

7/8/2003

Committee Secretary,
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs,
Child Custody Arrangement Inquiry,
Department of the House of Representatives,
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT 2600.

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

Submission No:

910

Date Received:

15-8-03

Secretary:

Re: Submission inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of Family Separation.

I am putting forward a submission in support of a 'fair go' for estranged mothers fathers and children, to ensure that there is equitable contact, in order that the family will have a more lovable, harmonious and happier life together. It seems that the stronger a family is, whether intact or not, the better off that this great nations of ours will be, because the children to whom I refer, are Australia's future.

To support my argument that all children need equal time with their mothers and their fathers I will refer to published theory and other arguments that support my premise that children need equal time with **both** parents. In my case I have 2 boys who need more time with me and I need more time with them

Dr. Warren Farrell's study and his published book, *Father and Child Reunion* (2001) cites results of detailed studies into the needs of children to have more time with their fathers. These will be listed in dot point form as they are well argued in the aforesaid book

Dr Farrell lives and works in the USA where he has taught psychology and is a prominent member of various organizations that relate to men's and women's issues.

The following dot points relate to the importance of children being able to have an equal share of time with their fathers

- Quality time with the father begins at birth.
- The more time that a baby boy has with his father the higher the boy's IQ. He also states that children attain higher marks in science and maths when Dad is present He cites a recent US Department of Education Study. (2001:45).
- Regular contact with the father reinforces the child's feeling of safety.
- Children are at a greater risk of 'dropping out' of school if the father is not present.
- Boys suffer more than girls in school results if the father is not present.
- The more a father is involved the easier the child makes open receptive and trusting contact with new people in his/her life.
- Children without fathers are more likely to have nightmares, show more anxiety and be more hostile to adults. They are also more dependent, inattentive, withdrawn, aggressive and are much poorer at social skills and communication.
- With absence of Dad children show dependence on the mother and therefore Dad becomes a lesser player in the family construct.

The figure cited below are from American studies.

- Children are more likely to take drugs when Dad is not present.

- 90% of homeless children are from fatherless home. (2001:35)
- A child living with mother only is more likely to develop chronic asthma.
- Sons living with Dad or having equal contact are less likely to getting their girlfriends' pregnant.
- 73% of murderers come from Mother only homes.
- 80% of rapists who were evaluated as raping out of anger came from fatherless homes (2001:37).
- 65% of juvenile prisoners were brought up without Dads (2001:38)
- 90% of repeat adolescent arsonists live with their mothers only.

The child adjusts well to a divorce if:

- there is little conflict between the parents
- if the parents are authoritative and 'stick to' their agreed decisions,
- there is appropriate access to both parents,
- the children have equitable support from friends, family, and mentors who can listen well.

Findings from studies on children who were in a separated family situation:

- Children felt the loss of contact with one parent and showed intense dissatisfaction with unequal times with each parent. They felt deprived and depressed and this behaviour manifested itself, particularly in boys.
- Whereas children with equal shared times with each parent were found to have higher self-esteem, be less excitable, and less impatient.
- Shared parent time resulted in less sibling rivalry and fewer negative attitudes towards the parents.
- Shared parent time also leads to better relationships with step-parents and greater overall family cohesion.
- From the parents' point of view shared parent time lessens stress.
- When both parents had equal incomes the children with the father full-time did better. (2001:42).
- It has been found that boys who live with their fathers rather than with the mother are warmer, have a higher degree of self-worth and are more mature and independent.
- Children who live with their fathers were only:
half as likely to have frequent nightmares, feelings of low self-esteem and lonely;
one third were likely to feel victimised;
one quarter is likely to experience seizures of fear.

Important issues or points in the Dad's role are:

- broad education,
- fair and firm discipline.

Other points of importance in shared parenting:

- Mothers use physical discipline more frequently and as a result children have more temper tantrums,
- Children who live with their mothers have more frequent headaches and stomach aches and are 2-3 times more likely to do so.

