such as going over to a friend's house to use the phone or going to a phone booth to call the other parent in the event of an emergency. If your non-custodial parent has a cellular phone, this is ideal because you will be able to reach your other parent to pick you up should you have any problems. Should you find yourself being abused when you go back to visit your parent for the first time, it is important that you leave the first chance you get so that you will not be subjected to further abuse and then to report this to other parent. Should the parent you ran away from harass and intimate you again, then this will reinforce your reasons to not go back again.

When I go back to visit with the parent I used to live with, they make me feel very uncomfortable and keep putting pressure on me to come back to live with them. They also put pressure on me when I am talking to them on the phone. What should I do?

Should you have an unpleasant time with the parent you left then you should not return to their home until they have given their assurance to you and your other parent through a third party that they will respect your rights and protect your best interests next time you go back to their home. They should promise not to put pressure on you any more. Should a parent who you know is abusive and controlling put pressure on you then this is child abuse and should not be tolerated and if necessary you should not go back to that parent's home. The sooner you show this type of parent that you will not tolerate this sort of behaviour then the sooner they will realize that this abusive behaviour will not work on you and the sooner they will start to act in a more normal and socially acceptable manner.

The same thing applies if the parent is putting pressure on you when you speak to them on the phone. If the parent starts putting pressure on you then you should simply tell them that you will not talk to them anymore on the phone until such time as they stop abusing you in this manner.

In both situations above, should you feel afraid to tell the person this then you should tell the parent you are living with now and also relay this to a neutral third person who should speak to your abusive and controlling parent. You should try to get a third party to speak to your other parent as the parent you left may accuse the parent you are living with now of keeping you from seeing them. Even your abusive parent deserves a reason why you may not want to come over or call them.

Is it good for me to exercise my right to choose the parent I wish to live with or to spend more time with?

Although exercising your right to choose to live or spend more time with a more reasonable parent can be very difficult and stressful initially, over the long term, exercising your choice for good reasons and with consideration of fairness and equality can have many very positive effects on your life. Asserting your rights and choosing to live with, or spend more time with, a parent who is less abusive and controlling may provide the following benefits to you:

- It will help you to build self confidence and esteem. These qualities are important in life and the earlier in life you develop them, the better off you will be later in life.
- Will help you to develop your critical thinking skills as it will allow you to see how a good, loving parent should behave.
- It will allow you to really see for yourself what it is like to live with the other parent. Most abusive and controlling parents do not want you to know what living with the other parent is like, because they are afraid that you might find it better. To maintain control over you they have to force you to live with them, just like a bird in a cage. A controlling parent is often afraid to give their child his/her freedom.
- It will set a good example to any brothers and sisters you may have that choose to remain with the custodial parent. Seeing you stand up for your rights may help give them confidence as well.
- It will help protect any brothers and sisters who may still decide to remain with the custodial parent. When a custodial parent sees one child stand up for his/her rights then that parent will

be fearful of the other children doing the same. At that time the custodial parent may try harder to improve the way that they treat the other children.

- It will give your non-custodial parent hope for the future. Most parents want to enjoy the company of their children and to share day to day experiences with their children, yet many non-custodial parents are denied this privilege for no reason other than the custodial parent does not want to respect the children's rights or to share the children fairly with the other parent.
- It will help reduce the causes of conflict. In fact, once the parent who is trying to control you sees that their strategy of trying to control you not working then they may actually stop being so controlling and become a better person.
- It will send a message to the parent who has tried to control you in the past that this sort of behaviour is not acceptable and that you will stand up against this sort of abuse and maltreatment. It will show your parents that you know the difference between right and wrong and that you are going to stand up against what you consider to be wrong.
- Most of all, making a choice based on the right reasons and standing behind what you want and believe, sends a message to your parents that you are now growing up and ready to take on the responsibility of making choices in your life and that you are not going to live your life in fear of any other person, including your parents. Standing up for your beliefs and doing what you know is the right thing to do will gain you respect from all those around you. Even a parent who may originally oppose you, will in time, respect you for your choice.

Always remember that you are your own individual person with your own basic rights. You have the right to choose your own future as long as you are mature enough to understand the reasons and consequences for your choices. No parent and no court has the right to interfere with your reasonable rights and wishes. Any parent or anyone else who interferes with your reasonable, basic rights is committing child abuse and this is just plain wrong and in some cases against the law!

I have been told that I must speak to a lawyer called a children's lawyer. What can I expect?

Sometimes during your parent's court process, the court may appoint a lawyer who is referred to as a children's lawyer. Sometime this lawyer may also have a social worker participate who may come to your home to see you. You will be asked to speak to this person and asked what your wishes and preferences are. You must remember, however that these lawyers and social workers are often biased against one parent (usually fathers but sometimes mothers as well). If you are trying to live with your non-custodial parent then the children's lawyer may try to get you to change your mind about moving or try to scare you by telling you your non-custodial parent will get into trouble. If the children's lawyer is success in getting you to change your mind, then the lawyer will report back to the court that you really don't want to move and that you always wanted to stay with your custodial parent. Unless you are getting seriously abused, the children's lawyer's office generally support what is called a "status quo" which in other means having you stay with the parent you are living with currently. The children's lawyer in many cases does not care about your wishes or preferences and care very little about you being emotionally abused.

