Helping Your Family Cope With Family Change



Presented by:

Multnomah County Family Resolution Services (FRS)

and

Clackamas County Resolution Services (CRS)

Family Resolution Services

Clackamas County Resolution Services

We're glad you're here!



You're in the right place. The court requires everyone who is a party to a case that decides a child's custody to take this class.

In Oregon, laws about child custody are the same for all legal parents, whether or not you've ever been married, or whether you are gay, straight, polyamorous, or a relative raising children.

Certificate: If you attend the entire class, you'll receive a certificate of attendance that is your proof that you've fulfilled the parent education requirement.

"The well-being of your child/ren is more important than winning a custody or parenting time dispute"

- Judge Patricia McGuire



Class Guidelines

Video - On, please

Audio - Off (except brief comment/general question)

Driving - No

Children - Out of earshot, please

Questions - Class is lecture format, so we won't be able to answer specific questions during class

Chat - We'll be posting resources throughout class. It's also a great way to support others and contribute your comments and questions

Time - Class is 3.5 hours long. We'll take 2 short breaks.

Agenda

- Risk Factors for children during family changes
- Hearing from the “Experts”
- Rollercoaster of Emotions
- Legal Terms and Dispute Resolution
- Helping Your Child Adjust

Families Change

Look around - there are many people going through family changes just like you and your family.

Families go through all kinds of changes, not just separations - family members are born, die, move, repartner, come out, get sick, recover, etc.

This is just one of many changes you and your family will experience over the years.

Change can be challenging, but it can also be a time of growth and learning, both for you and your children.



Families are Diverse

- Families are as unique as the people in them
- Families can change over time
- Cultural influences impact the experience of family change for children AND parents.



Breakout Room

What is something that you love about the child or children in your life?

AND

What is something you hope to take away from class today that will help you and your children through the process of family transition?

Realities About Family Separation

- Increased financial and emotional stress
- Parents' time with children may change, both in quantity and quality
- Holidays and vacations will

  be different
- New Partners have an impact



What you Should Know about Intimate Partner Violence

The risk of violence *increases* during the separation process. Co-parenting may not be possible at this time, but may be possible in the future. Children's exposure to violence may put them at risk for:

- Experiencing higher levels of anger, anxiety, depression, and school & behavior problems now and in the future
- Being in violent relationships as adults
- Changes in brain development

If Violence is in Your Family, Consider:

- Making safety *a* ***number one*** priority
- Seeking additional legal and emotional support for you and your children, such as:

- ✔ Asking the Court to waive mediation or meet separately (shuttle mediation)
- ✔ Getting secure escort for Court proceedings
- ✔ Having parenting time or exchanges supervised professionally or by someone you both trust
- ✔ Getting domestic violence intervention services

Safety Resources

If you have concerns about your safety or your children's safety:

- In Multnomah County, contact:
  Call to Safety 1-888-235-5333 (24/7) or **Gateway Center – 503-988-6400**
  10305 E Burnside St., Portland, OR 97216

- In Clackamas County, contact: **A Safe Place – 503-655-8600**
  256 Warner Milne Rd., Oregon City, OR 97045

- See your booklet for referral information

Research Tells Us What Hurts Children

- ***Exposure to Chronic Parental Conflict*:** seeing, hearing, or being told about parents fighting with each other
- ***Loyalty Binds*:** *bad-mouthing of the other parent, children being made to feel they have to choose sides*

Separation or divorce by itself does not necessarily hurt children. Children are also at risk in high conflict families that stay together.



Children can be Hurt if They Lose Contact with a Parent

Children often feel it's their fault if a parent loses contact with them.

Do everything you can to stay meaningfully engaged in your child's life.

Foster your child's relationship with their other parent - think of it as a gift you give to your child, not a favor to your co-parent.

If one parent is not safe right now, the court may place conditions on their contact with the child. If possible, try to keep the door open, so a parent can re-enter the child's life when the situation becomes safer.

Your child has their *own* relationship with each of their parents.



Research Also Tells Us Children Do Well When They…

- ★ Are supported by both parents
- ★ Are connected to outside support
- ★ Have strong inner resources
- ★ Have parents that model:
  - Rebuilding their lives
  - Managing conflict constructively

Tell your children: **they are loved, valuable, special, wanted, accepted, great, important...**



Listening to the Experts




VİDEOTİME

Good News

You *CAN* still be a supportive parent, even though the intimate relationship with the other parent has ended.



