

How to Handle a Co-Parent Who Spoils Your Child

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As a parent in a co-parenting situation, one of the most frustrating things that can happen is when the other parent tries to spoil your child in an attempt to sway the child in wanting to live with him or her. This predicament can particularly happen when one parent only has the child every other weekend and spends his or her time with the child only doing “fun” activities. This arrangement leaves you as the “bad cop” who makes the child do homework, chores, or other activities that are not seen as “fun”. So what can you do to prevent this attempt from being successful?

First, it is important to realize that in a lot of custody cases the child is not going to testify about his or her preferences. While one of the best-interests test factors looked at in every custody cases in Virginia is “the reasonable preference of the child,” it is important to realize that this factor carries the caveat of the court having to find that the child is of a “reasonable intelligence, understanding, age and experience to express such a preference.” What this means is that the court has to find that the child has the emotional maturity and developmental ability to comprehend and express such a preference and understand the consequences of that preference. The courts are very careful about having children testify in custody cases and parents should be too. While there is no age restriction on who can testify, normally only teenage children will possess the necessary maturity and development to express such a preference. Requesting a small child to get involved in a complex custody matter where he or she will have to testify against one parent or the other can backfire.

Outside of court, there are a few other things you can do to ensure that the child has a more balanced view of each parent. While this may seem difficult without spoiling the child yourself, it can be done. You will want to positively reinforce the child for completing homework, chores, or other tasks to ensure that he or she properly values finishing his or her work. Another avenue, particularly after the child is in school, is to allocate some of his or her work to be done on the weekend. I am not suggesting that you dump all of the child’s school work on the other parent’s weekend, but the co-parent should take the responsibility for any work that needs to be completed during his or her time with the child. Not sending work and forcing your child to complete it all on Sunday night is not a recipe for success. If the other parent refuses to ensure that the work is done, that is something that should be brought to the court’s attention. Likewise, ensuring that things such as regular bed times and consistent discipline are being followed can alleviate some concerns over one household becoming the “fun one.”

If the child is receiving inconsistent messages from their parents, it can damage his or her development and teach him or her that he or she can play one parent off of the other. Most importantly, remember that it is never appropriate to embroil your child in any dispute you have with the other parent or try to communicate to your co-parent through them. The child should know as little as possible about any details relating to their custody case or the difficulties you may have with the co-parent.