If a children's lawyer is appointed to you then:

- Secretly record your meetings with the lawyer using an electronic recording device. Hide a recording device on your body to record your meeting with the lawyer. If the lawyer is ethical and doing his/her job right your recordings will not contain anything of value. On the other hand, if the lawyer tried to coerce or intimidate you then your recording may provide you with the evidence to sue the lawyer and the Provincial government for damages later.
- Do not be misled into changing your mind. Sometimes, the workers with the Office of the Children's lawyer will try to get you to change your mind or may try to get you say that things did not happen or are not true. They often will put pressure on you to say what they want you to say but just be firm and consistent with truthful answers.
- Always be truthful – never tell lies about either parent.
- Be very clear in telling them as to which parent you want to live with and why you want to live with that parent.
- If you are being abused then tell them exactly how you are being abused and tell them that you want the judge to know about this and you want it to stop.
- Ask your non-custodial parent to let you know what the children's lawyer reported about what you said and if what the lawyer wrote in his/her report is not accurate then tell your non-custodial parent where the lawyer did not report on what you told them correctly. If you are being abused, your complaints about abuse should be listed in their report to the court.
- Tell your parent that you want your meeting with the children's lawyer tape recorded and you want to be able to tape record the meeting yourself with your own recorder. If the children's lawyer refused to allow this then write a letter to the children's lawyer telling him/her that you want the meeting to be taped recorded and that you will not want to meet them unless they agree to this.
- If the children's lawyer did not report what you said or lied about what you told them, then tell your parent that you want to complain about the lawyer. Get your parent to help you to write a letter to complain and copy your complaint letter to the Members of Parliament. If the social worker did not report accurately, then tell your parent to file a complaint against him/her as well. Show all the professionals that you are going to stand up for your **RIGHTS!**

I've already spoken to a social worker and/or a lawyer with the court about being abused but these people seem to be doing nothing to help me. What do I do?

Sadly, at times you may find yourself in a situation where people appointed to talk to you from the court do not tell the truth or fail to report on things that they have said to you. Many children have reported being coerced by their children's lawyer into taking the side of one parent over the other.

These people include social workers with the court or child welfare protection agencies or lawyers appointed to you by the court. Sometimes these people want you to be with the parent they want rather than being with the parent who is best. Sometimes, they may even support the parent who is abusing you! To do this, they will not report to the court things that you say to them, including abuse, because they want to help hide this information in order to help the abusive parent win in court. Although there are some good workers, some of them cannot be trusted!

If you have this problem and find that you do not trust those people that have been appointed by the court, then you should ask the parent is most supportive of you to obtain the services of a child advocate who works outside of the court system. Advocates do not get paid by the court system and generally will fight for your rights. If you want to make sure that you have a good advocate then that person should be willing to support your rights as outlined in the back of this document and to put that commitment in writing to you and your parents. Get your statements on video tape so that the proof is there and that nobody can twist around things that you said or to hide things that you did say.

To make it easier for the advocate to help you in the court, then write a letter in your own handwriting and mail it to this new advocate asking for their help, telling them why you want their help and giving them permission to represent your interests in court. This will make it easier for the advocate to speak on your behalf.

Also ask your parent to make a formal complaint against any professional who you have told about being abused, if that person has not reported abuse. All social worker and children's lawyers must report abuse to child welfare protection workers if you tell them of being abused. Making a complaint against these people will help to ensure that they are not doing the same thing by hiding abuse to other children.

Although the parent I live with has been abusing my rights, I would like to give my custodial parent one more chance to be a better parent. How would I go about doing this?

If you would like to give the parent you live with now, one more chance to be a better parent, then you must first talk to your non-custodial parent first and prepare yourself to move in the even that your custodial parent gets angry. When you are ready, then tell your custodial parent that you know what your rights are and that you simply want them to respect your rights or you will have to move with the other parent.

Give a copy of "The Universal Rights of Children of Separation and Divorce" that is at the end of this document and tell them to start respecting your rights. Also give them the list of behaviours listed in this article which are considered as abusive and controlling then tell them that you don't want them doing any of the things listed. Tell your custodial parent that if their behaviour does not improve and if they don't start behaving like a good parent, then you will go to live with your other parent. Be prepared to follow up your words with actions. If the parent's behaviour does not improve then go to live with the most reasonable of your two parents. This is what it means to stand behind your words.

I've moved in with my other parent but now this parent is doing some of the same things that my other parent did before I left them. What should I do?

In some cases, after you move the parent you live with may now start doing some of the same things you did not like when you were living with the other parent. They may start telling you not to visit the other parent or keeping you from using the phone as well. In such a situation you should tell your parent that if they are not going to be any better than the parent you left then you might want to move back again. Remember, neither parent has the rights to violate your rights and to do things which hurt you physically or emotionally. Tell both your parents that you want both of them

to protect your rights. You should always choose to live with the parent who can best provide for your emotional and physical needs and is willing to protect your rights.

I have brothers and sisters who still live with the parent I left and I'm worried about them being abused after I leave them. What should I do?

Each and every child must be given the freedom to make the reasonable choice to live with the parent of their choice. If you have decided to move with your other parent and your brothers/sisters cannot make up their minds as to what they want to do, then all you should do is to let your brothers/sisters know why you are moving and after you move to keep them informed as to what it is like living with the other parent. Also help them to understand their rights and freedoms as well. Don't put pressure on them to move but give them the same chance to make the same choices you did. If you find that you are much happier with the parent you have moved to, then let your brothers/sisters know this. Once your siblings understand their rights and freedoms and are ready to speak up, they too, may choose for themselves to come and live with you and your current parent as well. But let that be their decision as much as possible.

