

Myths and Truths about Shared Parenting— Beyond Children’s Well-Being

Myth	Truth
Shared parenting is a “one size fits all” arrangement.	Shared parenting is an extremely flexible approach to separated parenting. There are many different equal shared parenting schedules to fit the needs of different families. Research supports schedules tailored to the ages of children with shorter exchange periods for younger children. But it does not support unequal parenting time even for infants and toddlers. Baude <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Fabricius, 2020
Parenting roles should remain the same after separation and divorce.	Parenting roles usually must change after separation and divorce. The experience of one parent taking on more parenting responsibilities and another pursuing career activities can provide for more enriching experiences for the children with each parent. Children raised in shared parenting arrangements demonstrate better adjustment, across several domains including family relationships, behavioral adjustment, emotional well-being, and academic achievement than children who remain in the sole custody of one parent regardless of how parenting roles were handled when the parents lived together. Fabricius & Hall, 2005; Emery, 2004; Fabricius, 2003; Bauserman, 2002
Shared parenting increases parental conflict.	There is no scientific support for the claim that shared parenting increases parental conflict. In fact, both mothers and fathers practicing shared parenting report less conflict and more emotional support and positive feelings with their ex-spouses. Bauserman, 2012; Kruk, 2013; Nielson, 2017 & 2018
Shared parenting increases domestic violence (intimate partner violence).	Recent research has demonstrated just the opposite: presumptions of equal shared parenting reduce the incidence of intimate partner violence and female partner homicides. Fernández-Kranz, <i>et al.</i> , 2020
Presumptions of shared parenting have been tried and were found unsuccessful.	There are no examples in which presumptive shared parenting legislations were reversed because of unsuccessful outcomes. A California example that is sometimes cited as a retrenchment from shared parenting was, in fact, a clarification that the previous law did not, in fact, create a presumption in favor of shared parenting. Public polling demonstrates that presumptions of shared parenting are popular with the public and research has shown that equal shared parenting presumptions are favored by divorce professionals. Fabricius, <i>et al.</i> , 2018
Shared parenting arrangements are unstable and tend to turn into a sole custody arrangement, except in name.	While a very old (1980s) study in California suggested that shared parenting arrangements tended to drift over time to sole maternal custody arrangements, recent research has demonstrated that “the living arrangements of children with shared placement were at least as stable as those of children with sole mother placement.” Bartfield, <i>et al.</i> , 2021
Even though shared parenting is better for children, there should be no legal presumptions about parenting time.	Legal presumptions of equal shared parenting provide parents and children with assurances that their relationship will be protected. Young adults who were raised by divorced parents wish that they had more equal parenting time with both their parents. Fabricius, 2003 & 2020
Fathers could share in the physical custody of their children more if they wanted to share equally in the responsibility of raising children.	Child support often limits a father’s financial ability to set up a residence that supports equal shared physical custody. The legal costs required to fight for equal parenting time often deter parents from asking for equal time. Fabricius and Braver, 2003; Braver, 1998; Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 2004
Children will be less supported financially if they spend equal time living with fathers because it will decrease the amount of child support the father must pay.	Financial support for children can be either direct, what parents spend themselves on the children, or indirect, what one parent gives the other to spend on the children. Equal shared parenting often results in less indirect spending on a child but, it always results in much more direct spending. The more time children spend in the care of their fathers, the more money fathers spend on supporting the children. Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2004; Braver, 1998, Fabricius & Braver, 2003

