

Bill of Rights

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN OF PARENTS LIVING SEPARATELY

1. **Every child has the right to love and be loved by both parents.** Children should feel free to express their love and affection for both parents without guilt or fear of disapproval, rejection or other negative consequence. This right extends to step-families and other relatives. It is not a competition. There is plenty of love to go around, and your child loves and needs both of you.
2. **Every child has the right to parents who respect the child's relationship with the other parent.** Parents must acknowledge and accept that their children have two parents and two homes. Neither parent should trivialize or try to control what goes on in the other home. Refrain from communicating moral judgments to your children about your ex's values, lifestyle, cultural identity, friends or successes and failures. Never encourage or reward a child for being disobedient or acting negatively toward your ex. Never tell your child to keep a "secret" from your ex. Never bribe your children with tempting alternatives so they will want to stay with you instead of your ex.
3. **Every child has the right to continuing care, participation and guidance from both parents.** Your number one responsibility is your children. Both you and your ex have so much to offer to them, and there is so much they can learn from both of you. You should want your children to be the best of both of you. Your children also have the right to have both parents participate in school, activities and other important events in their lives. Never interfere with that.
4. **Every child has the right to parents who treat one another with integrity and respect.** You don't have to like each other. But for your children's sake, follow the Golden Rule... Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Remember, children learn from your example. If you and your ex cannot maintain civility, keep it away from the children. Communicate via e-mail, text messages, or through an online shared parenting management program such as Our Family Wizard. Have custody exchanges occur at school to avoid direct contact.
5. **Every child has the right to freely communicate with both parents.** It is not fair to turn off your phone so that your ex cannot call the children. It is also wrong to "forget" to have the children return phone calls in response to your ex's messages, or to wait until five minutes before bedtime to have them call back. Do not distract your children from their phone calls with your ex by starting the movie you just rented. Nor should you violate your children's privacy by listening in on their conversations, recording them, or reading their e-mails from your ex.
6. **Every child has the right to be free their parents' hostilities and conflicts.** Keep your discussions and arguments away from the children. Don't put your children in the middle by telling them what your ex has done wrong. Recognize that badmouthing your ex hurts your child. Never discuss your legal or business dealings with your ex within earshot of your children and don't take your children with you to your attorney's office. Do not use your child as a messenger between you and your ex, or to deliver the child support check. Interrogating your children about what goes on in their other home puts them in an uncomfortable situation. You should refrain from this. Your child is not your spy and he should not be made to feel as if he has to take sides or defend you.
7. **Every child has the right to freedom from guilt or blame.** Too often children believe that their parents are no longer together because of them. Talk to your children and encourage them to talk to you about their feelings. Reassure them that not only did they not cause the break-up, but that it is not up to them to prevent the break-up, or to get you and your ex back together.
8. **Every child has the right to parents who cooperate with one another when it comes to the children.** Don't interfere with your ex's time with the children just to get back at him/her. This hurts the children more than it hurts your ex. Accommodate your ex if he/she has a special occasion and wants the children during your custodial time. You would want the same courtesy. Remember to notify your ex of important things or events in the children's lives. Don't "forget" to pack or return clothing or gear that your children need at your ex's home. Find a qualified parent coordinator to help you learn how to ease the conflict and work together for the best interests of your children.
9. **Every child has the right to be heard.** Listen to your children when they want to talk, and acknowledge their feelings. Be honest with your children, with age-appropriate answers to their questions about the changing family relationships. Give them the opportunity to have some input into the parenting plan if they want, but do not ask them to make a choice between you and your ex.
10. **Every child has the right to live the life of a child throughout minority.** Some children find themselves "parenting" their own parents. Do not confide in your children, or cry on their shoulders about adult issues. Your 10 year old son is not "the man of the house" now that you are no longer with your ex. It is not up to your child to cook dinner and care for younger siblings because you are not emotionally up to doing it yourself.
11. **Every child has a right to a safe and secure environment in their parents' custody.** Quit smoking cigarettes around your children. Don't do drugs or drink and drive, especially with your children in your custody. Make sure you have safety plugs in all of the electrical sockets, and proper car seats in your car. Be vigilant, but not overprotective.
12. **Every child has the right to financial support from both parents.** The Georgia child support guidelines contemplate that both parents should provide support for their children. To the extent it is possible, your children have the right to the same support and opportunities they would have had but for the break-up of the family. Even if you think you are paying too much child support, it's probably not enough to provide your children with the kind of lifestyle to which they are entitled. The likelihood is that your ex complains that you are not paying enough. Quit worrying about how your ex is spending his/her money or the child support, and focus on providing the best for your children.

M. Debra Gold



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