Sometimes, when one child moves to live with another parent, this can have a positive effect on the parent who is being abusive and controlling. Often, when the abusive and controlling parent sees that they have lost one of their children to the other parent because of their abusive behaviour, they will correct their behaviour out of fear of having the other children leave them as well. Very often when a child leaves one parent to live with another, positive changes for the whole family result. Your brothers and sisters who still remain back in the home of the parent you left may actually find that things are better than before but the opposite may happen.

Sometimes you may feel guilty about leaving your siblings and may feel that you are the only one able to protect them. Do not feel pressured into staying because of this as this will only show your siblings to fear repression. In most cases, the example you set by showing your siblings that you are going to stand up for your rights far outweighs the benefits of remaining in an abusive situation under the care of an abusive and controlling parent.

Now that I have left my abusive parent, I have brothers and sisters who remained with my abusive parent. They are being abused and are being told to hate me as well. What should I do?

Often an abusive and controlling parent will get very angry at those children who do become brave enough to leave their home. Often these parents will then try to turn the remaining children against you and the parent you went to live with. This is referred to as Parental Alienation. Often these abusive parents will throw out your belongings or give them away to others or to your younger brothers and sisters. When an abusive parent acts in this manner it is a sign of a mentally ill parent. This type of parent has no concept of what is in the best interest of children and no sense of what is right and wrong. The best you can do in this situation is to maintain your contact with your siblings and let them know that what the abusive parent is doing that is wrong. Encourage your siblings to join with you at your non-custodial parent's home. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to help younger children who may be afraid to leave. If the parent you are now living with attempts to obtain custody in court, then you must provide full support by telling authorities the kind of abuse the other parent subjected you to and the abuse your younger brothers and sisters are being subjected to. Always remember to tell the truth and not to be afraid to tell the truth as this is the right thing to do for yourself and all members of your family.

I'm afraid that if I run away from my custodial parent's home that my custodial parent will come and harass me or physically grab me at my school and take me with him/her. How can I make it so that I will not be afraid of my parent showing up at school?

Under the law, the school has an obligation to make sure that you feel safe and secure while you are on school property. The school principal has the legal authority to keep one or both of your parents off school property if their presence on school property may cause a disruption to you or to other students. If you would like to be able to go to school in peace and to not have one, or both of your parents come on school property, then you have the right to request that the principal of your school do this. At the first opportunity you should meet with the principal of your school and advise the principal of your wishes relating to your parents coming to the school. You can follow up your meeting by having a child advocate or family support person also send a letter to the school informing the school of your wishes to keep one of your parent(s) off school property. You may also write a letter yourself to the school principal informing the principal that you do not want one or both of your parents bothering you at school. It is always best however, to make sure that someone is helping you with a letter to the school other than the parent you want to live with, so that your parent will not be seen as coaching or brainwashing you. You can even have this third party contact the school principal to reinforce your wishes regarding parents coming on school property. Be aware that if you disclose abuse as one of the reasons why you do not want your parent on school property, then the Principal of your school will be obliged to call child protection authorities and you should be prepared to deal with them as child protection workers will likely try to meet with you to find out about the abuse.

I've wanted to live with my non-custodial parent for a long time but I have been prevented from doing so by the family court system. I was even forced to go back to my custodial parent's home where I was abused again. Can I get even with those persons who forced me to stay with an abusive parent and made me suffer for so long?

When you get older (usually 18 years of age) you have the right to sue the persons who you feel were responsible for causing harm to you by forcing you back into an abusive situation or contributing to a situation where you were made to remain in an abusive home.. These people could include doctors, psychologists, social workers, child protection agencies (CAS), custody assessors, police or anyone else who you feel may have lied about what you were saying or in any way contributed to you being forced to stay with a parent where your were subjected to further harm or abuse. When you get older, no matter how many years have elapsed, you can sue these people, individually as well as the agencies they worked for at the time. By suing those responsible for past wrongs when you get older you will be helping to prevent other children from being subjected to this kind of abuse by other professionals in the family court system.

In the time before you become of age to launch your own lawsuit, you should do everything you can to convey to someone you trust, the abuse that you are being subjected to and to get your statements recorded and placed on the record with the police and/or courts. Records and statements you have made in the past may help you in the years to come to make those responsible pay for the things they did to you as a child. Those who want to help you often have a hard time convincing others of your plight so you should be willing to let those who want to help you videotape you giving your

statement about the abuse you are suffering from. If you are asked to speak to newspaper or TV reporter then do not hesitate to tell them your story as well. One family who had their daughter forced into foster care by a CAS agency, launched a 50 million dollar lawsuit personally against those workers once the girl turned 18 years of age. You can even sue members of own family, such as grandparents, aunts or uncles, should they have done things which helped one of your parent's keep you in the care of an abusive parent. Unfortunately, many grandparents support their own son or daughter to fight your other parent but never look out for your best interests.

I've really been angry at the judge for making me live with the parent I did not want to live with. What can I do to show the judge that his/her decision was wrong?

