

Shared Residency :

an option for your
family?

Dr Ronel Duchon

SHARED RESIDENCY:

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contents

CHAPTER ONE SHARED RESIDENCY DEFINED	5
1 Introduction	5
2 What is shared residency?	5
3 How does it work?	6
4 How do I know if shared residency is an option for my family?	6
CHAPTER TWO PHYSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES	8
1 Introduction	8
2 Draw the map	8
3 Similarities in physical environment	9
4 Your child in the community	11
CHAPTER THREE PARENT FACTORS	13
1 Introduction	13
2 Commitment to routine	13
3 Self-regulatory capacity	15
4 Resolution in separating the parental and spousal relationship	16
5 Willingness and capacity to resolve differences	18
6 Care	18
7 Empathy for the children	19
CHAPTER FOUR CHILD FACTORS	20
1 Introduction	20
2 Temperament	20
3 Age	21
4 Attachment patterns	27
CHAPTER FIVE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	28
CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION	30





CHAPTER ONE

SHARED RESIDENCY DEFINED

1 Introduction

“Do you want to tell me that I am not good enough to look after my child?”

Richard’s voice carried tones of anger, frustration and desperation. He and many other fathers who I have consulted with over the years have found themselves in a position where they battled to be full participants in their children’s lives. In many of these cases their child’s other parent vehemently opposed the request for shared residency. At times the opposition was well founded and at times not. When two parents have dramatically different ideas about residency arrangements for their children, how do you know whether shared residency is a viable residential option for a family?

This booklet navigates through the various aspects that you need to consider if you are considering, asking for, or opposing a request for shared residency. It is written from the position of what will work well for your child, a support tool consisting of information and exercises that you and professionals assisting families can use in deciding whether shared residency should be considered as a residential option for a specific family¹.

2 What is shared residency?

Shared residency is a residency plan where children spend substantial time living in both parents’ homes. This usually means that your children will spend weekend and week time with both parents.

1 The booklet does not replace professional assistance.

3 How does it work?

There are different forms of shared residency arrangements. Older children can, for instance, spend one week living with one parent and the following week living with their other parent. Younger children cannot cope with being separated for a full week from a parent. This requires a different arrangement of shared residency with shorter time blocks².

It is important to remember that it takes two supportive parents to make a shared residency arrangement work well. Once your children have to use the energy that they need to develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially, in order to cope with the residency arrangement, the arrangement may not be in their best interest.



Shared residency has evolved as a viable and possible residential option due to both legal reforms and changes in the work roles of men and women.

4 How do I know if shared residency is an option for my family?

This is not an easy question to answer. There seems to be agreement that children's well-being is not determined by the time spent in each home. Children's well-being is determined by factors, such as, the mental health of parents, the real quality of parent-child relationships, the quality of the parental relationship, the age, temperament and flexibility of the child³. Having said this, you cannot have a meaningful and close relationship with your children if you do not spend enough time together.

² Each family decides on a configuration that suits them. Visit www.familyzone.co.za for examples.

³ Wallerstein, J., Lewis J. & Blakeslee, S. (2002). *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce. A 25 Year Landmark Study*. London: Fusion.

This point of view is echoed in the South African Children's Act which sets out a Best Interest of the Child Standard. The Best Interest of the Child Standard provides the yardstick by which the residency plan is measured. In the following chapters, you will consider three critical elements that will help you to determine whether a shared residency arrangement will work for your family. These three factors include:

- physical circumstances,
- parental characteristics and
- child characteristics.



exercise

Write down your reasons for considering, asking for, or opposing a request for shared residency.

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CHAPTER TWO

PHYSICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

1 Introduction

The comfortable movement of your children between two homes is necessary for the shared residency plan to work. This chapter focuses on traveling time, the need to create a fairly similar physical environment for your children in two homes and your child's need to be part of the community.

2 Draw the map

Use the space provided to complete the following exercise regarding the distances between important places in your child's world.

