

CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS

WHEN PARENTS ARE NOT TOGETHER

Every kid has rights, particularly when mom and dad are splitting up. Below are some things parents shouldn't forget -- and kids shouldn't let them -- when the family is in the midst of a break-up.

You have the right to love both your parents. You also have the right to be loved by both of them. That means you shouldn't feel guilty about wanting to see your dad or your mom at any time. It's important for you to have both parents in your life, particularly during difficult times such as a break-up of your parents.

You do not have to choose one parent over the other. If you have an opinion about which parent you want to live with, let it be known. But nobody can force you to make that choice. If your parents can't work it out, a judge may make the decision for them.

You're entitled to all the feelings you're having. Don't be embarrassed by what you're feeling. It is scary when your parents break up, and you're allowed to be scared. Or angry. Or sad. Or whatever.

You have the right to be in a safe environment. This means that nobody is allowed to put you in danger, either physically or emotionally. If one of your parents is hurting you, tell someone -- either your other parent or a trusted adult like a teacher.

You don't belong in the middle of your parents' break-up. Sometimes your parents may get so caught up in their own problems that they forget that you're just a kid, and that you can't handle their adult worries. If they start putting you in the middle of their dispute, remind them that it's their fight, not yours.

Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are still part of your life. Even if you're living with one parent, you can still see relatives on your other parent's side. You'll always be a part of their lives, even if your parents aren't together anymore.

You have the right to be a child. Kids shouldn't worry about adult problems. Concentrate on your school work, your friends, activities, etc. Your mom and dad just need your love. They can handle the rest.

IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT AND DON'T BLAME YOURSELF.

----Special Concerns of Children Committee, March, 1998

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers