



Teenagers By Jodi Wyman

Parenting teenagers can certainly have its challenges. Family law cases involving teenagers also have their own set of issues and challenges. The legal system is set up to assume that the "child" in question will do whatever the Judge and their parents say, which is not always the case as the kids get older.

Teenagers typically are more interested in spending time with their friends than their parents. Although there may be a Court Order in place requiring the child to spend every second weekend with the non-custodial parent, as kids get older they may decide they have other plans. This can be especially true when the parent lives in a different community where the teen may not have friends. Married parents usually understand their child spending most of their time with friends. They can still have some contact during the day. It is not however so easy for the parent who only sees their son or daughter every second weekend.

As well, as children get older they develop their own busy

schedules. Sports, play rehearsals, music lessons, parties, concerts, part-time or volunteer work can take priority for the teen over visiting with their mom or dad. When children are young it is up to the custodial parent to try not to schedule play dates or lessons during the visitation times. When it is the teen doing the schedule it is not as easy to tell them they cannot attend their big hockey game or take guitar lessons because it would interfere with the Court Order.

The non-custodial parent who loses out on time as a result is in a difficult position. They have legal rights, but they do not want to be the "bad guy" by forcing the teen to give up an activity they enjoy, or to keep them away from their friends and cause resentment.

On the other hand, as children get older they sometimes choose to spend more time with their other parent or even live with them. Once a child is a teen, depending upon their maturity level, their wishes with respect to custody and access can be taken into account by a Judge. They do not have the

final decision, but they can be heard. Realistically, once a teen is old enough to drive themselves over to the other parent's home, there is not a lot either parent or the Judge can do to make them live elsewhere or only visit at certain times. Sometimes the change of homes is only short-lived.

Teens of course have no idea what a mess this can create for their parents in Court. There is typically a Court Order not only for custody, but also for child support. If the child switches homes, the Order has to be changed, which means going back to Court. The support Order in place has to be cancelled, and a new child support Order made for the other parent. This can take months even if the parents agree. If the child moves again, yet another Court Order has to issue. This can obviously become very costly for the parents.

With respect to custody, access and child support, the legal system is not always equipped to manage teenagers.