

TEENAGERS: WHAT IF THEY DON'T LIKE THE COURT-ORDERED VISITATION SCHEDULE?

By Nancy M. Perry

Teenagers. That word is enough to make any parent want to cringe. You and your ex have been humming along quite nicely with your court-ordered visitation schedule, or as others call it, your “shared responsibility” schedule. Then your child becomes a teenager. Suddenly, it’s just not cool to go to dad’s house every other weekend. Or it’s a royal pain to him to have to spend “quality” time with mom during the week. Right now, in this teen’s life, cars, the opposite sex, activities, and friends are the most important thing in the world to him. Of course, you can force your teen to adhere to the strict, court ordered schedule, but all you’ll get from that is a very resentful teen.

The best thing you can do with your teen is be flexible. You might as well take that old divorce decree with the strict visitation schedule and toss it in a drawer. It’s time to get creative and schedule time with parents around him rather than the other way around. It’s important to allow your teen to continue the activities that make him who he is. This is especially true if your teen is involved in school-related activities that will dock his grade or get him cut for not attending.

You do need to establish rules for your teen to ensure that he will spend time with both parents. What you might try is setting up a minimum of number of overnights and weekly visits a month with the non-custodial parent. That way, your teen can schedule the time in much the same way he schedules a date or school activity. This is easy if both parents live close to each other and the teen has a car. He can drive to dad’s house in the middle of the week to spend the night. Again, both parents need to be open and flexible to a fluid schedule such as this, but make sure to enforce the minimum and make sure they stick to it.

Every teen has a cellphone attached to them. Now more than ever, you can stay connected with your teen through text messaging, instant messenger, and phone calls. That’s a great way to find out how they’re doing with their day to day lives.

What if your teen absolutely refuses to go to one parent’s home? Some courts will not force the child as it may provoke him to run away while other courts will tell the teen to march himself over to the parent’s house or else the other parent will go to jail. If relations are that tense, then going to counseling would be extremely beneficial to helping the teen and his parents work out their issues. You can get the counseling ordered by the court if necessary.

And it goes without saying that, now more than ever, you and your ex need to be consistent with setting rules and limits. Teens are notorious for getting one parent to approve something after the other parent said no.