- 1 Draw or mark your children's schools and the two homes⁴ in the space as if you are drawing a map
- 2 Indicate the distances in kilometers between the homes and schools.
- 3 Indicate the total distance the children travel between their homes and schools on any given day.



exercise

Add how much time each child will spend in the car/traveling per day if they

a) *live with you*

b) *live with the other parent*

Compare these calculations with the time that each child spends in the car during the time you all lived in one home.

.....

What type of residential arrangements would you implement considering only the issue of distance and traveling time?

.....

Do you believe it is fair to expect your children to cope with this type of travel arrangement?

.....

3 Similarities in physical environment

Children find it easier to move between homes which are fairly similar. If your child is very young, she relies on her senses to know who she is with and where she is. By warming, soothing, feeding, cleaning and calming her, the caregiver creates a set of specific experiences for the baby. These experiences activate specific areas of the baby's brain which is responsible for bonding between parent and child. It is the smells, sights, sounds, tastes and touch of the caregiver that provides consistency and feelings of safety for the baby. We now understand that the baby builds what is called a sensory register for each parent or caregiver. It would assist the baby greatly if the same routines of feeding, cleaning and sleep time rituals are used by various caregivers.

4 If you and your child's other parent still reside in one home, consider the homes you both have in mind once you have separated.



exercise

How well does your baby know the touch, sounds and smells of both parents?

.....

.....

Are both parents familiar with the routine and care giving of the baby?

.....

.....

If your child is of school going age, keep in mind that older children find it difficult to adjust when the differences between homes is too dramatic.

The case of Sam and Lindi's four children illustrate this point. Sam and Lindi agreed on a shared residency arrangement for all four children. Lindi stayed on in the family home where each child had his/her own room. There was a swimming pool and big garden for the two boys to play ball games. The piano stayed in the home for the eldest girl who was particularly talented. Sam moved into a two bedroom townhouse. The girls shared a bedroom and the boys slept on a sleeper couch in the lounge. It did not take long before the children complained about living with their father. Sam found this hurtful and at first blamed Lindi for not being supportive of the shared residency arrangement.

During the psychological assessment of the children, they explained how they experience the shared residency arrangement. Sam and Lindi then started to understand that the physical environment between their homes was not similar enough to create smooth transitions for the children.



exercise

Do you believe that the physical environment between your two homes is similar enough to create a stable shared residency arrangement?

.....

What are the positive aspects about the physical environment that you and your child's other parent create?

.....

What are the problems that you and your child's other parent face in creating a similar physical environment?

.....

4 Your child in the community

At the time of their divorce, Craig and Susan agreed that George would spend every weekend with his father in light of the substantial distance between their homes. Three years later, Susan explains their son's social difficulties at school and in the complex they live in as result of this arrangement. "He is never here over weekends. The children at school and in the complex cannot or will not understand this. George cannot make arrangements; he cannot go to parties and play sport at school because he is at his father's home every weekend. It is too far for them to come back to this side on Saturday morning. He feels like an outsider in the complex. The other children in the complex play together every afternoon and over weekends."

George's parents had good intentions when they made the arrangement. Their good intentions have developed into a situation where George lives with one foot in the world at his mother's home and with one foot in the world at his father's home. This residential arrangement is creating difficulties with his friendships. Sociability is very important for the school going child. The ability of your child to develop and sustain relationships is important for his adjustment in adolescence.



A child who cannot form and keep friendships will find it very difficult to make a smooth transition into adolescence.

George is torn between the love he has for his parents, his need to spend time with them and his need to have friends and to "belong" amongst his peers. If Craig and Susan do not address the situation, George may feel similar to Jordan a 13 year old girl who described her feelings about her father's attitude to her social engagements during "his weekends" with her. Jordan's father does not want her to go out when she is with him. He tells her that he sees so little of her that he does not want to "play driver" over weekends carting her around to all her arrangements. Jordan told me: "He does not understand. I feel that he is stealing part of my life."



exercise

Consider how the arrangement you have in mind, will affect how your child will fit into his/her community,

now?

.....

in the future?

.....

.....



