



As part of the 'national conversation' on fatherhood that President Obama would like to have, we need to talk about the presumptions of Illinois divorce courts that influence our perceptions of the value of father involvement.

The de facto minimum [parenting schedule](#) used by Illinois courts remains, as it has been for decades, 'every other weekend' with a weekly non-overnight 'visit' for the non-custodial parent, normally the father.

This antiquated, minimal 'standard visitation schedules' is, according to a nationally-respected child development specialist, 'child-unfriendly' and befitting only 'disinterested' fathers.

It will influence expectations for the 35,000 children who will experience their parents' breakup over the next 12 months in Illinois, because it can prevail regardless of the father's close geographic proximity and track record of responsible fathering. The minimum parenting schedule used by our Illinois divorce courts presumes, in effect, that fathers need not put their children to bed on a weekday, help them with their homework, nor help get them ready for school - the very activities associated with 'stepping up.' For that reason, the Children's Rights Council (CRC) of Illinois carefully researched and then provided an updated, family-friendly set of minimum parenting time guidelines to the Illinois Family Law Study Committee in January of this year. Testimony from state- and nationally-respected child development and parenting experts at those hearings reinforced the need for this reform.

The benefits of updating Illinois' parenting time protocols have been substantiated in research studies and are agreed upon by many divorce attorneys and counselors. They include decreased transfers of children between separated parents, greater father involvement in children's schooling, fewer animosity-generating court battles, more constructive communication between parents, fewer 'Disneyland dads,' improved post-divorce adjustment, and clearer signals that children in Illinois need access to a meaningful relationship with both parents. These benefits are already being experienced in other states that have reformed their parenting time guidelines, such as Indiana.

Judges, attorneys, and legislators need to support reforms to Illinois 'standard visitation' if they want to set forth a positive message on the value of a fatherhood. At the same time, updating our courts' parenting time protocols would provide Illinois children of separated parents the opportunity for the responsible fathers they deserve.



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