

Evidence-Based Decision Tree for Considering Shared Parenting

Leslie Drozd, PhD, Co-editor, Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for Family Court, Newport Beach, CA (lesliedrozd@gmail.com)

Nancy W. Olesen, PhD, Independent Practice, San Rafael, CA (olesenphd@aol.com)

Michael Saini, PhD, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada (michael.saini@utoronto.ca)



Ten or fifteen years ago, shared care was a comparatively rare phenomenon

(Cashmore, Parkinson, Weston, Patulny, Redmond, Qu, Baxter, Rajkovic, Sitek, & Katz, 2010).

Some social science research suggests that equal contact with both parents is beneficial for children's wellbeing.

(Glover & Steele, 1989; Kuehl, 1989; Wolchik, Braver, & Sandler, 1985)

Others argue that shared living arrangements disrupt needed stability in children's lives and can lead to harm by exposing children to ongoing parental conflict.

(Amato & Rezac, 1994;
Rhoades, 2008; McIntosh,
2008)

Some have argued that shared decision making provides the opportunity for both parents to be involved in the lives of the children.

Others note that some parents are unable to make joint decisions and that these arrangements perpetuate the children feeling caught in the middle of their parents' disputes.

Bender, W. (1994). Joint Custody, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 21:3-4, 115-132.

Brinig, M. (2005). Does Parental Autonomy Require Equal Custody at Divorce? The University of Iowa College of Law, University of Iowa Legal Studies Research Paper Number 05-13 April, 2005

Kelly, J. (2007). Children's living arrangements following divorce. *Family Process*, 46, 35–52.

Kruk, E. (2010). Parental and social institutional responsibilities to children's needs after divorce. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 18, 159–178

McIntosh, J., Burns, A., Dowd, N., & Gridley, H. (2010). *Parenting after separation*. Melbourne: Australian Psychological Society.

Nielsen, L. (2011): Shared Parenting After Divorce: A Review of Shared Residential Parenting Research, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 52:8, 586-609.

Trinder, L. (2010). Shared residence: Review of recent research evidence. *Family Law*, 40, 1192–1195.

Based on these results, children in joint custody are better adjusted, across multiple types of measures, than children in sole (primarily maternal) custody (Bauserman, 2002, p, 97)

- “It is important to recognize that such comparisons **cannot establish a causal role** for joint versus sole custody in child adjustment, because such **research is necessarily relational rather than experimental in nature**” (Bauserman, 2002, p. 92)

WHAT we KNOW

Parents in shared parenting agreements:

- Generally tend to be older, more educated and have more resources (income);
- Live in closer proximity to each other;
- More satisfied with the parenting plan;
- More satisfied with the parent-child relationships;
- Experience less conflict and less relitigation.

You risk losing the rights to the child.

You risk losing the right to visit the child.

You risk losing the right to make decisions about the child's education, health, and welfare.

You risk losing the right to make decisions about the child's future.

You risk losing the right to make decisions about the child's life.

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Parents in shared parenting agreements:

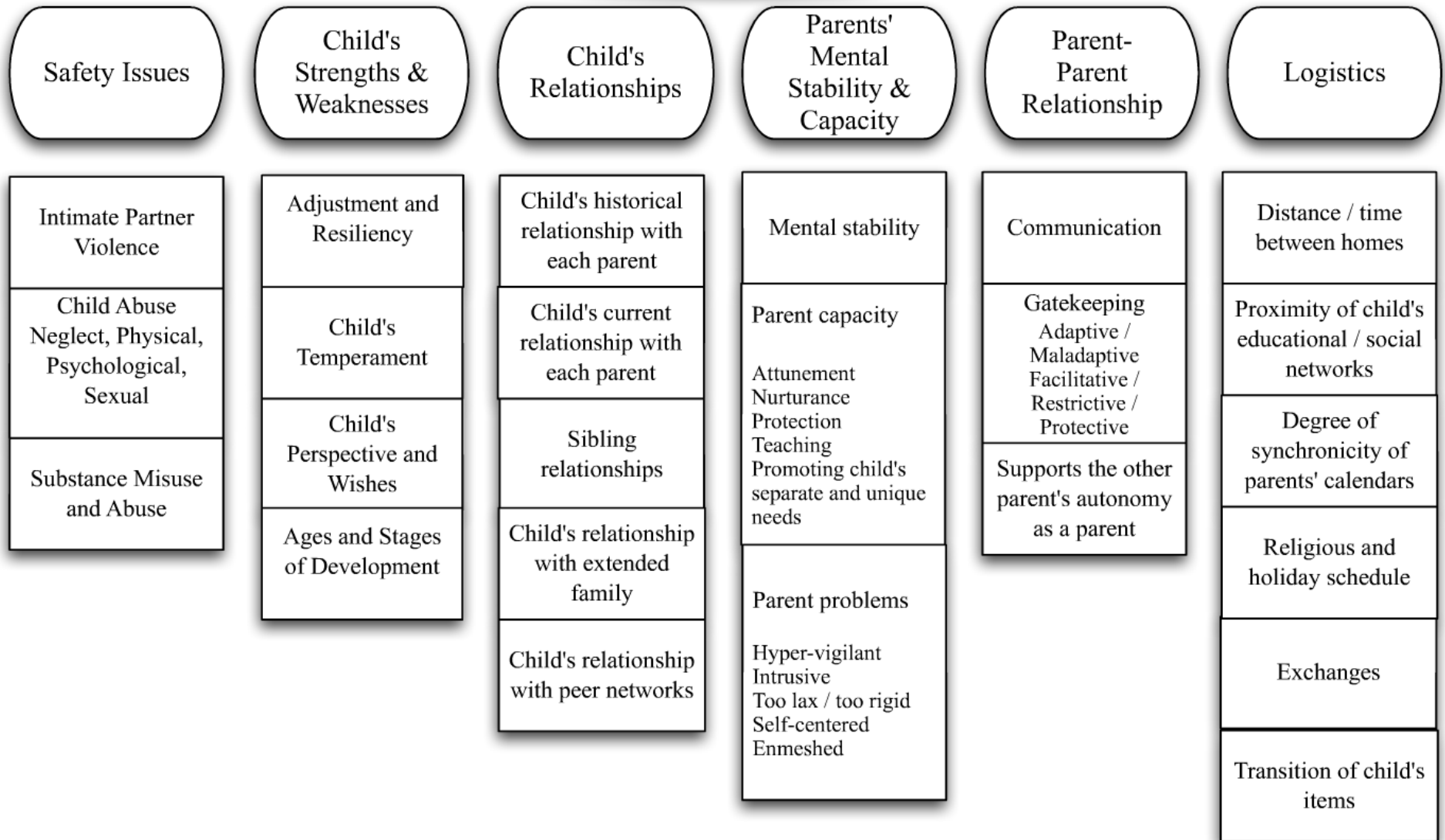
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We don't know the optimal time (30%, 40%, 50%, etc.) needed to replicate positive outcomes for shared parenting.

We don't know whether the benefits of shared parenting can be extrapolated for parents stuck in litigation about custody.

We don't know the directionality between shared parenting and adult conflict.

What is the optimal parenting time that a child should spend with each parent?



What is the optimal decision making
plan for the safety and well being of the
child in this family?

Safety Issues

IPV
There are issues of IPV that
affect the parents' ability to
make joint decisions

Child Abuse
There are issues of child
abuse and/or risk of abuse
that affect the parents' ability
to make joint decisions

Mental Health
There are issues of mental
health issues that affect the
parents' ability to make joint
decisions

Substance Abuse
There are substance issues
that affect the parents' ability
to make joint decisions

**Decision Making
Issues**

Child's Vulnerabilities
The child requires third party
professionals to address
vulnerabilities (emotional,
educational, medical, etc.)

**Major vs Minor
Decisions**
Decisions include only
minor issues given that the
parents agree on all major
decisions

Ages and Stages
The child's age and stage
requires significant parent's
involvement in decision
making

Child's Perspective
The child's views and
preferences influence the
decision making

**Parents'
Decision Making**

**Involvement with
Professionals**
One or both parents has not
followed through with
suggestions of third party
professionals

**Disagreement about
Major Decisions**
The parents disagree about
major decisions impacting
the child (education,
religion, medical)

Communication
The parents are unable to
communicate to resolve
issues

Gatekeeping
Parental gatekeeping
(facilitative or restrictive)
affects decision making