CHAPTER THREE

PARENTAL FACTORS

1 Introduction

Parents' willingness and ability to support their children with the shared residency arrangement is critical. Without your support as parents, the full weight of managing the shared residency arrangement falls on your child's shoulders. This can cause emotional problems and other difficulties for your child. This chapter investigates the input of parents in a shared parenting arrangement that will last. We refer to this as a sustainable shared residency arrangement.

2 Commitment to routine

"Maybe it was not the best idea to take them to the concert during the week. We came back late but I thought it was a great opportunity to do something exciting together. I spend so little time with the boys." This comment was made by Mandy when we discussed her child's poor test performance after the two boys have been with her for midweek contact. Mandy's son, Roy, is anxious at the best of times and the inadequate preparation for the test made things even worse for him. Roy did not have the courage to tell his mother that he did not want to go to the concert.

Predictability creates feelings of safety for your children. When your children anticipate uncertainty and cannot "track" what is going to happen next, they may develop stress, anxiety and even depressive symptoms. By keeping routines intact you support your children through transitions and change. It is not always convenient for a parent to follow a routine.



The role and influence of routine is frequently regarded as unimportant and parents who focus on routine are described as obstructive and inflexible.

As our understanding of brain development is advancing, the link between routine and the development of the children has become clearer. The establishment of eating and sleeping routines is among the most important things you can do to assist healthy brain development in your children⁵. The importance of the bedtime routine is important⁶ as this will determine the quality of sleep that your child will get. A child's quality of sleep is also linked to brain development.

A commitment to routine is important for children of all ages. The young child becomes "out of sorts" and difficult to handle if his routine is disrupted. The school going child needs routine to establish working patterns and to develop feelings of competency. For the adolescent, routine forms part of the adolescents' organisation of his world.



exercise

Shared residency requires the fairly similar management of routine across two households.

Are you committed to providing your child with the routine she knows?

.....

Do you and your child's other parent have similar ideas about routine for your children?

.....

-
- 5 Shiver, E. (2001). Brain Development and Mastery of Language in the Early Childhood Years. IDRA Newsletter. Retrieved at <http://community.learnnc.org/dpi/secondlang/archives/Brain%20Development%20Article.pdf> on 28 February 2009.
- 6 Philippine Star. (2008). Global Survey Awakens Moms On Importance Of Bedtime Routine. Retrieved at <http://www.philstar.com/index.php?Health%20And%20Family&p=49&type=2&sec=41&id=200809044> on 28 February 2009



exercise *continued*

If not so, is this an aspect that you both can do something about?

.....

How do you envisage that you and your child’s other parent will deal with routine in a consistent but flexible manner?

.....

How do you believe your children will respond to this approach?

.....

3 Self-regulatory capacity

The ability to regulate emotions and behavior differs from one person to another. Parents who can regulate their emotions and behavior will cope better with:

- the demands of a shared residency arrangement
- the need to have regular contact with the other parent
- negotiate problems
- focusing on their children’s needs
- the support of their children

Parents with low levels of emotional and behavioral self-regulation experience difficulties in many areas of functioning. They will find it difficult to:

- create an environment that supports a shared residency arrangement
- manage conflict
- protect their children from ongoing “toxic stress”⁷ associated with ongoing conflict

If you have low levels of emotional self-regulation it means that you frequently lose control of your emotions. This means that your children have to accommodate for these outbursts. This results in them using their emotional energy or resources to protect themselves from the emotions of one or both parents or from the ongoing conflict between their parents⁸.

When one or both parents have low levels of emotional self-regulation there is a greater chance of conflict whenever the parents have contact. This type of situation increases the risk factors associated with a child’s mental health outcomes. The presence of low levels of emotional self-regulation may indicate difficulties in managing a shared residency arrangement.

4 Resolution in separating the parental, spousal and financial relationship

During the marriage⁹, a husband and wife have three relationships that exist simultaneously, namely, the spousal, parental and financial relationships. Once there is a separation, the family reorganises itself. In the reorganised family, you and your child’s other parent are no longer spouses and this relationship ceases to exist. The parental and financial relationships continue. Some parents manage this change in their relationship with ease and others seem to struggle with the change of having a parental relationship only.