- Children who live with their mothers are more likely to have an immune –system breakdown because of irregular living habits.
- Children who live with their fathers feel positively about their mothers.
- Children living with their mothers are more likely to feel negatively about their Dads.

Therefore it can be read that children who live with their Dads are not sacrificing their positive feeling towards their mothers. It can be said then that IF boys and girls should be with one parent only, the boys should be with Dad and the girls with mother.

Further research from Steve Biddulph, a family therapist and parenting author, in his book *Raising Boys* (1997:66 on) develops arguments that support the need for fathers to have an equal role in parenting, particularly with boys.

- The father's role becomes an integral part of the child's upbringing and the feeling that he is *just a wallet* is erased as father is seen as a contributor and a real person.
- In England fathers are gaining increased time with their children.
- Fathers bring different, unique and irreplaceable practices to parenting because of their maleness such as testosterone.
- Boys love the physicality of the male Dad.
- Boys love adventure and with Dad they can experience excitement whilst feeling secure with him.
- Boys love to hear stories about Dad's life as well as meeting his friends and seeing how he makes his money.
- Boys love to have Dads teach them things such as fishing.
- Boys often take on attitudes and learn from what the parents say and therefore shared parenting is important.

Boys and indeed girls learn positive attitudes from parents such as loving, warmth sharing and complementing.

- Boys love the physical contact that they can have with Dad and this contact shows boys that they can have 'rough and tumble', have fun, be noisy, yet know when to stop. This teaches boys self-control, particularly when angered.
- The aforementioned attributes of boy/son relationship coupled with the former evidence and research shows quite clearly why children and particularly boys need equal time with both parents.

My situation

After spending \$20,000:00 in the Family Law Court I am almost a broken man. My dream of owning my own home, free from mortgages and being able to share my life with my children has been destroyed and I still do not know why I have almost lost everything. This was reinforced when earlier in the marriage break-down, my wife stated to me that I had done *no wrong*.

I have given her \$230,000:00, paid lawyers \$20,00:00, and still, at 47 years of age, I am being chased for more money. So at the moment I have very little, except for a new mortgage, government agents chasing me for more money, lawyers charging exorbitant costs to tidy up breakdown in their negotiations and a physical body that has worked hard and is now into 'break-down' mode.

My children have been taken away from me for more than 50% of the time and yet I do not know why this is so. I can cook, wash, clean, and tidy the physical environment, I can read and discuss issues with my children, and I am physically alert and love to play with them. I love and care for them as they do for me. The Court Social Worker also stated the fact in his findings that the boys are well adjusted and love both parents

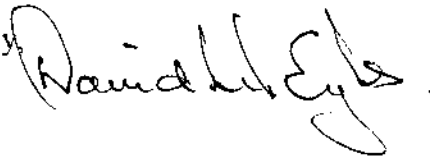

After weekend visits, my elder son has tears in his eyes and feels very strongly that he needs more time with me and my younger son clings to me when we meet. His excitement is catching and in many ways lifts my spirits. My former wife is not only punishing me, but she is punishing the children as well, by not allowing them to have equal time with me.

The most appalling thing to me is that if their mother finds another partner and moves in with him, that person will have more contact with my boys that I do, this is an iniquitous situation indeed.

To conclude, I know that there are many men out there who are hurting as much as I am yet, because of out-moded laws and a seemingly lack of or ignorance of concern about the final outcomes from the Family Court which are, *most often not fair* to both parties and the children. At the moment, it is the male who suffers and most particularly in the terms of an equal share of time with the children.

I respectfully ask you to consider this matter wisely in so far that your findings will give me hope for the future to an equal share in my boys' up-bringing.

Yours faithfully,

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David William Eyles.
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References:

Biddulph, Steve (1997). *Raising Boys. Why boys are different – and how to help them become happy and well-balanced men.* Lane Cove, Aust. Finch Publishing. Pty.Ltd.

Farrell, Warren (2001). *Father and Child Reunion. How to bring the dads we need to the children we love.* New York Jeremy Archer Pub.