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Making Smooth Transitions

Household transitions occur when children leave the care and responsibility of one parent for the other parent. This process can be emotional for both children and parents. Establishing a routine for household transitions is beneficial for residential parents, nonresidential parents, and children. Although there is not one correct way to handle household transitions, parents can benefit from helpful guidelines.

- **Select a set pickup and return time**
Having a set time that children are picked up and returned creates continuity for children. They will know when to be ready for their visit with the nonresidential parent.
- **Choose a location**
If parents fight, it may be beneficial to pick up children at a neutral location. This could include day care, school, grandparent's house, or afterschool activities. This will lower the chances that the children will become caught in the middle of their parent's conflict. A neutral location can make the transition easier for everyone. Children will be more ready to spend time with their nonresidential parent without the hesitancy of saying good-bye and leaving the other parent.
- **Ease children's feelings of guilt and stress**
Children often feel guilty when leaving one parent for the other. Sometimes it is difficult for children to go through repeated separations and reunions. It is important for parents to encourage their children to talk about their feelings about household transitions. Children need to know from both parents that it is okay to love and see the other parent. It is important that children are not used as messengers between parents.

Tips for Nonresidential Parents

Children need regular contact with their nonresidential parent. It is important for this parent to stay actively involved in the children's lives. A positive relationship and regular contact with the nonresidential parent promotes positive child adjustment.

- **Get involved in children's school activities**
Attending parent-teacher conferences, sporting events, and other school activities keeps parents involved in their children's lives. This lets children know that their parents are interested in their life.
- **Establish regular household routines**
Avoid doing strictly fun activities when the children are visiting. Children need structure and routines. Knowing what to expect when at the nonresidential parent's house will make the transition easier for children.
- **Get to know children's friends**
Allowing children to invite their friends to join family activities shows children that the parent is interested in their life.
- **Be reliable and consistent**
Children look forward to seeing both of their parents, and can become disappointed when a parent does not show up when planned. If something unexpected happens and a parent cannot make the visit, they should let the children and other parent know as soon as possible.

Monthly tip for families:

Schedule a special afterschool activity to enjoy with your child.

Additional Resources:

www.extension.usu.edu/stepfamily

www.healthyrelationshipsutah.org

www.strongermarriage.org

www.stepfamilies.info

www.twoofus.org

For more information, contact:

Shannon Cromwell, M.A.

Extension Assistant Professor

Utah State University Extension

435-283-3472

shannon.cromwell@usu.edu