A shared residency arrangement results in frequent communication and involvement with your child’s other parent. This can be managed if there is a clear end to your spousal relationship and a good parental and well defined financial relationship between you and your child’s other parent.



exercise

To what extent, have you and your child’s other parent managed to separate your spousal and parental relationships?

.....
.....

How healthy is you and your child’s other parent’s parental relationship?

.....
.....

How will you be able to achieve a sustainable separation of these issues in the future?

.....
.....

How healthy is your and your child’s other parent’s financial relationship?

.....
.....
.....

7 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain. (2005). Working Paper No. 3. Retrieved at www.developingchild.net/pubs/wp/excessive_stress.pdf on 19 January 2009.

8 McIntosh, J. & Chisholm, R (2008). Cautionary notes on the shared care of children in conflicted parental separation. *Journal of Family Studies*. 14(1), 37-52.

9 Marriage could be interchanged with relationship and husband and wife could be interchanged with partners.

5 Willingness and ability to resolve differences

A willingness and ability to resolve differences may be part of your pre-separation parental relationship. A distinction can be made between parents who could resolve differences concerning their children during their marriage or relationship and those who were always at loggerheads about issues concerning their children.

During the time of separation, it is possible that parents' capacity to work together on parenting issues becomes contaminated by other disputes. If this is true in your case, understand that this situation does not assist your children during a time when they find it difficult to cope with what has happened in their family. In these circumstances, it is necessary for you and your child's other parent to find a way of bringing your parental relationship "on-line" again.

Many parents believe that once they are separated they will be able to cooperate with each other. This is not necessarily true. If you have always had trouble cooperating, it is necessary to consider a way forward to address what we refer to as the "parental alliance" between you and your child's other parent. You may need professional assistance.

A willingness and ability to resolve differences will go a long way in supporting a shared residency arrangement. A history of conflict around parental issues may prove an ongoing obstacle in creating an effective shared residency arrangement.

6 Care

Any residential arrangement must reflect the real relationship between you, your children's other parent and your children. Shared residency is a realistic option for families where both parents have shared the care of the children pre-separation or divorce. It is not an option for families where one parent had little real involvement with the care giving of the children on a day-to-day basis.



exercise

Can you think of any difference in opinion about parenting that you and your child's other parent resolved effectively during the time you were together?

.....

How frequently did you disagree about parenting issues?

.....

Are you willing to resolve difficulties with your child's other parent regarding the care of your children?

.....

Do you believe that your child's other parent is willing to resolve difficulties regarding your children?

.....

7 Empathy for the children

"It is surely more important to spend time with your mother, than going to soccer practice. I see so little of you." Erica does not seem to understand how much anxiety this statement causes her child. She does not understand that he feels that he is letting his team down and that his place in the team could be in jeopardy if he does not attend practice. The coach told him the other day that if the situation continues, he will have no choice but to leave him out of the team.

In general, parents need to be sensitive to their children's needs. If you have a shared residency arrangement sensitivity to your children's needs become even more important. If you are going to get angry every time your child forgets something or when you feel that the other parent should have done something differently, you will find it very difficult to give your children the type of support they need. If you have the capacity to mostly focus on your child's needs and assist your child, the shared residency arrangement will work well.



CHAPTER FOUR

CHILD FACTORS

1 Introduction

The physical and emotional environment that you as parents create may be ideal for a shared residency arrangement. However, the last piece of the puzzle that needs to fall into place is your child's temperament or personality and wishes. Some children will be able to cope with this type of arrangement and others will find it very difficult. This chapter highlights the child's characteristics that play an important role in deciding whether a shared residency arrangement is an option for your family.

2 Temperament

Each child is born with a temperament. You can possibly remember noticing differences between your children's personalities from the time they were born. Some children are easygoing and adjust easily to change. Other children are more vulnerable and do not adjust easily to change and need more care and support from their parents. These children are believed to have a difficult or vulnerable temperament.



Characteristics such as sociability, how your child react to unfamiliar people and situations and the intensity of your child's reactions to various situations are referred to as your child's temperament.

