

# A Child Cries; Parents Misinterpret

by Honorable Anne Kass.

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One of the most frequent concerns divorced parents express in custody disputes is that when their child is supposed to spend time with the other parent, the child cries or clings or sometimes "begs" not to be made to go.

The parent generally interprets the child's behavior to mean that the child hates to spend time with the other parent. Sometimes they interpret the behavior to mean the other parent is abusive, or at least incompetent, as a parent.

In fact, there are many possible reasons why children resist going from one parent to the other.

1. The children may really not want to spend time with the other parent, sometimes for good reason. But, this is actually quite rare.
2. The children may want to spend time with the other parent but not want to leave the parent they're with. It is common for human beings to simultaneously desire two, mutually exclusive results. We often wish we could eat our cake and have it too. Children are no different. In fact, most children really want to be with both parents and not to leave either. Their favorite fantasy is that their parents would get back together.
3. The children may be sensing non-verbal cues from the parent they are leaving that she or he is sad when the children leave. The children maybe reflecting the parent's feelings, not expressing their own.
4. The children may believe it pleases the parent for them to be sad about leaving. The children may be telling the parent what they think the parent wants to hear.
5. The children may simply find changing from one parent's home to the other uncomfortable. This is usually a temporary upset. Some children welcome change. Others have a more difficult time with it.

Parents ought not jump to conclusions when a child resists visitation. We suggest these parents choose a counselor to help them (the children and the parents) sort out what is really troubling them.

Just as important as figuring out the children's true concerns is finding solutions to the problem. The first solution many parents propose is to stop visitation. That is almost never the best answer, and the counselor can also help the parents devise ways for the children to comfortably spend time in both homes. Often it is the parents who need to learn new skills such as how to give their children sincere permission to feel and express love for both parents.