

Tips for Fathers Involved in Child Custody Cases: Establishing Your Good Parenting Skills

By **Scott David Stewart**

At the [Law Offices of Scott David Stewart](#), our attorneys regularly meet with fathers requesting [child custody](#) related legal representation. These fathers want regular, significant involvement with their children. Fathers often believe that their best parenting efforts have been thwarted, through no fault of their own. The Court system may have worked to frustrate the father's efforts. The Judge in the divorce may have ruled against the father. The opposing party may have pushed an agenda to minimize the father's role in their children's lives. Regardless of how it occurred, both father and child suffer when a father's parenting role is diminished.

In Arizona child custody cases, both parents have their actions, judgments, and statements scrutinized by both the *Child Custody Evaluator* and the Court. One of the key components in a custody case is the level of each parent's involvement with the child. When a father seeks significant involvement with his child, he must be committed, fully prepared, and have a plan.

The father in a custody case must convince the Judge or custody evaluator that he should be given equal access to the children for parenting time. If the father seeks primary custody, then it is absolutely essential that he establish the requisite dedication, character, and responsible nature to be there for his child "day-in and day-out."

With our experience in *fathers' rights*, we have learned to recognize some common mistakes that fathers make in their child custody cases. The suggestions below are a vital part of any father's successful child custody case.

TIP: Be Sure to Document Your Parenting Time.

Child custody cases often involve accusations that the father hasn't been spending time with the children. Because child custody cases can take months to resolve, and require full and accurate descriptions of parenting time, you should document -- on a calendar or in a parenting journal -- what occurred during *parenting time*. Failure to account accurately for parenting time in a child custody case may seriously damage your credibility. Document special activities with the child, such as a trip to the park, a swim at a neighborhood pool, a special events with friends, a child's softball game, or time spent with extended family.

TIP: Be Involved in Your Child's Extracurricular Activities.

Father's need to be involved in their *children's extracurricular activities*. Whenever possible, adjust your schedule so you can be there, personally, to witness your child's participation in these activities. If your child has a particular interest, such as math and science, then investigate the kinds of classes and activities that will help your child develop that interest. Think about activities that you would like to participate in, too. Your personal interest will show in your genuine enthusiasm. Look to activities that draw on interests your child has talked about.

Once you've identified an activity, *investigate implementation*. Learn where your child can pursue the activity, and be prepared to show proximity to your home. Also, try to show how any actual or planned activities, such as swimming lessons or softball, will work into a proposed parenting schedule.

Make sure that you know who your child's coaches are, and with any team sport, know who the child's teammates are. Be knowledgeable not only about the position your child plays, but about

the team's overall performance record. Make sure that you are up to date on the team's practice and game schedule.

TIP: Don't Be a Victim of Circumstance.

Issues over a father's uninvolved involvement in the child's extracurricular activities may be the result of being "left out of the loop," so to speak. If the activity was initiated by the mother, and she failed to consult with you, then be proactive and discuss the activity with her. Make sure that you save copies of emails and text messages on the topic. Maybe the mother doesn't notify you of dates, times, and locations for games and practices. *Don't be victim* to the whims of the other parent, and don't leave yourself vulnerable to accusations of poor parenting. Do your homework, investigate and get your child's schedule from a team-player's parent, from the league representative, or from the organization's activity website. Get your name on the email distribution list for newsletters, game times and locations, and practice locations and schedule changes. In that way, you will not be reliant on the other parent's good will, and you'll stay apprised of your child's schedule.

The more involved you can demonstrate you are with your child's activities, the stronger your child custody case will be. Don't let yourself be characterized as an uninterested father with no time for the child because you're a chronic no-show at the child's activities. Get involved early on, arrange to get every schedule, show up at the child's activities, and always stay connected.

TIP: Be Knowledgeable of Your Child's Educational Progress.

To fully understand how your child's education is progressing, there is perhaps no simpler method than to *actively participate* in the process. Help your child work through homework assignments and special event projects, such as the school's annual science fair. A little guidance from an interested, supportive father goes a long way toward helping your child achieve, accomplish, and gain confidence.

Be knowledgeable about your child's education. Be cognizant of your child's strengths and weaknesses. Be aware of any problems at school and after school. Get to know all of your child's teachers. The teachers will, in turn, get to know you because you're a father who makes himself available and is fully engaged in the student's homework and projects. These are all significant, persuasive factors that demonstrate how you have been consistently involved, focused, and engaged in your child's education.

TIP: Be Present at Educational Special Events.

Of all the educational special events involving your child, probably the most influential is the *parent-teacher conference*. Attend the conference fully prepared to discuss all aspects of your child's educational progress and society at the school. Be knowledgeable and apprised of every element of your child's educational development. If you, as a father, desire equal parenting time with the child's mother, or desire to be the child's primary custodial parent, then it is absolutely critical that you show your parenting commitment and attend parent-teacher conferences as scheduled.

TIP: Have a Well Developed Child Care Plan.

If you desire significant parenting involvement, then your commitment, preparation, and planning could not be better illustrated than with a well developed *child daycare plan*. Many fathers are unsuccessful in custody cases because their child care plan was inadequate or nonexistent.

You must be prepared to demonstrate:

- 1) *How you will properly care for their child while you're at work.*
- 2) *How you will make adjustments to your work schedule.*
- 3) *How you will be flexible with needed care for the child.*
- 4) *How you will transport the child to activities and events.*
- 5) *How you will be as involved in your child's life as you claim you want to be.*

TIP: Be Knowledgeable About Daycare Providers.

When it comes to daycare you should *be very knowledgeable* about, and very familiar with, the people who will care for your child. Know the name of the person in charge of the daycare facility. Know whether there are records about your child's activities and behavior and, if there are, obtain copies for your custody case. Determine whether you'll drop the child off or pick the child up (or both) at daycare, and get any records documenting your having done so. Be very involved in the selection of daycare providers for your child, including the interview process of potential providers. Make sure you investigate any problems that the facility has presently or has had in the past.

TIP: Document Your Communications with Child Care Providers.

To *be fully prepared* for your child custody case, when you speak with the child's school, a daycare provider, or a medical provider, take the time to document who you spoke with. List the names, addresses, telephone numbers, and email contacts of the people you communicated with and summarize what you discussed with them.

Lastly, establish your ability to care for your child with supporting documents. For each and every aspect of raising the child -- education, medical decisions, religious decisions, extracurricular activities, and the like -- find something to document your involvement. Include formal and informal records, brochures, letters, emails, handwritten notes, and any writing that can be submitted in the child custody case on your behalf. Never miss an opportunity to collect evidence supporting your ability to parent your child.