Some children's temperament stays the same into adulthood and others not. One explanation given for these differences in children's development is the goodness of fit between parents and children. A good fit between your parenting style and your child's temperament can assist positively with your child's development¹⁰. A sensitive parent

can help her child to function in circumstances that are normally difficult for a child with a very difficult temperament. A problematic fit between your parenting style and your child's temperament can cause difficulties for your child's development in many areas.

Certain theorists¹¹ indicate that temperament is believed to be biologically based and describe indicators that link temperament with activity in specific areas of the brain¹². Family influences play a role in changing children's behavior despite biological temperament features. Parental support seems to be especially critical for temperamentally vulnerable children.

Any residential arrangement requires your child to make transitions between homes. It is easier for the easy going child to make transitions between homes. Even the easygoing child needs a supportive environment to sustain her temperament. If the easygoing child is placed under constant emotional pressure due to transitions, she runs the risk of developing emotional difficulties.

Frequent and ongoing change is difficult to handle for the child with the vulnerable temperament. Shared residency may not result in the best outcomes for this type of child.

3 Age of the child

The age and development of your child will determine whether shared residency is an option to consider.

0-4 years

In order to understand the appropriateness of residential arrangements for babies and very young children, we need to understand more about the remarkable brain development processes that takes place during this critical time period. This section may be difficult to understand at first. It explains why shared residency is a difficult residential option for very young children.

Brain development research has provided unique insights in the development of babies. Each brain area has its own timetable for development. Brain development is the activation and creation of chains of neurons that enable our cognitive, emotional and behavioral capacity. We are born with all our neurons but most of the wiring (or organization) of these neurons in systems occurs after birth¹³. The connections between neurons are formed by repetitive experiences.



A neuron is a specialized nerve cell that transmits nerve impulses in the brain. Neurons are the building blocks of the brain. Attachment between the parent and child is a complex neural system.

In order for brain development to take place, the baby or child must have experiences that are:

- structured,
- patterned and
- appropriately timed.

There are time periods that are considered to be critical and sensitive periods for brain development. There are critical periods during which the baby develops his ability to form relationships with others. We now understand that the development of an attachment relationship between parent and child is the development and organization of a complex neural system. In the development of this socio-emotional functioning, early nurturing is critical. If nurturing is absent for the first three years of a child's life, later positive experiences might not be enough to overcome the lack of organization of the neural systems¹⁴. Experiences such as loss, threat, neglect and injury disrupt brain development¹⁵.

13 Rose, S (2009). In Search of the God Neuron. *Brain in the News*. 16 (1), 1-8.

14 Perry, B.D. (2002). Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential: What Childhood Neglect tells us about Nature and Nurture. *Brain and Mind*. 3(1), 79-100.

15 Schore, A. (2003). *Affect Dysregulation and disorders of the Self*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

The link between brain development and attachment is the following: by warming, soothing, feeding, cleaning and calming the baby, the caregiver activates specific networks in the areas of the baby's brain that become responsible for bonding. It is the smells, sights, sounds, tastes and touch of the caregiver that provides the repetitive cues to express the genetic potential to form and maintain healthy relationships. We now understand that the child builds a sensory register for each parent or caregiver.

As the brain organizes and develops, other relationships in the child's life will make a difference in the baby's capacity to develop relationships. There is no scientific proof that frequent and ongoing changing relationships with multiple adult caregivers benefits young children. On the contrary, although young children certainly can have healthy relationships with more than one or two adults, prolonged separations from their familiar caregivers and repeated "detaching" and "re-attaching" to people is emotionally distressing and can lead to enduring problems. Sustained, reliable, and predictable relationships are important¹⁶.

A lack of continuity of care can negatively affect very young children's attachment patterns. McIntosh and Chisholm explain that

Shared care arrangements that involve the frequent moves from one parent to another can, inadvertently, bring about this experience. Typical patterns of care for babies require frequent transitions, but in this way, care with either parent risks becoming a discontinuous experience..... there are important developmental reasons, sketched above, to be cautious about the recommendation of shared care for children under four.

