

Ask an Expert – Establishing Smooth Transitions after Divorce

Shannon Cromwell

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Household transitions, when children leave the care and responsibility of one parent to be with the other parent, can be emotional for children and parents alike. Establishing a routine for these transitions is beneficial for residential parents, nonresidential parents and children. Although there is no correct way to handle these transitions, good communication about how it will happen can make it easier for everyone. Consider these tips.

- **Select a set pickup and return time.** Having a set time when children are picked up and returned creates continuity for them. It is important that they know what to expect and when. If something unforeseen happens and a parent cannot make the visit or pickup when planned, they should let the children and other parent know as soon as possible.
- **Choose a pickup location.** It may be beneficial to pick children up at a neutral location. This could be daycare, school, a 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. It will also help children avoid saying goodbye and leaving one parent to be with the other.
- **Ease children's feelings of guilt and stress.** Children often feel guilty when they leave a parent. It can be difficult for children to go through repeated separations and reunions. Parents should encourage their children to talk about their feelings. 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 spies or messengers between parents.

- **Get to know your children's friends.** Allowing children to invite their friends to their house or to join family activities shows them that their parents are interested and care about who they spend time with.
- **Involve nonresidential parents.** Children need regular contact with their nonresidential parent. Both parents should stay actively involved in their child's life. A positive relationship and regular connection with the nonresidential parent help promote a positive adjustment for the child.
- **Get involved in children's school activities.** Nonresidential parents should make an effort to attend parent-teacher conferences, sporting events and other school activities. This keeps parents involved in their children's lives and lets them know that both parents want to be there for them.
- **Establish regular household routines.** Avoid the "Disneyland parent" syndrome of doing strictly fun activities when the children are visiting. Children need structure and routines. Knowing what to expect when they are at each house will make their transition easier.

By: Shannon Cromwell, Utah State University Extension associate professor, 435-283-3472