More Good News

- Most children adjust well to the new family situation over time
- You **can** help your children thrive
- There are many resources for parents and children who want help
- Low-conflict family separations often have little negative impact on children



Emotional Reactions to Family Change



The Grieving Process

Children may experience many feelings …

- Sadness
- Denial
- Anxiety/Fear
- Anger
- Relief
- Stress
- Depression
- Confusion
- Acceptance/Understanding

You may be feeling some of these things too, and not always at the same time or in the same way as your children…



Supporting Your Children Through Family Change

- Let your children know that whatever they feel is okay!
- Help your children ***label*** their feelings with words –

"Name it to Tame it!" - Dr Dan Siegel

Labeling feelings calms the emotional centers of the brain *(Lieberman, et al., May 2007)*



Children need:

- Comfort
- Age appropriate answers
- Guidance and skills for handling anger
- Reassurance & regular routines
- Relief and access to fun activities

You and Your Children May React When…

- You or your child's other parent remarries, re-couples or separates again
- At graduations, marriages and anniversaries
- You or the other parent has a child with a new partner
- Change, or threat of change, in legal arrangements
- Children’s needs change



Take Care of Yourself for Your Children's Sake

- Find healthy ways to manage your stress - ask for help, get counseling or support
- Go slowly when considering long-term legal decisions… one step at a time
- Create a plan and structure for interactions with other parent
- Care for your physical and mental health and well-being.



Breakout Room

What is something safe and legal you do, with or without your children, to take care of yourself mentally and physically during this process?

New Partners..... what to do ?

- Go SLOW with introductions if you want your children to accept a new partner. Don't introduce a new partner before the children have adjusted to the family changes.
- Prepare the other parent before children are introduced to a new partner.
- Expect that children will need take time to adjust to new partners.
- ***Focus** on your children's perspective and needs. **Listen** to their concerns. Children still need **one on one time** with you, even when you're in a new relationship!*



Legal Terms and Problem Solving





Judge Patricia McGuire

Oregon Family Law Basics



Legal Custody

Legal Custody = Decision Making

Legal Custody is decision-making authority about important issues, including non-emergency medical care, education, religion and residence. It is NOT parenting time.

<u>Options in Oregon:</u>

Joint Legal Custody - parents agree to share custodial decisions

Sole Legal Custody – parents may consult, but one parent has final decision-making authority in the specified areas

A Judge cannot order joint legal custody unless both parents agree to it



Parent's Rights to Information

Each parent has the right to access the following information about his/her child:

- Health & Mental Health Treatment
- Education/School Records
- Juvenile Justice Records

…regardless of custody (unless a judge has specifically ordered otherwise).

(Oregon Revised Statutes 107.154)

Considerations for LGBTQIA2+ Families

The laws around child custody and parenting time are the same for all legal parents, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

If you aren't sure of your legal status as a parent, it may be helpful to consult a lawyer with expertise in this area.

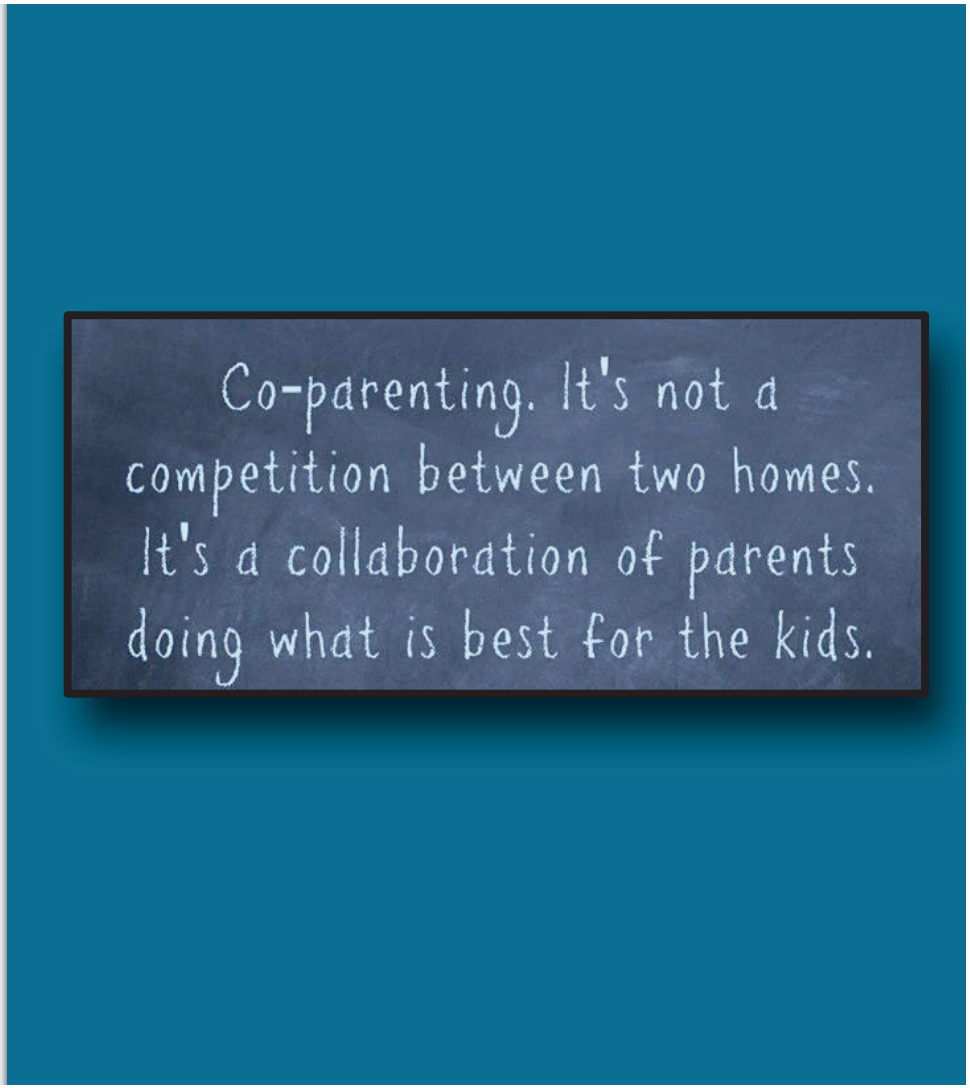
The child's best interest is the most important consideration in all cases. Whether or not a parent gave birth does not determine custody or parenting time.