One thing you can do to release your frustration and to let the judge know what the outcome of his decision was wrong is to write a letter to the judge who gave your custodial parent custody in the first place. It does not matter how long it has been since the judge made the court Order. You can even draw a picture showing what you really think of the courts, the judge or any other authorities for what was done to you because of the family court system. Tell the judge how angry you are and tell the judge about some of the things that have happened to you since the judge made his/her last order. If you feel that you have been abused then tell the judge how you feel you were abused after the last court hearing. Once you have written your letter then ask someone you trust for help to distribute it to as many people as you can. Ask for someone in your family to arrange to have it mailed to the judge and the Judicial Council and then to pass it out to as many people as possible, especially members of the Parliament of Canada. When you let the judge know how angry you are and knows that a lot of other important people know that he/she has made things difficult for you, the judge may think twice next time he/she may consider placing a child back under the care of an abusive and controlling parent. Writing a letter or drawing a picture and letting everybody see it really embarrasses the judges and helps to expose all of the terrible people who trampled on your rights and hurt you. When you get older continue to write letters until such time as the court system stops hurting children in the way it hurt you when you were younger. Your letter to the judge may help prevent that same judge from abusing another child in the same way.

What are the consequences if I choose to continue to live with my abusive and controlling custodial parent even though I know my other parent is the better parent?

If you do not have the courage to stand up for your rights and to leave the abusive and controlling parent, then it is highly likely that you and other members of your family will suffer some adverse consequences. If you are old enough to choose then that is your choice and you have the power to do something to choose what you know is best for you. But remember that with every choice in life there are consequences. Below are some of the consequences that could result from your decision to live under the control of an abusive and controlling parent:

- You will be helping to encourage the abusive behaviour of the hostile and controlling parent. In the real world people should not be rewarded for doing bad things and neither should either

of your parents. When a person gets rewarded for their bad behaviour then this encourages them to continue with their bad behaviour.

- If you have younger siblings you will be setting a bad example for them. Younger brothers and sisters usually look up to their older sibling for encouragement and guidance and to make the first move. Many of them hope that their older sibling will help them by taking action. By allowing yourself to stay in an abusive environment with an abusive parent you are helping to teach your younger brothers and sisters that it is alright to be abused and intimidated and that in this world we are supposed to tolerate this.
- By choosing to remain with an abusive and controlling parent you may be helping the abusive parent continue to punish your other more reasonable parent. If you are not spending at least half of your time with the parent who you know is a better parent, then you are most likely contributing to a situation where they feel that they have not been treated fairly and justly. All good parents want to have their children close to them. People are supposed to get rewarded for doing good things.
- You will grow up to be complacent, lack confidence and be less assertive in life. Learning to speak up for what is right for you and fair for others is a valuable life skill that each person must learn by experience with the positive encouragement of parents.. When you allow yourself to be controlled by an abusive and controlling parent and do not speak up for what is right, then you will not gain valuable life skills that will be so important when you get older. By failing to speak up for your rights you will be seen as a “wimp” and “spineless” by your friends and family. Every child, by the age of 13 or 14 years of age, should be able to clearly know what their rights are and to be able to differentiate between good parenting and bad parenting.
- You could end up helping a controlling and abusive parent to financially punish the other parent through the court system and with child support. The parent you live with normally gets child support and all kind of other financial benefits while the other parent is often put in a much worse financial situation by the court system. In essence, the parent with the children gets more money and benefits while the other parent is often forced into poverty. A good way to keep the system from punishing one of your parents into poverty and to help ensure that one of your parents is destroyed is to spend half of your time with each of your parents so that neither parent will be the “winner” in court when it comes to money. If you still find it difficult to live with an abusive and controlling parent when you spend 50% of your time with each parent then you should spend most of your time with the parent who is not abusive or controlling.
- Your abusive parent may set you up for charges or to force you into a foster home. Some parents will go so far as to fabricate false allegations against their own children so that they can force them into the care of a child protection agency. Parents who would go so far as to fabricate false allegations against their own children are likely have severe mental problems. You are only placing yourself at risk should you remain in the same home with such a parent.

How do I know if my parent is abusive and controlling? What kinds of things do abusive and controlling parents do?

Abusive and controlling parents may do many abusive things to hurt you and others you love. The list of things below has been put together based on what many children have reported being done to them by an abusive and controlling parent. Some examples of things that a parent may do that would be considered abusive and controlling include the following:

- 1) **Won't talk to your other parent.** *Abusive and controlling parents will avoid talking or writing notes to your other parent as they want to make things as difficult as possible when dealing with the other parent.*
- 2) **Will demonstrate poor manners with the other parent.** *Controlling and abusive parents will often be rude to the other parent and do things such as not to say thank you or hello to the other parent when they meet. Sometimes at school functions, exchanges or in public places the abusive and controlling parent will totally ignore the other parent. They may even do childish things such as make hand or face gestures at the other parent.*
- 3) **Will tell you call your other parent by their first name** *Abusive and controlling parents want to humiliate your other parent and some will pressure you to call your other parent by his/her first name. Quite often while your controlling and abusive parent pressures you to call your other parent by his/her first name you are expected to call your abusive and controlling parent's new partner as mommy or daddy.*
- 4) **Will force you to call a stepparent by "mommy or daddy" even though you feel uncomfortable doing this.** *Controlling and abusive parents know it hurts the feelings of your other parent to hear you call your custodial parent's new partner your "mommy" or "daddy". In addition, the controlling and abusive parent wants to exert their control over you and to show you that they are boss over you.*
- 5) **Will tell their new partners that your other parent is a bad person.** *Often when controlling and abusive parents get into a new relationship with another person, they will tell that other person that your other parent was a bad person and parent. Often you know this is not true but are fearful of speaking up. The controlling and abusive parent only wants to make themselves look good to their new partner by making your other parent look bad.*
- 6) **Will tell you that they can't change the parenting schedule because the court won't let them.** *Controlling and abusive parents often used this excuse because they want the child to believe that the court is the culprit and to make it seem that they have no say with the schedule. In reality, most parents can vary from the court agreement if they mutually agree to. Controlling parents just want the child to think that changing schedules are hopeless.*
- 7) **Will often angry at you or the other parent** *Many abusive and controlling parents have anger control problems. They often get angry at little things and may even hit you when they get angry. They often use their anger to control their children.*
- 8) **Will tell you not to tell your other parent about incidences where you are abused or where you witness abuse in the home.** *Many abusive and controlling parents want to hide the bad things happening in their home. They get you to be part of their lies and deceptions.*

