

THE NELSON LAW OFFICE P.C.

Tips for Custody Matters

1. Be honest.
2. Remember there are two parts to custody: Decision-making authority, and the physical location of the children. Both of these can be shared, divided, or sole.
3. Reflect on your reasons for seeking custody.
4. Think about the children's happiness and best interests.
5. Think about how parenting will be after you separate. Discipline, education, homework, and extracurricular involvement are a few examples.
6. Reflect on how you and the other parent can accommodate parenting time with your work schedules.
7. Do not seek custody for financial reasons.
8. Make lists of interests you have in common with the other parent to lead the way to fair compromise and cordial co-parenting after you separate.
9. Ensure your children's physical and psychological well-being. Focus on your children's routine, sleeping habits, eating schedule, and after-school activities. Encourage and exemplify a healthy lifestyle.
10. Continue to spend time with your children. Take photos together, and be in the photos. Be engaged in family-oriented and age-appropriate activities.
11. Ensure your actions reflect that your children are a priority in your life. For example, spend time with extended family if you wish, but don't frequently leave the children with your family and then go somewhere else.

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12. Use all the time that you have allotted in your schedule with your children, and as much additional time offered with children as you reasonably can.
13. Give advance notice to the other parent of scheduled time you must miss with the children. This also avoids disappointing the children.
14. Know the names, locations, phone numbers and email addresses of the schools, teachers, doctors, friends of your children, coaches, and babysitters who interact with your children. These people should know you.
15. Attend parent-teacher conferences and doctor appointments.
16. Encourage your children's relationship with the other parent and extended family. Courts usually find that encouraging a relationship with the other parent is in a child's best interest.
17. Keep the other parent informed of health, school, and other important matters regarding the children.
18. Discuss matters about the children with the other parent, but do not engage in arguments. Walk away if it will shield your children from fighting, yet never leave a young child unattended.
19. Shield the children from hostility and the details of litigation.
20. Allow reasonable contact and phone time between your children and the other parent.
21. Don't take the children to new or distant places without the other parent knowing.
22. Don't pick up the children early from school or daycare without the other parent knowing.
23. Do not allow the children to miss school unless there is an emergency.

24. Keep a calendar or notes of your time with the children. Record where parenting time occurs, the length of time, frequency (daily, weekly, biweekly etc.) Make sure no one else has access to modify, erase or dispose of your records. You do not have to tell the other parent that you are keeping records. Note breaches in your agreement(s) if you have one: Late pick-up/return; failing to appear at school conferences or doctor appointments, or injury or incidents with the children. You may also find it useful to note a failure to pay support, school or activity fees, or missing belongings of the children after parenting time.
25. Take note of or correct the most serious concerns when parenting time is being decided, for example: Any kind of substance abuse, criminal history, denigrating the other parent or their family, and physical abuse of the other parent or children. Exposing the children to substance abuse, a transient lifestyle, or new romantic partners may also cause issues.
26. Think about the relatives, friends, and romantic partners the other parent may expose the children to, and who you expose them to. In nearly every case, it is better not to discuss or introduce the children to significant others or new romantic partners before you have an agreement or order of parenting time.
27. Be cautious when speaking to mutual friends of the other parent.
28. Make a list of potential witnesses. They may be teachers or nannies for example. Talk to your attorney before approaching others to be a witness.
29. Consider audio or video recording at home.
30. Act like you are being recorded. Imagine your emails, text messages, and social media posts being read by a judge before sending them.
31. Do not discuss or reference your case on social media. Ensure you are portrayed as a loving and caring parent on social media.

32. In most situations, continuing to live in the home with your children is best until your separation or divorce is resolved.
33. Follow court procedures.
34. If there is an attorney for the children appointed in your case, treat them with respect. Do not criticize the attorney for the children, the judge, or the court system.
35. Keep a neat appearance, dress professionally, and be on time for court and meeting professionals such as the attorney for your children or forensic experts.
36. If you contribute financially to the children's household, use traceable methods, not cash. Keep records and proof of support paid.
37. If planning to move away from the children's home, maintain the status quo as much as possible for the children's stability. For example, consider extracurricular activities, nanny, school district boundaries, doctors, having suitable rooms and home space for your children, and consider commute times for yourself and the children.
38. Rely on family and friends for support, but remember every family and every case is different.
39. You should feel comfortable discussing these matters with your attorney. These are only guidelines for most cases. Work with your attorney to present yourself and your goals in the best way possible.