

## DOGMA vs. DATA

Shared Parenting Research  
A Summary of 25 Years of  
Research

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## Myths About Shared Parenting Couples

They Consent to Share Parenting

They Communicate Well

They Cooperate and Co-parent as a Team

They Have Little to No Conflict

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### Myths About Shared Parenting

Shared Parenting Fails Unless Both Parents Agree To It At the Outset

Shared Parenting Fails If Either Parent is "Forced" Into It by Court Order or Through Mediation

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### What's the Data on Conflict and Shared Parenting?

Initial Conflict for Sharing vs. Non-Sharing Parents

Same Conflict Level 59%

Less Conflict for Sharing Parents 40%

More Conflict for Sharing Parents 1%

*Data from 14 Studies: 2,767 sharing and 13,281 non-sharing couples*

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### Shared Parenting Arrangements Are Generally Long-Lasting

Study	Years since divorce	Percent No Change	Number of Families
Melli	3	90	597
Kline	2	80	38
Kaspiew	3-4	70	480
Maccoby	2-4	65	150
Cashmore	1.5	65	440
Brotsky	2-3	65	40
Lodge	4	60	105

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**Does the Level of Conflict in Sharing and Non-Sharing Change Over Time?**

- For sharing and non-sharing parents, the level of conflict generally declines within 1-2 years
- As with married couples, ongoing conflicts over child rearing issues occur with sharing and non-sharing parents
- Conflict can be higher for sharing parents due to their dedication & involvement
  
- Over time, conflict decreases more in shared parenting arrangements

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**Shared Parenting Does Not Generally Mean Co-Parenting**

Most Shared Parenting Couples

- Do not co-parent; they 'parallel' parent
- Communicate less as time passes
- Limit direct contact as much as possible
- Minimize the kids' moves with an alternating full week schedule
- Minimize contact at the 'switching' hour - the time of highest potential conflict

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**Shared Parenting Does Not Expose Children to More Conflict**

Shared-parenting children are *not more* likely to:

- Be dragged into conflicts
- Witness conflicts
- Be more stressed when there is conflict

Shared-parenting children are *more* likely to:

- Offset the impact of conflict by having closer relationships with both parents

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### Shared Parenting and Children's Wellbeing

Children with shared parent arrangements vs. children spending less than 35% of the time with their father:

- Academic and Cognitive Development

Better with shared parenting: 3 studies (578 shared and 3,848 non-shared children)

Equal: 4 studies (17,631 shared and 35,958 non-shared children)

- Psychological and Emotional Development

Better with shared parenting: 13 studies (22,218 shared and 69,027 non-shared children)

Equal: 6 studies (883 shared and 1,460 non-shared children)

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### Aggression, Delinquency, Drugs, Smoking and Drinking

Children with shared parenting vs. children spending less than 35% time with their father

Better with shared parenting: 13 studies (3,013 shared and 9,530 non-shared children)

Equal: 3 studies (149 shared and 659 non-shared children)

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### Impact on the Quality and Endurance of the Father-Child Relationship

Closeness and endurance of the relationship throughout childhood and young adulthood:

Better with shared parenting: 20 studies (21,664 shared and 65,891 non-shared children)

Equal in both groups: None

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### How Does Family Type Affect Talking to Dad?

Kids say it's 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to talk to Dad about things that really bother them.

Family Type	Percent Responding Yes	Number of children
Shared	29	2,206
Intact	32	148,177
Single Dad	33	3,177
Dad/Stepmom	39	1,561
Single Mom	42	25,578
Mom/Stepdad	43	11,705

Bjarnason & Arnason (2012)  
(Data from 36 countries)

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### What Kids Think About Shared-Parenting

The Majority Stated:

- It's worth the hassle
- My parents made the right choice
- My relationships with both parents are better because of it
- I like having a week's break sometimes from each parent
- I wish I had complete control over the schedule -- teenagers

Data from 5 studies (357 children)

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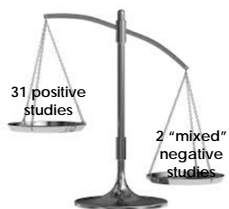
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### Data versus dogma




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### Beware of the 'Woozle'

"Research shows that the best interests of children are not connected to any particular pattern of care or amount of time".

Belinda Fehlberg et al (2011)  
*Legislating for shared time*  
Journal of Law, Policy & Family

"No convincing argument can be made on behalf of shared care for the children's benefit. Research makes clear that father presence & frequency of contact is not a significant factor."

Sonia Harris (2010)  
Birmingham University Law school  
*Resisting the March to 50/50 Care.*

"In fact there is little if any evidence that mere amount or frequency of father contact is better or worse for children."

Liz Trinder (2010)  
Exeter University Law School  
*Shared residence: Review of Research*  
Child & Family Law Quarterly

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### Outlier #1: The Australian 'Baby' Study

Conclusion: Infants & children under 4 should spend little, if any, overnight time away from their mother because it damages their relationship with her and also causes:

- Irritability
- Insecurity
- Inattentiveness to tasks
- Behavioral problems
- Wheezing due to overnighing stress

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### Dissecting the Australian 'Baby' Study

Who were these parents?

- 90% of infants' and 60% of toddlers' parents were never married
- 30% never lived together
- 30% reported physical violence

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### Data Contradicting the Woozle

- No differences overnighting vs. not overnighting on 4 of 6 measures of infants' well-being and 6 of 7 measures of toddler's well-being
- Irritability: 59 infants with more than 4 overnights were more irritable than 20 infants with fewer overnights BUT...not more irritable than infants in married families not more irritable than non overnighters
- Attachment to mom: Using gazing at mom and trying to get her attention as a measure of 'insecurity' (a 3 question scale with no validity created by the researchers solely for this study) they concluded that overnighting > 3 times monthly causes insecurity . BUT...these infants were not more insecure than occasional overnighters & the scale has no validity

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### Dissecting the Australian 'Baby' Study Woozle

Data for 2-3 year olds:

- Refusing to eat, getting upset, being clingy & hitting mom was more common for the 22 frequent overnighters than for occasional overnighters. BUT was the same as the non overnighters & the same as 50% of Australian children in national surveys

Only 1 clear result for the 19 frequent overnighters: Less persistent at completing a task or playing alone than 310 occasional or non-overnighters BUT...this was not a validated scale

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### Outlier #2: The American 'Baby' Study

Conclusion: Infants & children under four who frequently overnight are more insecurely attached to their mothers than those with fewer overnights or those who see their fathers only during the day.

Bottom Line: Divorced parents should not be overnighting their infants and toddlers - and judges should not allow it.

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### Dissecting the American 'Baby' Woozle

Who were these parents?

- 100% living in inner city slums
- 85% never married
- 40% never lived together
- 62% living below poverty level
- 85% racial minorities
- 50% prison record before child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday (10% of the moms)
- 60% high school dropouts
- 65% have children with different fathers

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### Dissecting the American 'Baby' Woozle

No differences between rare, frequent, or no overnights on 13 of 14 analyses on 5 measures of children's well-being

- The 1 difference: Mothers rated frequent overnighting infants & toddlers as more insecurely attached than less frequent overnighters:
- BUT.
- 55% of frequent overnighting infants *lived with their father* and spent as little as 25% time with their mother
- 2-3 year olds in these groups were virtually the same:  
128-256 overnights with dad & < 12 overnights
- 0 overnights & up to 127 overnights
- More importantly: The data are uninterpretable (useless) because this test is only valid when administered by trained observers, not by mothers

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### Isn't It Time To Start Listening to 25 Years of Research?



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