This is setting a bad example and as a child you should not allow yourself to be part of your parents lies.

- 9) **Will complain about child support payments or money issues and will blame the other parent for their problems.** *Most hostile and abusive parents are motivated by money to some extent. Even if the other parent is suffering financially they will insist on getting child support payments. These kinds of parents will never consider a parenting arrangement where your other parent takes care of you at their expense.*
- 10) **Will not care if the other parent loses their drivers licence or gets kicked out of their home.** *An abusive and controlling parent will push child support collection agencies to do everything they possibly can to take as much money as they can from the other parent and to do everything they can to punish and destroy the other parent. These parents don't care if the other parent is forced to live on the street and have no place for you to visit. When the children show concern about their other parent, the hostile and controlling parent will tell the children that there was nothing they could do because it is the court system that is going after the other parent. In reality the court can only pursue another parent at the request of another.*
- 11) **Will tell your other parent to talk only with their lawyer.** *The abusive and controlling parent wants to get your other parent upset and make them spent lots of money on lawyers. The abusive and controlling parent does not care about the money it costs your other parent, even though that money is money that will help you one day when you get older.*
- 12) **Will not answer the phone, hang up or use call block on the phone to keep your other parent from calling on the phone.** *The abusive and controlling parent wants to keep your other parent from reaching you on the phone and to frustrate the other parent whenever they can. The abusive and controlling parent is a very bad role model for children.*
- 13) **Will tell you not to answer the phone when it rings.** *Many times you know it is your parent trying to contact you but you are not allowed to answer the phone even though you would like to.*
- 14) **Will listen in on your phone conversations.** *Abusive and controlling parents will often listen in on your personal phone conversations, especially when it is your other parent. Often they will "hang around" in the same room or keep the phone in a location where they can always hear what is going on. If you have brothers or sisters that live with another parent, they will listen in as well. Abusive and controlling parents sometimes will be so abusive as to secretly tape record your phone conversations as they want to know everything you said about them or about your other parent.*
- 15) **Will tell you to disobey your other parent and break the other parent's rules.** *The abusive and controlling parent may allow you to stay up late or not do your homework just so that you think they are nicer to you. Abusive and controlling parents will allow you to make decisions which you know you are wrong.*
- 16) **Will try to make you feel guilty.** *An abusive and controlling parent sometimes may tell you things like they will be really hurt if you do certain things that are nice to the other parent or that it is a sign that that you do not love them if you want to spend more time with the other parent.*

- 17) **Will not cooperate with your other parent to work out your summer holiday schedule.** *An abusive and controlling parent will make all kinds of excuses and employ all sorts of tactics to prevent working out a fair schedule for the summer. The abusive and controlling parent's intention is to create uncertainty with the other parent, to create difficulties with the other parent's schedule and to hopefully through the delay, to minimize the amount of time that the child will have to spend with the other parent.*
- 18) **Will not involve the other parent in the choice of daycare providers.** *Quite often the abusive and controlling parent will not tell your other parent where they are sending you for daycare after school. Often they will chose friends or people they know who will accept their side of the story without questioning them. They will search out to find day care providers who will side with them or bend the truth in their favour to help them make things difficult for the other parent. The daycare workers these parents choose often are ones who they know will not get "involved" to help resolve problems or will keep silent about reporting irregularities involving the children. Such daycare providers become, in effect, collaborative supporters to child abuse.*
- 19) **Will choose people from outside of the family to care for you when you are sick or not in school even if your other parent would like to take care of you.** *The abusive and controlling parent will use every opportunity to keep your other parent from having the chance to care for you regardless of your wishes.*
- 20) **Will tell you that you cannot see your other parent and use silly excuses such as you are sick or have too much homework to do.** *The abusive and controlling parent will use every opportunity to keep you from seeing your other parent regardless of your wishes.*
- 21) **Will create difficulties for you to see your other parent on special occasions.** *Abusive and controlling parents will attempt to prevent you from being with the other parent on special occasions such as birthdays, Father's or Mother's day, special family gatherings, etc. Very abusive parents won't even let you phone the other parent on these special occasions.*
- 22) **Will insist that your other parent return you precisely on time while they do not follow the same rules themselves.**
- 23) **Will be unwilling to be flexible with the other parent.** *For instance, an abusive and controlling parent may refuse to vary your parenting time to allow you to attend events such as dance rehearsal, birthday parties and other events because they are being spent with your other parent.*
- 24) **Will not allow anyone else help work out problems between themselves and your other parent.** *The abusive and controlling parent knows what they are doing is wrong and don't want any person outside of the family to see the bad things they are doing to hurt you and other family members.*
- 25) **Will take you to counsellors, play therapists, doctors or other professionals without telling your other parent.** *The abusive and controlling parent will take you to a professional such as counsellor or family doctor, often so that they can get these people to say bad things about your other parent. Some of these professionals actually lie in an attempt to help your*

abusive and controlling parent keep you from seeing your other parent. Sometimes the abusive and controlling parent may even ask you to lie to the person they take you to.

