

Sharing the Family Home During Divorce

Getting a divorce? I'm sure you are concerned about how your children will fare during and after the divorce. There are so many decisions you have to make. One that often causes conflict is who will live in the family residence.

In the interest of providing stability for their children, some parents decide that the children will remain in the family residence and the parents will swap weeks in the residence. For example, one of my clients rented a condo and each parent lived one week in the home with their children and one week in the condo. This can be a solution until the divorce is final [or until the house is sold].

If this type of arrangement appeals to you, you're going to have to cooperate on all kinds of housekeeping chores. Accusations like "You left the condo looking like a sty and I had to spend all day Saturday cleaning the mess you left!" are not going to foster a good working relationship and can quickly spiral into an argument that goes way beyond the messy condo.

In addition, for the week that you are the "condo parent," you'll need to allow your spouse to have mostly uninterrupted time with the children in your home. The following week, you'll be in the family residence with your children and likely won't appreciate the other parent "dropping in for a short visit" or "just dropping off something the kids might want" or otherwise interfering with your time with your children.

The condo and family residence swap can work well, but it's going to take two parents who can move relatively smoothly between two residences from week to week. If you are thinking of such a living arrangement – at least for the time being – there are some things you can do to ensure that your swap doesn't become yet another issue to fight over.

- The condo you rent should be geographically close to the family residence if possible so that the commute distance to work doesn't change dramatically for either parent.
- If you and your spouse can afford it, renting a 2-bedroom 2-bath condo is going to be emotionally easier to handle than a 1-bedroom 1-bath condo.
- Because you each will be living in the house and in the condo an equal amount of time, the condo and home expenses should be shared equally between you.

- If there are large differences between you on "housekeeping chores," make agreements beforehand about how the house and condo will be cleaned.
- Respect your spouse's week with your children and ask for the same respect when you are with your children in the family residence.

If you have tried this arrangement during or after divorce, I would love to hear how it worked out for you: what worked well, and what didn't work so well.