

# Regular Visitation is Important to a Child's Well-Being



My office is responsible for collecting court-ordered child support for one million children. Hardly a day goes by that

we do not receive an inquiry from a parent about the issue of visitation. The connection in people's minds is understandable. In many instances, a parent who is following the court order to pay financial and medical support complains of being denied visitation with the child.

"I'm doing my part," the noncustodial parent tells us. "It isn't fair that the other parent keeps me from seeing my child."

I understand that parents are frustrated, and I firmly believe both parents should honor court-ordered obligations regarding their children. Financial support is critical to a child's well-being, but so is the child's right to know and have a relationship with both parents.

We often are asked to provide legal assistance to parents who are being denied contact with children for whom they are paying child support. The parent without custody points out that we are quick to en-

force the order to pay support. Why won't we enforce the visitation order?

Under Texas law, child support and visitation are independent issues. However, child support orders in Texas must contain provisions regarding conservatorship, possession, and access. That is why every order addresses visitation between the children and the parent who pays child support.

The Child Support Division of my office does not handle custody or visitation disputes. The child support program receives a significant number of federal dollars for specific child support activities and cannot be used for custody and visitation matters.

However, my office is committed to helping parents without custody maintain meaningful relationships with their children. We look for other ways to help children and parents who are experiencing custody or visitation problems.

For instance, this year, 11 organizations across Texas received federally funded grants administered by my office. The awards fund services that help unmarried parents work together to parent their children. Several notable programs to serve families include:

- The Bexar County Domestic

Relations Office helps parents with child support cases resolve custody and visitation disputes.

- The Child Crisis Center of El Paso provides a neutral setting for parents to exchange and visit their children.
- The Place in Wichita Falls provides educational seminars that help divorcing parents put aside personal differences for the good of their children.
- Recently, a federal grant was awarded for a project in Harris County to help parents when lack of child access and regular visitation are key complaints.

Another alternative to resolving custody and visitation differences is mediation. Contact your local domestic relations or dispute resolution center for assistance. In cases where custody and visitation are contested, it is sometimes necessary for each parent to hire a private attorney.

I am thankful for the many parents who make their child support payments each month. I also would like to commend all of the mothers and fathers who work together to care for their children. Involvement from both parents is needed for children to thrive.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

### Child Visitation for Parents

- **The Office of the Attorney General establishes and enforces court orders for the payment of child support but does not intervene in visitation disputes.**
- **Under the law, child support and visitation are separate, independent issues. A parent cannot refuse to pay child support because the other parent is refusing visitation, and vice versa.**
- **The Attorney General's Office partners with local organizations that help parents with custody and visitation issues.**
- **You may be able to resolve your visitation dispute through mediation. Contact your local domestic relations or dispute resolution center.**

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web Site at [www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us)



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