- 26) **Will not consider any kind of fair and equal parenting arrangement for you even if you want to spend more time with the other parent..** *Abusive and controlling parents want to be in control of you all the time and never want the other parent to have as much time with you as they do. These kinds of parents cannot be fair to the other parent or to you. They don't care about your feelings, only about their own.*
- 27) **Will often seem to be angry at the other parent about something.** *Abusive and controlling parents always seem to be angry, even years after being separated from your other parent. Some parents can never get over their anger and revenge and get on with their lives.*
- 28) **Will not tell your other parent about upcoming school activities, events, or holidays.** *Abusive and controlling parents want to keep the other parent as much out of your life as possible.*
- 29) **Will tell you that you can't put up any pictures of your other parent in your home and even in your own room.**
- 30) **Will throw out or destroy pictures of the other parent and remove pictures of the other parent from all photo albums.** *The abusive and controlling parent has very little, if any, respect for anything, even if there were some good memories in the past. Their anger is so intense that even the picture of your other parent makes them angry.*
- 31) **Will try to keep your other parent from seeing you at school.** *Abusive and controlling parents will go to great lengths to keep your other parent from seeing you at school. They often will call the school and tell the school to keep your other parent from seeing you at the school.*
- 32) **Will tell everybody that they have custody of you because your other parent is no good.** *Abusive and controlling parents will say that because the court gave them custody that they are the better parent. They may even tell you that the court determined that they were the best parent. You may know that this is not true. An abusive and controlling parent wants everyone to think that they are good and that your other parent is bad.*
- 33) **Will tell you that they won't love you anymore should you ever want to live with the other parent.** *An abusive and controlling parent will even threaten you with their love.*
- 34) **Will coach you to "spy" on the other parent.** *Many abusive and controlling parents will ask you to report back to them about what is going on at your other parent's home. They may tell you to keep your "spying" activities a secret from the other parent.*
- 35) **Will send you to the other parent's home in old clothes and keep any newer clothes that the other parent may have sent you in when you came to their home.** *The abusive and controlling parent wants to keep all of the good clothes for themselves.*
- 36) **Will not return some of your possessions should you stay at the other parent's home against their wishes.** *Some abusive parents will even keep your possessions as punishment for going to or wanting to stay at the other parent's home. Some parents have been known to sell or give away some of their children's possessions just to hurt their own children.*

- 37) **Will abduct you and take you into hiding.** *In some rare situations, abusive and controlling parent may move with you suddenly without saying goodbye to the other parent and keep you from contacting the other parent.*
- 38) **Will tell people that your other parent sexually or physically harmed you.** *Very abusive and controlling parents will tell others that you have been sexually or physically abused by your other parent. Abusive and controlling parents will call police and CAS officials with their stories, knowing that an investigation often will result in the other parent losing contact with you for a long period of time.*
- 39) **Will move, or threaten to move you away to another community further away from the other parent, family and friends.** *In some cases, hostile-aggressive parents may threaten to move you far away from your other parent in order to get you to do what they want. Often these hostile and aggressive parents will move away to another community using excuses such as work reasons to justify their move but in reality the purpose of the move was to make it more difficult for you and your other parent to see each other.*
- 40) **Will tell the school not to provide information or report cards to your other parent or to keep the other parent from attending school activities or events.** *Although studies have shown that involvement of parents at school can be beneficial to the child, HAP parents will do every trick in the book to keep the other parent out of their child's life at school.*
- 41) **Will change your last name to their own last name.** *An abusive and controlling parent will change your last name to their name prior to being married, even though you were born with the last name of the other parent. They know that changing your name may hurt the other parent and they don't want you to have anything to do with the other parent.*
- 42) **Will provide the school with the wrong information about the other parent so that the other parent is never contacted.** *An abusive and controlling parent will not give phone numbers or names of the other parent or family members, even though these people would be able to help you in case of an emergency.*
- 43) **Will attempt to physically hurt the other parent.** *Some abusive and controlling parents may try to hurt the other parent by throwing things at them or pushing, shoving or hitting the other parent. Sometimes this may even be in front of you or your siblings*
- 44) **Will have fits of intense anger/verbal abuse against the other parent in front of you or your friends.** *The abusive and controlling parent is so angry that they cannot even control their anger when they are with you. This can be very embarrassing when your friends see this.*
- 45) **Will try to keep you from seeing your other parent's family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles and nieces and nephews.** *Abusive and controlling parents don't want you to spend any time with your other parent's family. They hate everyone on your other parent's side of the family, even if they are nice people.*
- 46) **Will try to get your brothers and sisters to dislike you and get them to do mean things to you.** *An abusive and controlling parent may even try to get your brothers and sisters to turn against you if you seem to like the other parent. They may try to make you feel alone and*

isolated from your own brothers and sisters and call you a traitor to the family. Parents who go this far usually are suffering from some kind of mental illness.

