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Life After Divorce: 6 Common Post-Divorce Life Changes



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When Ben and Julie divorced six years ago, they thought the agreements they made would serve them and their then one-year-old son, Eric, for many years to come. They would maintain separate residences just a few miles apart, share custody of Eric equally, and — since they both had well-paying jobs — contribute equally to a fund for his college education.

Fast-forward to today: a company reorganization resulted in Ben losing his job; being out of work, he has had to live on his savings and has not been able to contribute to Eric's college savings fund. Meanwhile, Julie's live-in boyfriend is pressuring her to move with him hundreds of miles away.

These life changes raise a host of issues which will affect the parties' original arrangement and their relationship with their now 7-year-old son. Ben and Julie must figure out what is best for their son now, given the changes that will make the prior arrangements impossible. A parenting relationship does not end when the divorce proceedings do.

Circumstances change over time and affect the continued workability of the original arrangements and create issues to which you have to adapt. Children grow older and their needs change. Either or both of the parents often find their lives become significantly different than they were during the original proceedings.

Here are some of the most common post-divorce life changes and how you can prepare for them.

Remarriage: A new marriage, for either or both divorced parents, can mean lots of changes — especially for their children. Will the new marriage lead to relocation? How well does the child interact with the new spouse? Older children might feel displaced by infants or other children new to the household. Planning the introductions, staggering the combining of families and working with the other parent to help the children adapt to the changes can make the transition from a single parent household to a blended family easier for the children.

Economic Challenges: Changes in the economy may create changes in a family's life. A parent may say, "I lost my job and am not working, so I will watch the children so we can save money on afterschool care," but they may then seek an increase in child support from the employed parent. Or a former spouse may request an increase in spousal support because he or she was downsized. It is important to know what rights you have under the divorce decree but also to evaluate whether being a little generous now will serve you and the children well in the future.

Relocation: Any residential move, no matter how close to or far from the parent who shares custody, requires notice to the Court and to the other parent and may require a revision of the parties' custodial arrangements, whether by agreement or through litigation. What seems like a minor move in terms of distance could have a significant impact on the child. It could mean a change of school districts. Or, maybe the traffic, after-school activities and other logistics make mid-week, non-overnight visits to the other parent's home impractical. The cost of exercising visitation could rise significantly if relocation takes a child to another state or to another country.

Relationship Changes: Any life change can result in a change in a parent's relationship with the children — even the children simply getting older. While multiday time with one parent may not have been appropriate when a child was an infant, it may be appropriate for a 5 or 10-year-old. One parent may have been the primary caregiver for a younger child, but as that child becomes a teenager and highly invested in a particular sport supported by the other parent, extended time with the other parent may work better for the child. Parents should look at their time with their children in light of what the children need at that time, appreciating that those needs will change.

Allow Plenty of Time: Divorced parents need to think ahead and should notify one another in advance of changes that could affect the other's time with the children or custody responsibilities. The parent seeking modification of child support, custody or visitation will need to file the appropriate petition with the Court. Timing is extremely important because a Court may not have time on its docket to hear a matter for several months after you file the motion.


If you want to relocate and expect that the other parent may object to the relocation, you should leave a considerable amount of time before the commencement of the next school year to resolve the matter.

Unfortunately, this may not always be possible. For example, if you are forced to relocate to maintain your employment, you are going to have very little control over when you must report to your new office. If custody is not resolved before then, the other parent may be awarded temporary custody of the child pending the hearing.

Don't Count on Retroactive Solutions: Changes in child support or spousal support may be retroactively awarded by the Court, but generally, the retroactivity is limited to the date upon which the person seeking modification files the petition. Therefore, if a parent loses their job and is unable to pay the child support previously ordered but waits six months to file a petition to reduce child support, whatever arrears that accrued during those six months will still be owed - even if the Court rules that the support should be reduced prospectively. And do not count on an "agreement" with the other parent to modify support unless it is incorporated into a new support Order.

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