This does not mean that a shared residency arrangement cannot be considered at all for this age group. Parents who wish to consider a shared residency arrangement for children in this age group may want to get professional input regarding the development of their children.

16 Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships. (2004). National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Working Paper No. 1. Retrieved at http://www.developingchild.net/pubs/wp/Young_Children_Environment_Relationships.pdf on 19 January 2009.

5-11years

Children in this age group can cope better with longer separations from either parent. The extent to which a shared residency arrangement can work for this age group depends on the parental support and the absence of ongoing parental conflict.

Children in this age group deal with critical aspects of learning. They enter formal schooling and develop socially. Developmentally, social competence is important for a successful transition to adolescence, and provides a strong foundation for healthy adjustment.

In order for the shared residency arrangement to work, parents need to be able to:

- negotiate and manage schooling issues and
- provide academic support and
- assist the child in developing social competencies that will bridge a smooth transition into adolescence.

Children with a vulnerable capacity to regulate their attention, behaviour and emotion will react unlike others to the demands of frequent moves between the homes. It is not fair to expect these children to cope with the significant demands of learning and to negotiate these problems in an environment of constant change.

Adolescents

Some adolescents are interested in a shared residency arrangement and others are less amenable to shared residency arrangements. Changes in brain organization lead adolescents to experience increases in:

- novelty seeking,
- risk taking and
- a need for peer-based relationships¹⁷.

17 Ackerman, S.J. (2007) The Adolescent Brain – The Dana Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.dana.org/news/brainhealth/detail.aspx?id=10056> on 3 May 2009.



exercise

Are you and your child's other parent involve with helping your child with homework?

.....

Do you know what the school requires from you as a parent in terms of homework assistance?

.....

Does your child have any special academic needs?

.....

Are you and your child's other parent in a position to make the necessary social arrangements for your child?

.....

Do you feel that you and your child's other parent can work together on these issues?

.....

How do your children feel about the prospect of a shared residency arrangement?

.....

.....

This means that your adolescent's world shifts in terms of the activities and company he prefers. Children in this age group juggle their own lives and interests with their sense of belonging to family. This can become a very complicated situation for an adolescent living in two homes.

Article 31 of the Children's Act compels parents to give due consideration to their children's view and wishes specifically regarding the time spend with each parent. This article of the Act is qualified in that the age and maturity of the child must be considered in giving due consideration to the child's wishes. The views of your adolescent will definitely impact on the viability of a shared residency arrangement.

Younger children's views and wishes must also be considered¹⁸.



A word of caution: it is not appropriate to delegate the residency decision to your children. You should be interested in their opinion but not burden them with making the final decision.

The link between your child's temperament and your style of parenting is very important during the adolescent years. This is specifically true in the case of the temperamentally vulnerable child. Children who are very shy and withdrawn or who are volatile, feisty and hard to manage need specific types of parenting. The quality of parenting is the one factor that can make a difference to these children's future mental well-being. This includes warmth, supervision and effective discipline¹⁹. Careful consideration should be given to whether a shared residency arrangement will serve the needs of an adolescent with a vulnerable temperament.



exercise

What do you believe your adolescent favors in terms of a residency arrangement?

.....

.....

How will you adolescent cope with a shared residency arrangement taking into account their academic and social schedule?

.....

.....

¹⁸ See the booklet: Views of our children at www.familyzone.co.za

¹⁹ Smart, D. (2007). Tailoring parenting to fit the child. AFRC Briefing No 4, 2007. Retrieved at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/pubs/brefing/briefing4.html> on 10 November 2008.



exercise continued

Does your adolescent have a vulnerable temperament?

.....

Will you and your child's other parent be in a position to maintain adequate parental supervision of your adolescent in a shared residency arrangement?

.....

How will you and your child's other parent manage a situation where your adolescent decides to switch residency because he finds the rules at one house too restrictive?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4 Attachment patterns

Children do not necessarily have the same attachment relationship with both parents. The real relationship between parent and child holds the key to a sustainable shared residency arrangement. If the child feels safe and secure with both parents, a shared residency arrangement could be viable and sustainable.