- 47) Will attempt to force themselves upon the other parent's family at special events.** *An abusive and controlling parent may show up unannounced at special events such as the funeral of a member of the other parent's family when they know that they are not invited or welcomed. This is often done to disrupt the peacefulness of your other family's function.*
- 48) Will disconnect the phone in your home and use a cell phone instead.** *Some abusive and controlling parents may go so far as to disconnect the phone in the house and get a cellular phone just for themselves to use so that they have total control over who uses the phone in the house. In this way you can't call out or receive calls without the abusive parent knowing about it.*
- 49) Will prevent you from giving out your phone number to the other parent.** *Some controlling and abusive parents will tell you that you are not allowed to give the other parent your phone number even though you know there is no reason for this. Abusive and controlling parents just want to exercise their power and control over the other parent, and keeping them from calling you is one way they like to exercise their power and control over you and your other parent.*
- 50) Will threaten and/or intimidate you.** *An abusive and controlling may threaten or intimidate you by telling you things to make you feel scared or sad. Your parent may tell you that he/she is going to get rid of one or of favourite pets or throw out some special toy or possession if you don't do what they want you to do.*

Some suggested escape and protection plans for children living under the control of a hostile and controlling custodial parent

One of the most common things that a hostile and controlling custodial parent will do to abuse you is to severely restrict or deny your access to the other parent. In many cases, your custodial parent will totally cut off your access and communication with your other parent. In most cases, when a hostile and controlling parent resorts to these types of tactics, they are usually trying to hide the emotional or physical abuse they are subjecting you to while they attempt to alienate you from the other parent and totally destroy your relationship with your other parent.

Although the actions of a hostile and controlling parent can make communication between yourself and your non-custodial parent very difficult there are strategies that can be put in place which will help minimize the damage and ensure that you are always able to maintain lines of communication with a minimal amount of hassle from the custodial parent and to know what to in the event of an emergency.

Remember, your custodial parent cannot watch you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The harder the custodial parent tries to restrict your contact with the other parent, the more you will likely want to see the other parent.

Strategies which will help you to maintain contact with your non-custodial parent:

Here are some of the things you can do to help maintain your contact with your other parent:

- First and most importantly, memorize your non-custodial parent's phone telephone number, cellular telephone number and e mail address if they have one. Do not write telephone numbers or e mail addresses down anywhere in case your custodial parent finds them and throws them out. Always memorize key contact information.
- Look around your custodial parent's home for phone recording devices. Check all the phone jacks in the home and to see where any wires may lead to. If anything of the phone cables seem to be attached to a device with a cassette tape in it or should wires from the phone jack disappear into a locked room, chances are that your custodial parent is tape recording the phone while they are out of the house and when you are alone in the house. In the event that you makes any arrangements meet your other parent, your custodial parent may be able then to stop you by scheduling something at that time at the last minute. Every precaution must be taken to ensure that the custodial parent does not know your plans with your other parent.
- Always assume that your conversations are being tape recorded by the custodial parent. Don't be discussing escape plans over the phone unless you are absolutely sure that you are not being recorded.
- Learn how to make collect phone calls from a private or public phone. This will allow you to call your other parent whenever you want, even when you don't have any money.
- Learn how to use E mail. You should know how to set up an e mail account with a web based e mail provider such as hot mail or yahoo. This will allow you to communicate with your non-custodial parent through the e mail without having to download messages through a computer at the custodial parent's home. If you are logging on to an internet mail, learn how to erase the temporary files from the computer each time you finish using the mail.
- Remember, the custodial parent cannot watch you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They may try to but with a bit of training on what to do you will manage to elude or escape from even the most controlling and abusive parent. No matter what your custodial parent may do to cut off contact, just be patient and to wait for the right time to reconnect with you non-custodial parent.
- If you are old enough, obtain a cellular phone. Maybe your non-custodial parent can get one for you. This is one of the best ways in which you can speak to your other parent at any time you want.
- Tell your non-custodial parent to get a cell phone as well. This will allow you to reach them almost anytime that there is an emergency. You may have limited opportunities to call your other parent and a cellular telephone offers reliable means by which you can reach your non-custodial parent.

Contact strategies for contacting your other parent

Hopefully, in most situations you will be able to contact your non-custodial parent at times when your custodial parent is out of the home temporarily such as after school etc. If your custodial

parent is at home all the time this can be a bit of a problem but have patience. Here are some suggestions for contacting the other parent.

- Pay phone at the school – Check your school and see if there is a pay phone at the school. A number of schools, even junior schools have public pay phones in the school. If there is then that is a good place for you to be able to call your other parent.
- Internet e mail – An excellent way in which you can contact your parent is through the internet. Get yourself a web based E mail account and learn how to access it from any computer, including a friend's computer or the public or school library. Learn how to send an e mail. If you have access to the internet from your custodial parent's home, then you can log onto a web based E mail account such as hotmail. Be careful when you use the internet from your custodial parent's home as the custodial parent may find your messages. Be sure never to leave the computer logged on to your e mail account. Never talk about running away on the internet as these can be found out by authorities or your custodial parent.
- Internet voice chat and video – A new way that kids can actually communicate with their parents without using the home phone line is through internet chat. Some companies such as Yahoo, Microsoft MSN messenger offer these free services where parties can actually speak to each other over the computer providing each computer is equipped with a chat program and is equipped with a set of earphones and a microphone. Two people can actually chat long distance without long distance charges over these internet based chat programs. These types of programs will even alert each of the parties at any time the other party logs on to their computer. The nice thing about chat programs is that the parent and child can speak to each other without a written record being left on the computer that the custodial parent may see. A code word between yourself and your non-custodial parent can alert your non-custodial parent to switch to another program so that the custodial parent cannot detect you speaking to your non-custodial parent.