The Parenting Plan

Oregon law requires parents to make a plan for sharing time and care of children.

Parenting Plans should reflect the age, development, and unique needs of children.



ORS 107.149:

It is the policy of this state to assure minor children of frequent and continuing contact with parents who have shown the ability to act in the best interest of the child and to encourage parents to share in the rights and responsibilities of raising their children after the parents have separated or dissolved their marriage. [1987 c.795 §2]

Parenting Plans Typically Include:



- Parenting time schedule
  - Regular, weekend & summer schedules
  - Holiday, Birthday & vacation schedules
- Legal Custody & Child's residence
- Methods for Communication & Conflict Resolution
- Other Issues Important to Parents

Sample parenting plans are available at:
https://www.courts.oregon.gov/programs/family/children/pages/parenting-plan-guide.aspx and

https://www.multco.us/family-resolution/resources-parents

Parenting Plan
Safety Considerations:

- Child abuse or neglect
- Substance use
- Intimate partner violence
- Power imbalances



- Untreated, severe mental illness that negatively affects children.

Parenting Plans for Children with Special Needs

Parenting plans for children with special needs often include extra details to promote consistency between homes and meet the child's needs.

Parents may disagree about the child's diagnosis, behavior and services - all of which can make creating a parenting plan more challenging.

Mediation may help parents develop parenting plans that best meet their child’s needs.



Choices for Conflict Resolution

Talk: Informal, parents control decisions, builds co-parent relationship, free

Mediate: Supported negotiation, parents control decisions, builds conflict resolution skills, free or low cost

Collaborate: Collaborative attorneys (one representing each parent) works with both parents to reach agreements, often bringing in a team of consultants to assist; *parents control most decisions*

Attorney Settlement: Attorney for each parent negotiates on behalf of parent, less control of message and decisions, can be adversarial and damage co-parent relationship, costly

Trial: Formal, parents have little control, adversarial, can damage co-parent relationship; can be costly. In some situations, however, it is the most appropriate choice.

Most people resolve their case without going to trial

Alternative Dispute Resolution is Mandatory

- Unless you already have a written, signed parenting plan, (or one person did not respond within 30 days of being served), you must try to resolve your dispute outside of court. Mediation is one option to resolve conflict.

- If you don’t try mediation or another form of alternative dispute resolution, the court will not hear your case.

- Even if you agree, it may be a good idea to mediate, but it is not required.

Multnomah Family Resolution Services (FRS) Mediation

Mediation about child custody and parenting time issues is FREE until your youngest child turns 18, but we do not mediate financial issues such as child support. You must schedule and attend orientation before you schedule mediation.

Contact FRS by emailing family.resolution@multco.us or call **503-988-3189**

You can self-schedule mediation orientation here

Find out more at our website: https://www.multco.us/family-resolution

Clackamas County Resolution Services (CCRS) Mediation

If both parties agree to participate, and they have an open Family Law court case, the first two sessions are provided at no charge. Mediation services are billed at $125 per hour. You can mediate about child support, spousal support, asset and debt distribution, in addition to child custody and parenting time issues. Parties will be scheduled for mediation once both have completed the online intake form.

