

I. When There are Children

For the woman who is separating or divorcing, the presence of children can create many more complications. If your husband is still relating to you and your children, there are several issues which must be dealt with by the two of you. First of all, the two of you (if this is possible) must decide what to tell the children about your separation. Generally, it is advisable to discuss the situation with them as openly and honestly as possible. The ability of your children to understand will dictate how much it is necessary or advisable for them to hear. There is little to be gained by causing children to lose respect for either parent; rather, it is better for them to realize that both parents are human, and that it is not a failure for them to decide to live apart. If your husband is no longer relating to the family, it is necessary for you to tell them about his absence. If your husband is gone because he has deserted you, is imprisoned, or is incarcerated in a mental hospital, it may be difficult to prevent loss of respect by your children for their father. Here again, probably the best course is to be as open and honest as possible in describing the situation.

Frequently it is assumed that the custody of children belongs with the woman. This is not necessarily true, nor is it always the best solution. There are countless factors which can contribute to deciding which parent can better deal with offspring. You might want to consider some of the following issues:

Are the children old enough to make up their own minds?

Is your husband as competent as you are to raise children?

Do you really want custody?

Does your husband want custody?

Are either you or your husband going to be living in a manner which might make raising children easier, like a group living situation?



Women's Legal Rights Reporter

Many women in the WIT program have had very ambivalent feelings about retaining custody of their children. It is not an easy task for a single woman to raise children. Many husbands are in a better position financially to assume responsibility for them.

Only you are able to decide what is the best alternative for you and your children. If you decide to give custody of your children to your husband, you may have a difficult time dealing with your own guilt feelings, or with the reactions of those around you. This is a time when your sister and the women in your small group can be very helpful to you. If you have examined all the alternatives and have settled on what you see as the best solution, there is no need for you to feel guilty. It is only the sexism of our society which decrees that women assume total responsibility for the raising of children.

children and fathers

Husbands will frequently use children as a means of "getting even" with their wives; this is especially true if the separation is not mutual. Be prepared for the possibility of your husband putting you down to your children. Women who retain custody of the children often find that they are extremely difficult to deal with after visitations with their father. This problem seems to be shared by most women.

Children often experience emotional stress around visitation. They may feel guilty about having good times with either parent. Frequently the father, who only sees the children periodically and is more secure financially, will be much less demanding and more generous than you are able to be. It is important that you do not allow yourself to use the children as pawns; don't fall into competition with your husband for the children's approval. Your children can be manipulating also. They may appear to pull away from you towards your husband. As frustrating and burdensome as all these "games" are, it may be helpful for you to know that once your husband establishes a new life of his own, with new interests, it is possible he will be less likely to bother causing difficulties for you.