

A CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS

A parent who is splitting up with their partner and who wants the best outcome for their children, should consider the following "Bill of Rights" for children published by Hillsborough County, Florida's Thirteenth Judicial Circuit's Family Law Division.

A. Children have a right to a loving, open and continuing relationship with both parents. They have the right to express love, affection and respect for one parent in the presence of the other parent.

B. Neither parent should alienate a child's affection for the other parent.

C. Parents should separate any bad feelings for one another from their duties as parents. Their duty is to share the children's time and share in making parenting decisions. Children must be free to draw their own conclusions about each parent, without the prejudicial influences of the other parent.

D. Children have the right to never hear a parent, or a relative or a friend of a parent, belittle or degrade the other parent.

E. Children have the right to be free of guilt because the parents have decided to separate. They are entitled to honest answers to questions about changes taking place in the family makeup. However, information regarding the parties' separation should not be discussed with the children.

F. Parents should never be so preoccupied with their own problems that they fail to meet the children's needs. Separation of the parents usually has a worse impact on the children than on the parents, a fact both parents should never forget.

G. Each parent should openly, honestly, respectfully and regularly communicate with the other parent to avoid misunderstandings. Parents should never argue about the children in front of the children.

H. Parents should discuss all differences between them regarding their separation, financial issues and parenting decisions out of the presence of the children. Both parents should always try to present a united front in handling any problems with the children.

I. Children have the right to regular and continuing contact with both parents. Parents should arrange all visitation and exchanges between themselves and not through the children. The children should never be the messenger between the parents.

J. Visitation plans should be kept and never cancelled unless absolutely necessary. If plans change, children should be given an explanation, preferably in advance and by the parent causing the cancellation.

K. Common courtesies (politeness, promptness, readiness, calling to notify if one is going to be late) should always be observed when picking up and dropping off children. These times can be very stressful on children, so it is imperative that parents always behave as responsible adults.

L. Between visits, children should be encouraged to contact the absent parent by letter, phone, email, text or video conferencing, frequently and continuously.

M. A parent's access to a child and child support, while they may be emotionally connected, are separate and distinct under the law. Accordingly, a child's right to access to his or her parent does not depend upon the payment of child support.

N. A child should never be the delivery person for support payments or other communication between the parents.

O. Both parents are entitled to participate in and attend all special activities in which their children are engaged, such as religious activities, school programs, sports events and other extracurricular activities and programs.

P. Parents should share information concerning children's activities and school information.