Intake form and payment links are found on our website:
https://www.clackamas.us/ccrs/domestic.html
Contact us at: rs@clackamas.us or leave a voice message at **503-655-8415**.

Child Support  Parenting Time

- Financial support and time with parents belong to the children.
- Children have a right to spend time with a parent even if that parent is not paying child support.
- You must pay child support even if you are not getting to spend time with your child/ren.
- A Joint Legal Custody arrangement does not change or eliminate child support.

Legal Remedies

- **If you are not receiving child support as ordered**, contact the Child Support Enforcement Office for help at 503-988-3150.

- **If you are not seeing your children as ordered**, you may file a motion for Enforcement of Parenting Time with the court. See ORS 107.434

Families Develop Over Time

- Families with young children tend to ***focus in*** on the family and care routines
- Families with school-aged children begin to ***focus out*** on school, skill development, and social activities with other families
- Families with teens are supporting their children in ***developing autonomy*** through increased choices, activities, and social connections to others
- Families with older teens are focused on helping children prepare for ***independence*** by teaching life skills, planning for independent living or schooling, and beginning to let go of parental controls



Ages and Stages

To give us a chance to talk more specifically about how to help your children get through the family change, we are going to divide into 2 groups.

1. **Infant to Elementary School Group** - will stay in the main Zoom room to talk about issues that affect children 0-8 years old.
2. **Preteen/Teen Group** will go into a breakout room to talk about children 9 and up - please raise your hand!

If you have children in both age groups, it's up to you to choose which group will be most helpful to you.

Helping Children Adjust

During Divorce/Separation All Children Need:

- **Adequate and Appropriate Information**
- **To know that they don't have to choose between their parents – they can love you both**
- **Consistent, Predictable Routines & Structure**
- **Emotional Support & Nurturance**
- **Realistic Expectations**



Normal Reactions & Signs of Distress

Normal reactions can include:

- Some clinginess/separation anxiety
- Interruption in developmental milestones
- Wanting to sleep with a parent or not be alone
- Increased worries or fears
- Shyness or avoidance in social situations
- Changes in school performance or not wanting to go to school

Signs of Distress:

- Child cannot be comforted after separating from a parent
- Regression (*going back to old behavior*) is significant and lasts longer than six months
- Extreme anxiety – multiple fears, nightmares, child cannot tolerate being alone
- Signs of serious depression; withdrawal, sadness, sleep problems, loss of interest, etc. Significant school problems or school failure

Attachment is Important

- It is a ***fundamental building block*** for healthy growth and development
- It is established in the first years of life by sensitive, responsive caregiving
- It Creates ***Trust*** – Children learn they can get what they need and be secure with others
- It is linked to good self esteem, school success, ability to handle change and healthy relationships with others



Developmental Stages
Possible Challenges and Suggestions







Infancy – 18 months
"Attachment and Trust"

Possible Challenges	Suggestions
Disruption in routines: feeding, sleeping, toileting	Maintain routines & match in both homes, daycare etc. when possible
Disruptions in attachment relationship with primary caregiver	Support primary attachment and provide frequent contact with non-residential parent to develop & strengthen attachment
Highly sensitive to parent's emotional state	Monitor strong feelings around infant - *Get Support*
The need for frequent and detailed communication @ naps, meals, medications…	Use email, notebook/journal, telephone or website to keep each other informed about child's status

18 Months to 3 Years
“Independence & Autonomy”

Possible Challenges	Suggestions
Need to explore the environment	Provide constant supervision and stimulating environments
Testing limits: saying “no” and having tantrums	Provide structure, consistency and routines; encourage using words to get needs met
More anxiety during transitions and separation, clinging and whining.	Provide warm, responsive care; lower the “voltage” of transitions; maintain existing childcare providers
Parents must have frequent and detailed communication : naps, meals, meds…	Use email, notebook, journal, telephone or website to keep each other informed about child’s status

Parenting Time Schedules for Children Under Age 3 Should…

- Support attachment to primary caregivers
- Minimize exposure to parental conflict and tension
- Try to accommodate feeding and sleep schedules
- Create opportunities for the other parent to build attachment through:
  - Frequent and consistent contact
  - Providing care: feeding, changing, playing and nap time
- Include ways to communicate important information about the health and status of the child



Overnights for Young Children
Things to Consider…

Parenting History & Pre-separation Roles:
What did you do before? Avoid abrupt changes.

