

What educators can do to help their students and help reduce family conflict

There are a number of things that educators can do to help children without getting caught "in the middle".

- ❑ **Do not interpret a court Order or take the word of any one parent.** If a court Order does not say that a parent cannot see one of their children at school, then do not assume this. Educators should promote healthy involvement of any parent with their child.
- ❑ **Try to keep the school out of direct negotiations between parents.** If there appears to be some kind of conflict between parents, request that the parents to obtain the services of a neutral third party, such as a family coordinator or mediator.
- ❑ **Never assume that a parent is a "risk" to their child.** No educator should be denying contact between a child and either of the parents at school without a court Order specifically stating so. Parents of separation or divorce may not be treated differently than parents from intact families.
- ❑ **Encourage and promote parental involvement at the school.** Studies show that parent involvement at school, especially with non-custodial parents, can have a positive impact on a child's performance at school.
- ❑ **Know the law.** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) specifically states that, absent a court order to the contrary, both parents have the right under Federal law to access their children's school records.
- ❑ **If a parent insists that the school keep the other parent away, ask the parent to produce a court Order showing where this is stated.** If the parent is insistent, this is all the more reason to be suspicious of their motives. Request that they take the matter to court and have the court settle the matter.

IT'S THE LAW!

Section 99.4 of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) states:

"An educational agency or institution shall give full rights under the Act to either parent unless the agency or institution has been provided with evidence that there is a court order, state Statute, or legally binding document relating to such matters as divorce, separation, or custody, that specifically revokes these rights."

Educational institutions that violate the provisions in FERPA risk loss of Federal funding.

For further information about the rights of children of divorce, contact FRTC.



<http://www.deltabravo.net/custody>

FRTC
PO Box 82764
Kenmore, WA 98028

A listing of the Federal and State statutes affecting non-custodial parent access to school records and school grounds can be found at

www.deltabravo.net/custody/access.htm

Information for educators concerning families of separation or divorce

A public awareness initiative sponsored by



FRTC

A resource and support group for fathers and noncustodial parents.

The Problem

Every year in the US, thousands of children and their families are devastated as a result of litigation in the family court system. Many families end up losing their homes, their children, their life savings, their jobs, their future income, and their dignity as result of the ravages in the court system. Normal, everyday families that once had a home and enjoyed the ordinary pleasures of life, find themselves in financial ruin.

In many cases the adversarial legal system itself is responsible for this devastation. Parental relationships and family ties with children are often destroyed forever, and often the loving relationship that a child once shared with two parents and two extended families is destroyed by the legal process with little thought for the child.

What Does This Have to Do With You?

In recent years, educators have inadvertently been made unwilling participants of a family's conflict. Many educators, acting without clear policy and with little understanding of the law, have often reacted in ways that have served to intensify the family's conflict, create bad feelings between the parent and school and further cause emotional harm to children. The lack of awareness by teachers and school officials of how to effectively and fairly deal with the growing problems of families of separation or divorce has been responsible for harm to a great number of children.

The vast majority of problems involving children of separation or divorce at school are created when one parent, usually the custodial one, will attempt to manipulate teachers and school officials into a position that supports them in their attempts to create interference with their child's relationship with the other parent or

members of the other parent's extended family during the times the child is in attendance at school.

Teachers and school officials must be vigilant to ensure that they don't get drawn into the conflict by taking sides and reacting in a manner that is damaging to the child or acting outside of the law. For example, the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** specifically states that **both parents have the right under Federal law to access their children's school records.**

As an educator or administrator, you cannot legally refuse a parent access to report cards and other records. Access must be provided regardless of custodial status.

Many states specifically provide in their statutes that a custody determination to one parent does not affect the rights of the other parent in regards to school records and access.

What is FRTC?

FRTC is an organization set up to support the involvement of both parents in their children's lives after divorce or separation.

FRTC works to reduce family conflict by:

- 1) Developing and distributing educational and resource materials for members of the public.
- 2) Directing family members to a number of educational and health related services in the community.
- 3) Minimizing the parent's involvement with the courts through research and investigation and by obtaining community opinions and input into recommendations for each family.
- 4) Providing resources and referrals to parents who are denied access to their children.

Alienating Parents

Parents who alienate children from their former spouse are committing a form of **child abuse**. Educators must make themselves aware of parents who alienate children.

Some signs of an alienating and controlling parent:

- Requests that the non-custodial parent not be allowed to visit the child while the child is at school (such as lunches and recesses) even though the custodial parent is not able to be there themselves.
- Tries to prevent the other parent from participating on school trips, classroom activities or other events.
- Insists that report cards and other school documents be given to them and not the other parent.
- Makes personal comments about the non-custodial parent, which are not relevant to the best interests of the child in an attempt to put the other parent in a bad light.
- Claims that the child says that they do not want to see the other parent (Never accept the word of only one parent).
- The controlling parent will try to keep the non-custodial parent isolated from teachers and school officials. These parents will attempt to prevent educators from seeing the truth about the child's relationship with the non-custodial parent. They will attempt to impede any routine communication between educators and the non-custodial parent.
- Appears to be disturbed by the other parent's presence at school functions and seem to go out of their way to avoid the other parent at such activities. They will walk away and ignore the other parent.