Note: If the hostile parent may check the computer after you use it then you should learn how to do the following on the computer:

- 1) clear the temporary internet folder and the history folder
- 2) To erase messages from the in box and delete folder on the e mail program.
- 3) To empty the wastepaper basket file on the computer after they have deleted any files they want to erase.

By being aware of computer security, the custodial parent will not be able to see where you have been visiting on the net or sending your messages.

- Neighbourhood pay phones – Find out where all the pay phones are in the neighbourhood so that you will know where they are. Be sure you know how to use a public pay phone, including making collect calls to others from a public phone.
- Other relatives – If there are any other relatives within close proximity to your school or home and are supportive of you then you may go there or call them for help. Your non-custodial parent and you should speak to some of your relatives and have them ready to help you when you may need some help.
- A friend's house – Decide which of your friends you consider a "safe" house. You will be surprised as many parents will be willing to help you in the event of an emergency or to help you contact your non-custodial parent by letting you use their phone.

- School Officials – you may go and speak to your teacher and ask for help. Again, be careful as many school officials will automatically contact your custodial parent.

Strategies for physical safety

In the event that you may become afraid for your safety here are some strategies that may be helpful in the even that you feel that you have to leave your custodial parent's home.

- Have a prearranged meeting place somewhere close to your custodial parent's home where you can meet your non-custodial parent, another relative or supportive family in the event of an emergency or crisis at the custodial parent's home. This could be a location in the neighbourhood or at a friend's home or apartment, etc.
- Learn how to take the bus to your non-custodial parent's home or to the home of a relative with whom you feel safe. Don't take public transit late at night as this may be dangerous and would make your non-custodial parent look bad for allowing you to do this.
- Explain to the child that in the event the child could not reach you or other relatives and they feel threatened then the child may call police or child welfare protection authorities. Having your child call these authorities is generally not the best because they tend to get things screwed up and if anything, will support the custodial parent, not the child.
- Ideally, call your non-custodial parent, a relative or a friend of the family to personally pick you up in the event of an emergency.
- You may call a taxicab. You may take a cab but before you take a taxicab, you should make sure that your non-custodial parent is ready to accept the cab fare. Your non-custodial parent should arrange the ride so that you or the non-custodial parent can call the taxicab company and arrange to pay for your cab fare. This is where a cell phone comes in handy for you to be able to reach your other parent.

The Universal Rights of Children of Separation and Divorce

- 1) THE RIGHT to be treated as an important human being, with unique feelings, ideas and desires and not as a source of argument between parents.
- 2) THE RIGHT to a sense of security and belonging derived from being a part of a stable home, school and community environment.
- 3) THE RIGHT to flourish in an environment that is free of negative social influences such as drugs, alcohol, crime, disrespect, bigotry, exploitation and neglect.
- 4) THE RIGHT to a continuing relationship with both parents and their extended families, based on a fair and just arrangement that will provide the opportunity to have a meaningful relationship with both parents, which includes the freedom to receive and express love for both.
- 5) THE RIGHT to have "listening parents" who work cooperatively in the best interest of the child as well as all members of the family.
- 6) THE RIGHT to express love and affection for each parent without having to stifle that love because of fear of disapproval by the other parent.
- 7) THE RIGHT to know that their parents' decision to separate or divorce is not their responsibility.
- 8) THE RIGHT to continuing care and guidance from both parents, where they can be educated in mind, nourished in spirit, developed in body and surrounded by unconditional love.
- 9) THE RIGHT to honest answers to questions about their changing family relationships.
- 10) THE RIGHT to know and appreciate what is good in each parent without one parent degrading the other.
- 11) THE RIGHT to a relaxed, secure relationship with both parents without being placed in a position to manipulate one parent against the other.
- 12) THE RIGHT to have parents who will not undermine the child's time with the other parent by suggesting tempting alternatives or by threatening to withhold activities or parenting time as a punishment for the child's wrongdoing.
- 13) THE RIGHT to be able to experience regular and consistent parental contact and the right to know the reason for not having regular contact.
- 14) THE RIGHT to be a child, to be insulated from parental conflicts and problems.
- 15) THE RIGHT to be taught, according to their developing levels, to understand values, to assume responsibility for their actions, and to cope with the consequences of their choices.
- 16) THE RIGHT to be able to participate in their own destiny and to be taught about their family's culture and history.
- 17) THE RIGHT to be able to contact any parent or any member of either parent's extended family without unreasonable objection or interference from either parent.
- 18) THE RIGHT to be listened to by legal authorities and to have their age appropriate wishes and preferences made known to any court of law.
- 19) The RIGHT to be supported and cared for, both financially and emotionally, by one's own parents and extended family as the first option before the involvement of any government or other third party.
- 20) THE RIGHT to be assisted by competent third parties whose responsibility it is to protect or advocate for children and to be provided this assistance by the parties without prejudice or bias in favor of, or against, either of the parents.