



S.P.A.R.C.

Separated Parenting Access & Resource Center

Online Parenting Plan Generator Child Custody Time Tracker

- Home

- SPARC Forums

- Divorce Articles

- Divorce FAQs

- Evaluation Guide

- SPARC Chat

- Helpful Links

- Resources by State

- Professional Directory

- Legal Forms

- Divorce Dictionary

- Downloads

- Search SPARC

- About SPARC

- Donations

Extended Overnights by Infants with the Other Parent Are O.K.

An article by Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D., and Michael E. Lamb, Ph.D. showing that extended overnights by infants with the other parent are just fine.

Er du student?
www.konsernsjefen.no ➔

Prøv deg som konsernsjef i Adecco! Test deg selv her.

Related articles:
[Overnight Parenting Time With Infants](#)

Excerpted from Family and Conciliation Courts Review, Volume 18, No. 3, July 2000

With the historic focus on preserving the mother-infant attachment while establishing an exclusive home, overnights or extended visits with the other parent (mostly the father) were long forbidden or strongly discouraged by judges, custody evaluators, therapists, mental health professionals, family law attorneys, and, not surprisingly, by many mothers (e.g. Garrity & Baris, 1992; Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973; Goldstein, Freud, Solnit & Goldstein, 1986).

Hodges, 1991, for example, stated that for infants younger than 6 months, "overnight visits are not likely to be in the child's best interest, because infants' eating and sleeping arrangements should be as stable as possible" (p.175). For infants 6 to 18 months or age, overnight visits "should be considered less than desirable" (p.170).

Although Hodges noted the importance of several visits per week for older infants who were attached to their fathers, he recommended that these be limited to several hours. Hodges stated that children might be able to spend overnights "without harm" only after reaching 3 years of age (p.177).

Such unnecessarily restrictive and prescriptive guidelines were not based on child development research and thus reflected an outdated view of parent-child relationships. Further, such recommendations did not take in to account the quality of father-child relationships, the nature of both parents' involvement, or the child's need to maintain and strengthen relationships with both parents after separation (Lamb, Sternberg, & Thompson, 1997).

Research and experience with infant day care, early preschool, and other stable caretaking arrangements indicate that infants and toddlers readily adapt to such transitions and also sleep well, once familiarized. Indeed, a child also thrives socially, emotionally, and cognitively if the caretaking arrangements are predictable and if parents are both sensitive to the child's physical and developmental needs and emotionally available (Horner & Guyer, 1993; Lamb, 1998).

The evening and overnight periods (like extended days with nap times) with nonresidential parents are especially important psychologically not only for infants but for toddlers and young children as well. Evening and overnight periods provide opportunities for crucial social interactions and nurturing activities, including bathing, soothing hurts and anxieties, bedtime rituals, comforting in the middle of the night, and the reassurance and security of snuggling in the morning after awakening, that 1-to 2-hour visits cannot provide. These everyday activities promote and maintain trust and confidence in the parents while deepening and strengthening child-parent attachments.

Absolutely no Evidence of Harm to Children from Overnights with Other Parent

There is absolutely no evidence that children's psychological adjustment or the relationships between children and their parents are harmed when children spend overnight periods with their other parents. An often mis-cited study by Solomon (1997) reported high levels of insecure infant-mother and infant-father attachment when parents lived apart, although toddlers who spent overnights with both their fathers and mothers were not significantly more likely to have insecure relationships than those children who did not have overnights visits with both parents.

Indeed, as articulated above, there is substantial evidence regarding the benefits of these

TA SNARVEIEN
TIL ASIA

BESTILL NÅ

Thon Hotels
 ThonHotels.no/Hje...
 Offisiell Hjemmeside.
 Sjekk ut våre beste tilbud!

➔

regular experiences. Aside from maintaining and deepening attachments, overnights provide children with a diversity of social, emotional, and cognitively stimulating experiences that promote adaptability and healthy development.

In addition, meaningful father-child relationships may encourage fathers to remain involved in their children's lives by making them feel enfranchised as parents.

Other advantages of overnights are the normal combination of leisure and "real" time that extended parenting affords, the ability to stay abreast of the constant and complex changes in the child's development, opportunities for effective discipline and teaching that are central to good parenting, and opportunities to reconnect with the child in a meaningful way.

In contrast, brief, 2-hour visits remind infants that the visiting parents exist but do not provide the broad array of parenting activities that anchor the relationships in their minds.

