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# Shared parenting: a preventative ‘medicine’ for kids

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*Prompted by what might be considered ill-considered comments and misleading analysis by Nebraska based psychologist John Rosemond, the following is a riposte by Dr. Linda Nielsen who as professor of Adolescent and Educational Psychology at Wake Forest University is surely better placed than most to comment .*

*John Rosemond's article appeared in the "Lincoln Nebraska Journal Star" (<http://www.statesboroherald.com/section/252/article/65863/>), and among the several howlers offered up for not supporting shared parenting was the belief that "Equality under the law is a uniquely American principle." Has the man not heard of the French Revolution or Magna Carta (the very basis for the American Constitution), or of its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year ?*

## “Shared parenting: preventative medicine for kids”

By Dr. Linda Nielsen, JournalStar.com, Feb 20th 2015

**N.B. access to the article by foreign based readers has now been blocked by the Lincoln Nebraska Journal Star (why ?)**

Columnist and psychologist John Rosemond recently wrote that when deciding contested custody cases, judges should avoid equal parenting outcomes and instead give one parent primary custody with the other parent receiving limited parenting time (“Custody should focus on fairness to kids,” Lincoln Journal Star (Nebraska), Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> 2015).

Mr. Rosemond argued that equal parenting arrangements were based on the best interests of the parents rather than the best interests of the children. Mr. Rosemond is absolutely correct that, when their parents separate, children have “rights.” More importantly, children have “needs” that adults should ensure are met — especially if those adults happen to be mental health professionals or judges.

Do too many hurt and angry parents put their own “rights” and needs ahead of their children’s? Unfortunately, yes. Some parents indulge their “need” to punish the other parent by restricting their parenting time even at the expense of their children’s physical and mental health. Even worse, these parents are often aided by mental health professionals and judges who are not familiar with the research — or who have been misled by poorly informed seminar speakers and writers.

Many of us are upset with parents who feel they have the “right” to deprive their children of necessary medical attention, even though these loving and often well-educated parents sincerely believe this is in “the best interests of the child.” Similarly there are parents, judges and mental health professionals who advise against a powerful preventative medicine — one that protects children for a lifetime against damaged, weakened, or completely lost relationships with one of their parents. That preventative medicine is shared parenting — allowing children to continue living with both parents at least 35 percent of the time.

Mental health research clearly shows shared parenting provides the best outcomes in most cases for children whose parents aren’t living together. There are **43 peer-reviewed studies** that compare children in shared parenting families to those who live primarily or exclusively with one parent.

The results are clear and unambiguous. The children in shared parenting families have better outcomes. Did the parents in the shared parenting families have especially communicative, friendly relationships with each other? No. Did they mutually agree at the outset to share rather than to hoard parenting time without any nudging from mediators, lawyers or therapists? No. Do these 43 studies show these children’s lives are unstable, disrupted or stressful because they lived in two homes instead of one? No.

When their parents are behaving badly towards each other, are children any worse off living in two homes rather than one? No. For the past quarter century, in dozens of research studies, have most children told us that the every other weekend parenting plan is meeting their needs, making them feel stable and secure, and reducing the disruption in their lives? No. In fact, they’ve told us quite the opposite.

Last year, 110 international experts on child development, early childhood attachment and divorce reached a ground-breaking consensus — shared parenting, including frequent ‘overnighting’ (i.e. sleepovers), with both parents for infants and toddlers, is in children’s best interests. Too many mental health professionals and professors offer recommendations about parenting plans that are based on their personal beliefs — not on empirical data. Indeed many of these professionals have never read the available research.

Just as some poorly informed doctors offer outdated or harmful advice about medical treatments, there are professionals who offer advice to judges and mental health practitioners that is not research-based. More troubling still, many of these speakers and writers convincingly present their opinions as if they were actually reporting empirical data — a disguise that is not only disingenuous but potentially harmful to children whose lives are affected by judges’ and mental health practitioners’ decisions regarding custody issues. In short, too many well intentioned judges and practitioners have been misled into accepting advice that is not based on empirical evidence.

Shared parenting is not about parents’ rights. It is about making the best choices for children — decisions that are firmly grounded in research — not on the personal opinions of parents, seminar speakers, mental health professionals or judges.

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