

**By Matthew Crider, JD
Family Protection Attorney**

As a Sacramento divorce lawyer, clients often ask me about how child visitation will work. Outside of the court orders and the parenting schedules, much of how child visitation and custody works is up to you. For parents who share custody of their children, here are a few thoughts on how to make visitation with your kids as enjoyable and comfortable as possible.

Create a comfortable space: Before your children visit, set up a living space for them in your home. A space that theirs and theirs alone, where they can put their things, have a little bit of privacy, and feels at home. A bedroom is best, but if it's not possible, a couch moved into a corner that is decorated with some of their favorite things could work.

Make your house a home: Make sure there is something recognizable and homey about your home. Again, it may not feel like a priority to you, but if you don't want it to feel like a home for yourself, do it for them. They deserve to be comfortable during this process.

Have a positive attitude: No one is saying you have to pretend like things are fantastic for every weekend visit, but do your best to have a positive attitude. The last thing your kids need is the additional worry that you're miserable and lonely in your new place. Acknowledge to your kids that it's a hard situation for everyone, but use your friends or therapist for the moping.

Be open to talking--or not talking: Don't expect to discuss the divorce with your children the entire time they visit, but also, don't expect that it won't come up. If it does, let everyone say what they need to say, give hugs and get hugs, and let the conversation stop when it stops. No one is going to get over this in one conversation, it's a long process.

Set behavior expectations: Set behavior expectations that are as close as possible to the rules they're used to, and explain those expectations as soon as they come in. Respecting your things, respecting mealtime rules, respecting directions from you--these are all important boundaries. Your kids may act out based on feeling anxious and upset, and you still have to be a disciplinarian, even if you only get them for a weekend.

Don't schedule too many activities: As hard as it may be to resist, try not to set up wall-to-wall activities for your time with your children. You don't want to wear them out or set up the expectation that your house is a party house, a vacation from reality for them. Make sure you schedule down time, homework time, and private time (if it's age-appropriate) during every visit.

Assign your children chores: Give your children chores while they're with you. Even if it's something simple like clearing dishes or going to get the mail, this will help establish a sense of normalcy for both you and your children.

Don't criticize the other parent in front of your children: Don't ever criticize the other parent in front of your children, not even passive-aggressively. If they're late dropping the kids off or picking them up, that is not your child's fault, and they don't deserve to be placed in the middle.

Don't expect perfect happy visits: Don't expect every visit with your kids to be perfect, so don't beat yourself up if things get testy. When you were a full-time parent, there were tantrums, slammed doors, tears, and hurt feelings on occasion- it's part of being in a family. Conflict during visiting weekends is a sign that you are adjusting to your new family arrangement.

Try to keep rituals intact: Do try and keep rituals from your previous marriage intact, with some flexibility. Find out from your kids what things they love most about holidays, dinner time, bedtime, etc, and then make an effort to recreate those specific moments. Otherwise, it's time to set some new family traditions- anything from made up stories at bedtime to Chinese food Sundays.

About Matthew Crider, J.D.

Matthew Crider formed [Crider Law PC](#) in 1999 so he could help individuals through the California divorce process by providing creative solutions as their trusted advisor and legal counselor. His divorce and family law practice focuses on assisting people in dissolution matters, including divorce, child custody and visitation, child and spousal support, spousal support and alimony, and parental rights.