When mothers are breast-feeding, there is considerable hesitation, indecision, and perhaps strong maternal resistance regarding extended overnight or full-day separations. Breast-feeding is obviously one of the important contexts in which attachments are promoted, although it is by no means an essential context. Indeed, there is no evidence that breast-fed babies form closer or more secure relationships to their parents than (those who are not).

Not Crucial that Both Residences be the Same

When there are overnights, it is not crucial that two residential beds or environments be the same, as infants adapt quickly to these differences. It may be more important that feeding and sleep routines be similar in each household to ensure stability. Thus, parents should share information about bed times and rituals, night awakenings, food preferences and feeding schedules, effective practices for soothing, illnesses, and changes in routine as the child matures. Parents should be encouraged by attorneys or mediators to communicate directly, either verbally or in writing. If this is not possible due to the intransigence of either or both parents, then the courts should order the involvement of co-parenting consultants, special masters, or custody mediators until the normal angers of divorce subside (Emery, 1994, 1999; Kelly, 1991, 1994).

It is important as well to recognize that protracted litigation and the specter of winning or losing delay the decline of conflict (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992), thus, such disputes should be resolved with speed. Furthermore, communication quality should not be judged from the level of conflict surrounding and encouraged by the litigation.

The challenges of child-focused communication require commitment on the parents' part to their children's well-being but will have long-term positive consequences for children and for each of the parent-child relationships. Although it is clear that a cooperative relationship between parents is beneficial, parenting schedules that promote meaningful child-parent relationships should not be restricted after separation if one or both parents are not able to cooperate. Disengaged parents may function effectively in their parallel domains and, in so doing, enhance their children's adjustment (Lamb et al., 1997; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Whiteside, 1998).

Because high conflict is associated with poorer child outcomes following divorce (Johnston, 1994; Kelly, in press; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992), it is preferable that transitions be accomplished without overt conflict. However, it is important to understand how high conflict is conceptualized in the relevant research, as the findings are often misunderstood. Almost by definition, of course, custody and access disputes involve conflict, but it is clear that such conflict in and of itself is not necessarily harmful.

The high conflict found harmful by researchers such as Johnston (1994) typically involved repeated incidents of spousal violence and verbal aggression continued at intense levels for extended periods of time and often in front of the children. Johnston emphasized the importance of continued relationships with both parents except in those relatively uncommon circumstances in which intense, protracted conflict occurs.

High conflict at the time of transition may heighten children's anxiety about separation. Even without conflict, transitions can cause unsettled behavior, fretting, and crying as children move from one set of routines or one parental style to another. As noted above, this is especially true of children 15 to 24 months of age, when it is quite normal.

If High Conflict Exists, Children Can be Exchanged at Neutral Places

If conflict is difficult to avoid because of one or both parents' hostility, then transitions should be implemented by babysitters or should take place at neutral places such as day care centers, special visiting centers set up for this purpose, or supportive grandparents' homes.

Occasionally, mothers are very hostile to fathers after separation as part of a legal strategy to prevent or diminish the fathers' participation in child rearing and co-parenting. In such instances, fathers should not be denied adequate contact with their children because conflict between the parents exists.

Similarly, when fathers berate mothers at transitions or refuse to communicate about the infant's behavior when with them, they will need to demonstrate more cooperative

infants' behaviors when with them, they will need to demonstrate more cooperative attitudes to warrant more extended contact.

It should be assumed that parents would have somewhat different parenting styles, which are related to their own upbringing and personalities. Regardless of those differences, children (and parents) benefit from discussions of disciplinary techniques and approaches as well as about the achievement of major developmental tasks such as toilet training. Furthermore, children will typically have different social experiences (and holiday rituals) with each parent and with extended families and friends.

Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D., is a clinical and research psychologist, assistant clinical professor at the University of California at San Francisco, and was previously director of the Northern California Mediation Center. She has published extensively in the area of divorce and children's adjustment, custody and access, and custody and divorce mediation. She is an advisor to CRC.

Michael E. Lamb Ph.D., is head of the Section on Social and Emotional Development at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Maryland. He has published extensively in the child development literature, with a focus on parent-child relationships, non-parental child care, and forensic interview processes.

[Home](#) [Contact Us](#) [Terms Of Service](#) [Privacy](#) [Sitemap](#) 60 users online

Copyright © SPARC - A Parenting Advocacy Group
Use of this website does **not** constitute a client/attorney relationship and this site does **not** provide legal advice.
If you need legal assistance for divorce, child custody, or child support issues, seek advice from a divorce lawyer.