Children who are insecurely attached to one parent may not be emotionally positioned to sustain a shared residency arrangement. When Louise and Kevin separated they decided that the children would live one week with each of them. Their youngest child could not cope with this type of arrangement. He continuously phoned his mother and became more and more withdrawn. Once the parents changed the arrangement for the child to spend more time with his mother, he settled down emotionally, enjoyed his time with his father and become sociable again.



CHAPTER FIVE

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I am concerned that it will be unsettling for my children to live in two homes. I cannot see myself coping with moving between two houses all the time, how can I expect from my children to cope with this?

A shared residency arrangement is not appropriate for all children. It is important to assess whether your children have the temperament to cope with the arrangement. If your children do not have the temperament but are equally bonded to their other parent, you have to address the contact with their other parent in another manner. If your children do not see enough of a parent they are closely bonded to, this can cause difficulties of its own.

Is shared residency an option that could be considered in high conflict cases?

There are indicators that a disproportionate number of high conflict matters are settled or resolved on the basis of a shared residency arrangement. From the previous chapters it is evident that high conflict cases do not create optimum circumstances for a sustainable shared residency arrangement.

Shared residency is sometimes opted for in these matters as it provides a compromise between the existing attachment relationship between one parent and the children and difficulties in the parental capacity of one or both parents. Parents in a high conflict situation, need to access various other forms of support for this type of arrangement to be implemented in a sustainable manner.

How do I know that this option will still be appropriate for my children in 3 years time?

This is a valid concern. You may find yourself in a position a few years down the line where the physical map has changed, parental issues have become contentious or child factors have changed.

Families develop and change. New patterns within the family create new relationships. As you are forming new relationships, you change and your ideas about issues change. These changes ripple into your relationship with your children's other parent and your children.

If you and your child's other parent do not have strategies to stay in touch with each other and allow your parental relationship to develop, you are going to have problems. This could be avoided through regular parenting meetings or other forms of communication. It makes sense to regularly update your parenting plan. The regularity of these meetings will be determined by your children's ages.

My children's father is very keen to have a shared residency arrangement. I believe it may work for the children but I am concerned that if I agree to this type of arrangement I will receive less maintenance from him. Would this be the case?

Accepting a shared residency arrangement may impact on maintenance issues. The best approach to the matter is to complete a calculation of maintenance needs in a shared residency situation and in a situation where your children are living with one parent and has contact with the other parent. Compare these calculations and then enter into a discussion with each other regarding the outcome of the calculation exercise. You may want to consider mediation if you cannot resolve the maintenance issues. The financial viability of the arrangement needs to be sustainable.

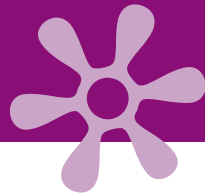


CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

You are now in a position to consider the three important areas that will determine whether shared residency is an option for your family. Use the following checklist to get a bird's eye view on your family's situation in relation to a shared residency arrangement.

	Yes	Maybe	No
Physical factors			
Homes in close enough proximity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School in close enough proximity to both homes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Similar physical environment at two homes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children will be close to friends and activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The arrangement is financially viable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent factors			
Similar approach to routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regulate emotions and behavior well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Separated spousal and parental relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Willingness and capacity to resolve difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both parents involved in care giving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can put children's needs first	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Shared Residency : an option for your family?

This booklet navigates through the various aspects that you need to consider if you are considering, asking for, or opposing a request for shared residency. It is written from the position of what will work well for your child, a support tool consisting of information and exercises that you and professionals assisting families can use in deciding whether shared residency should be considered as a residential option for a specific family

This booklet is one in a series of twelve. Other titles include:

- **Shared residency: An option for your family?**
- Maintenance: Finding a fair solution.
- Residency and contact plans for young children
- Residency and contact plans for school going children
- Listening to the views and wishes of children
- Making most of your contact time
- Trust again? Building a parental alliance
- Family violence and parenting plans

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