Annotated References

Reference	General Findings/Conclusions
Bartfeld, J. <i>et al.</i> (2021). Stability of Placement Arrangements Among Divorced Wisconsin Families with Sole Mother and Shared Placement Orders. <i>Institute for Research on Poverty Research Report</i> .	This recent research studied the stability of shared parenting arrangements differs from previous research in two significant ways. First, unlike earlier studies, it studied the stability of shared parenting in a context where shared parenting is no longer uncommon and, secondly, it studied this over a longer period than previous studies had. Researchers found "no evidence that shared placement orders are particularly unstable, either in an absolute sense or relative to sole placement."
Baude, A. <i>et al.</i> (2016). Child Adjustment in Joint Physical Custody Versus Sole Custody: A Meta-Analytic Review. <i>Journal of Divorce & Remarriage</i> . 57(5), 338-360.	This meta-analytic study found that "better adjustment for young people in joint custody was only significant for those who spent an equal or almost equal amount of time with their two parents."
Bauserman, R. (2002). Child Adjustment in Joint-Custody Versus Sole-Custody Arrangements: A Meta-Analytic Review. <i>Journal of Family Psychology</i> , 16(1), 91–102.	A meta-analysis of 33 studies compared adjustment between children being raised in sole custody and children being raised in joint custody after divorce. Children were found to be better adjusted in areas of self-esteem, family relationships, divorce related adjustment, academic achievement, and emotional and behavioral adjustment, when raised by parents who shared legal and physical custody.
Bauserman, R. (2012). A Meta-Analysis of Parental Satisfaction, Adjustment, and Conflict in Joint Custody and Sole Custody Following Divorce. <i>Journal of Divorce & Remarriage</i> . 53(6), 464-488.	"[B]oth JC [joint physical custody] mothers and JC fathers report less conflict with their ex-spouse, and more emotional support and positive feelings in the relationship. Frequency of relitigation is also less in cases of JC (especially for specific types of actions, such as child support modification)."
Braver, S. (1998). <i>Divorced Dads: Shattering the Myths</i> . New York: Putnam.	The book is a compilation of findings based on an 8-year federally funded study of divorced fathers. The research found that most policies and professional beliefs have been based on inaccurate negative stereotypes of the "divorced father." The book describes six myths about divorced fathers that were unsupported by research findings.
Emery, R. (2004). <i>The Truth About Children and Divorce</i> . New York, NY: Viking.	While divorce is an adjustment for children, it does not necessarily cause lasting damage. It is a major stressor, but "pain is not pathology. Grief is not a mental disorder."
Fabricius, W. (2003) Listening to Children of Divorce: New Findings that Diverge from Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee. <i>Family Relations</i> 52(4), 385-396	College students preferred equal time with parents after divorce. They reported better adult relationships with parents, feeling more supported by their parents, and receiving more college support from parents when they had equal parenting time arrangements after divorce.
Fabricius, W. & Braver, S. (2003) Divorced Parents' Financial Support of Their Children's College Expenses, <i>Family Court Review</i> . 41,145-56.	Data reported from a large group of college students who received support from divorced parents who voluntarily contributed to college expenses showed that mothers and fathers contributed equally when their resources were similar. Fathers contributed more proportionately than mothers when they had joint legal custody than when mothers had sole custody.
Fabricius, W. & Hall, J. A. (2005). Young Adults' Perspectives on Divorce Living Arrangements. <i>Family Court Review</i> . 38(4), 446–461.	820 college students provided their perspectives on the parents' divorce. The majority wished they had been able to spend more time with their fathers while growing up. Their perspective was that their fathers wanted more time, but their mothers did not want them to have more time.
Fabricius, W. <i>et al.</i> (2018). What Happens When There is Presumptive 50/50 Parenting Time? An Evaluation of Arizona's New Child Custody Statute. <i>Journal of Divorce & Remarriage</i> . 59(5), 414-428.	Four years after Arizona enacted its shared parenting legislation, research showed that "the law functions as a rebuttable presumption of equal parenting time; that it is evaluated positively overall in terms of children's best interests" by "conciliation court staff, judges, mental health professionals, and attorneys" and that it "has a neutral impact on legal and interpersonal conflict."
Fabricius, W. (2020). Equal Parenting Time: The Case for a Legal Presumption. <i>The Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law</i> (pp. 453-476). Oxford University Press.	"[T]he overall pattern of evidence indicates that legal presumptions of equal parenting time would help protect children's emotional security with each of their divorced parents, and consequently would have a positive effect on public health in the form of reduced long-term stress-related mental and physical health problems among children of divorce."
Fernández-Kranz, D. <i>et al.</i> (2020). Bargaining Under Threats: The Effect of Joint Custody Laws on Intimate Partner Violence. <i>IZA Discussion Papers</i> , No. 13810.	Researchers in Spain found that presumptions of equal shared parenting led to almost a 50% decrease in IPV among divorcing parents and to a significant reduction in female homicides by intimate partners.
Kruk, E. (2013). <i>The Equal Parenting Presumption</i> . Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queens University Press.	Kruk addresses many of the myths concerning equal shared parenting, including its benefits to children in a wide variety of circumstances and its effect on parental conflict/cooperation.
Nielsen, L. (2017). Re-Examining the Research on Parental Conflict, Coparenting, and Custody Arrangements. <i>Psychology, Public Policy, and Law</i> . 23, 211–231.	This article addresses four questions: (1) How much consideration should be given to co-parenting conflict when determining parenting time, (2) Do children have better outcomes when their divorced parents have low levels of conflict, (3) are children's outcomes worsened by parents taking their divorces to court, and (4) are children's outcomes better in sole-physical custody situations if the parents are conflicted and uncooperative?
Nielsen, L. (2018). Joint Versus Sole Physical Custody: Children's Outcomes Independent of Parent–Child Relationships, Income, and Conflict in 60 Studies. <i>Journal of Divorce & Remarriage</i> . 59(4) 247-281.	This article reviews the outcomes for children in joint physical custody (JPC) compared to those in sole physical custody (SPC) controlling for income, coparenting conflict, and quality of the parent-child relationship. Regardless of income, conflict, or the quality of children's relationships with their parents, JPC generally children had better outcomes on most or on all measures.
Fabricius, W. & Braver, S. (2003). Non-Child Support Expenditures on Children by Nonresidential Divorced Fathers. <i>Family Court Review</i> . 41, 70-82.	The investigation provided preliminary support that nonresidential fathers' expenditures on items such as clothes, bicycles, auto expenses, toys, etc. increase as their time with the child increases. Fathers were also found to contribute to these expenses at high levels even when they had minimal contact time with the child. The findings support more adjustment in child support calculations for nonresidential parents.
Wallerstein J. and S. Blakeslee. (2004). <i>What About the Kids?</i> Hyperion.	Based on the authors' 30 years of in-depth interviews with children of divorced parents, they advise divorced parents on how to protect their children during divorce, addressing topics such as introducing new partners, when and how to tell children about divorce, choosing custody arrangements, and how to raise children who can build lasting relationships.