Attachment History: *Who has provided primary care? What is the child's level of attachment to each of you?*

Parenting Ability and Skill Set: *What is each parent's ability to soothe, comfort and provide basic care to the child?*

Child's Temperament: *How does your child handle new environments, transitions and time away from a primary caregiver?*

Quality of the Parent to Parent Relationship:
Can you and the other parent communicate about important care details? Can you exchange the child without conflict?



3 - 5 Years
"Socialization and Self-Regulation"

Possible Challenges	Suggestions
Fears of abandonment or loss of a parent	Reassure children of parent's return; use reminders at each home; Encourage parental involvement
Feelings of guilt, confusion and responsibility	Parents tell children about family change together (*See Booklet pg. 29*)
Unwillingness to accept reality of parental separation	Use age appropriate books & materials to give realistic information & expectations about divorce/separation
Behavior problems: regression, heightened aggression, acting perfect, whining, clinging & sadness	Maintain consistent discipline, routines and nurturing activities

6 – 8 Years

"Empathy and Competence"

Possible Challenges	Suggestions
Loyalty conflicts	Shield from parental hostilities
Sadness, longing for absent parent, asking for reconciliation	Regular/frequent time with each parent
Behavior problems: crying, anger, tantrums	Consistent discipline and nurturing activities
School performance problems	Regular school attendance; also inform school about divorce; get support for child in school, tutor, school counseling, etc.
Physical complaints: tummy aches, headaches, etc.	Provide emotional support; encourage talking about feelings, get counseling

Parenting Time Schedules for Pre-school & Elementary Aged Children Should…

- Be predictable and regular, with clear transition routines
- Include ways to communicate important information about the health and status of the child
- Allow for frequent contact but begin to reduce the number of transitions
- Support crucial family life routines: mealtimes, bedtimes, holiday rituals
- Support educational and school activity and involvement
- Support extended family relationships
- Minimize exposure to conflict



9 – 11 Years
"Defining Sense of Self"

Possible Challenges	Suggestions
Hostile toward one or both parents; need to affix blame	Avoid blaming each other, encourage appropriate verbal expression of feelings
Worry about custody	Provide information about the plan, NOT the conflict
Conflicting loyalties	Avoid power struggles with the other parent; reassure child they can love you both
Shame, rejection, resentment, loneliness	Maintain routines, structure and support; talk to kids about their worries; connect them with peer support
Problems in school	Involve both parents; get school support systems engaged; support positive extracurricular activities

Parenting Time Schedules for 9-12 Year Olds Should…

- Support educational and school activities and involvement
- Support developing talents, interests and extracurricular activities – *this is a stage of high learning potential - important brain growth is occurring*
- Accommodate the child's ability to be away from a parent for longer periods of time
- Support the child's growing need for contact with peers and family relationships outside the home
- Minimize exposure to conflict and loyalty binds



Adolescents: *"Separation and Survival"*

Possible Challenges	Suggestions
• Feeling responsible for family members	Maintain parental role with child
• Concern about loss of family and their future	Limit involvement in parental worries
• Anger and hostility	Encourage positive peer support and appropriate expression of feelings
• Acting out emotional distress through delinquency, drug use, immature or overly mature behavior	Maintain consistent discipline; communicate about child's schedule; talk with your child about high risk behavior; drugs, alcohol, self harm

Parenting Time Schedules for Adolescents Should…

- Support educational and school activities and involvement
- Take teens wishes into consideration, but not let them dictate the schedule – ***In Oregon, children cannot legally choose where they live until they are 18 years old***
- Ensure continued contact with both parents even when teens act as though they couldn't care less – *children this age need parents* ***as much as ever***
- Support teens growing need for independence while maintaining important family rituals and traditions
- Minimize exposure to conflict and loyalty binds – **don't make your teen your confidante or your messenger**



Immediate Response is Necessary if You…

- Observe sexualized behavior or suspect sexual abuse.
- Suspect or witness self-harm/self-mutilation.
- Observe your child is talking about, thinking or attempting suicide
- Suspect there is an eating disorder
- Suspect or witness drug/alcohol abuse
- There is school failure
- Physical aggression
- Extreme withdrawal



Closing Thoughts

- ***Protect your children*** from conflicts & loyalty binds
- ***Maintain a meaningful presence*** in your children's lives regardless of how much time you have
- ***Stay in control of decisions*** by finding ways to problem-solve and deal with conflicts together
- ***Take the long view;*** your relationship with your children will outlast parenting plans, child support and your feelings about the other parent
- ***Get support*** so that you can support and help your children

My Two Homes - by Amanda, age 12

Most people have one home,
but I have two.
One of my homes is with my
Mom.
My other home is with my
Dad.
I know they love me.
That's why I like having
My two homes.