



## HELPING A NON-CUSTODIAL FATHER

By Wayne D. Stocks

August 6, 2012



Several months ago, we received the following comment on [a post](#) here on Divorce Ministry 4 Kids:

*Do you have anything I can read about the upside down family law court system in OK? How do you help three little boys whose father adores them, helps them with all their sports, mother has an affair and the court system gives him only standard visitation. 4 days a month is UNPARDONABLE! What can be done to come against a small town judge who clearly has issues against men herself to rule the way she did???*

*I don't know the details of this family's situation, but I have been involved in enough divorce cases to know that many times one side, or both, feels this way about the decisions handed down by the court. I also know that those of us who work with children of divorce are often solicited for information and advice by the parents of the kids that we minister to.*

*With the help of Linda Ranson Jacobs, a co-writer here on Divorce Ministry 4 Kids, who has worked extensively with children of divorce and lived for a long period of time in Oklahoma, I set out to answer this question in a manner which I feel would be most beneficial to the kids involved. Here is my answer:*

Dear Troubled in Oklahoma,

Thank you for reading Divorce Ministry 4 Kids, and for your question. I understand your sense of frustration both with the current circumstances, and the decision of this particular court. Of course, I do not know the specifics of your situation beyond the facts you gave me or about the court your friend's divorce was handled in.

First, and foremost, I believe that you must focus your efforts on making the transition to divorce as easy as possible for the children involved. A divorce is most definitely hard on all parties involved, but the truth is that it is the kids who suffer the most and often are forced to suffer in silence. To that end, I would like to suggest a number of things I would recommend your friend do as well as several things that are specific to helping his kids to weather the storm with minimal pain.





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There are a number of things that your friend can do to help himself so that he will be in the best position to be able to help his kids. It is an unfortunate reality that we cannot help others emotionally until we help ourselves.

So, I would encourage your friend to:

1. Either stay in the church he is currently attending or find a good church in his area. It is important in this time of turmoil to have somewhere solid to turn, and God is that rock. To that end, being in a supportive Bible-believing community and regularly reading the Bible can help to rebuild a foundation which will ultimately allow him to be a support for his kids.
2. Enroll in a program for adults going through a divorce like Divorce Care to allow him work on his own healing. He will not be in a position to deal with his kids' sense of loss until he deals with his own emotions.
3. Once that program is complete, I would encourage him to enroll in a class for single parents or blended families (depending on the situation). This is a new role for him (single father), and he would do well to get involved with others who have been through this same thing.
4. When things seem out of control, for example when a judge does not allow for what you feel is sufficient visitation, the best thing a parent can do is to focus on improving themselves and becoming an even better parent than they were before.
5. Encourage him to avoid focusing on the negatives. This will only lead to bitterness. As the kids pick up on this negative outlook and bitterness (and they will), they will either spend all their time trying to make him feel better rather than working on their own issues or begin to emotionally check out.
6. Remind him to never bad-mouth the children's mother in front of them. Children take these kinds of comments as a personal attack.
7. Tell him not to engage in self-pity or bickering about what is fair. The important thing now is those kids and what he needs to do to be the dad that they deserve.
8. It is also critical that he doesn't let the current situation affect his relationship with your kids. No matter how grim things might seem, it is important that he persevere in doing all he can to work on the relationship with his kids. The custody arrangement might not be what he wants, but it is reality, and he has to find a way to work within that arrangement to forge a lasting relationship with his kids.
9. Encourage him not to do anything to jeopardize the time that he does get with the kids. For example, he should always be on time when picking up the kids and returning them.
10. He must resist the urge to out-spend, out-give or out-entertain the kids in the brief time they are with him. They still need a father, and that includes discipline and structure.
11. He should look for alternate ways of keeping in contact when he can't see the kids face-to-face. For example,





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- a. He can try to make arrangements with the mother to call the kids every night or several times a week.
  - b. He could send them cards each week on the same day so the kids will expect them and be excited about them.
  - c. He might email them once a week or Skype a couple of times a week.
  - d. He could consider reading the kids a story via Skype a couple of nights a week.
12. Have him consider ways to stay in touch with the kids ways that don't interfere with his ex-wife. By doing some of these things, he might be able to edge into their daily lives more and more. However, I would caution that he must remain committed to doing this for the long-term and not expect immediate results. Ideas include,
- a. Make offers to the mother to help with the kids during the week.
  - b. Pick them up from scouts or other extra-curricular activities.
  - c. Take them "off their mom's hands" if she has to work late.
13. He should do what he can to convince his ex-wife that his desire is simply to be a good dad. Whether it is right or wrong, fair or unfair, he may have to prove this to her, and it may take some time.
14. Most importantly, he must be prepared to stick it out for the long-term. The results from any, or all, of these suggestions will not be immediate, but he has to remain committed and resolute about doing anything and everything for the benefit of the kids.

I understand that many of the suggestion given above are not what your friend wants to hear. There are no easy solutions when it comes to divorce, but all of these things will make it easier on the kids. Hopefully, in the long run, all of these things will convince the ex-wife and the judge that your friend is most interested in being a good dad. Ultimately though, his kids will realize that he has always been there for them, and that is the most important thing.

Best of luck to you and your friend,

Divorce Ministry 4 Kids

