Google Calendar Saved My Divorce...and Remarriage: Post-divorce Use of Technology

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Overview

• 1 million children experience parents’ divorce annually; courts increasingly favor joint custody (Kreider, 2007)

• Goals of joint custody include:
  • Maintain close parent-child ties
  • Contain coparental conflicts/reduce tension
Maintaining ties with technology

U.S. homes with children –
58% have 2+ computers
89% have 2+ cell phones (Kennedy, Smith, Well, & Wellman, 2008)

Technology can allow geographically dispersed families to stay connected

Little is known about:

• coparent communication technology use or
• how children maintain ‘connected presence’ with nonresidential parents
Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Technologies

Telephone – synchronous communication
- Widely used, but not always effective
- Interferes with the other household’s rhythms
- Allows hostile interactions (coparents)
- Privacy concerns
- Low quality interactions with children
- When children have no cell phones, coparents must be involved
- Hard to maintain relationships over time
Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Technologies

• Emails, texting, apps – asynchronous communication
  • Pros –
    • Can be used to organize schedules, send information at sender’s convenience
    • Can edit before sending
    • Does not require direct interaction with ex-partner
    • Allows photo sharing
    • Provides information trail
  • Cons
    • Does not allow nonresidential parent and stepparent involvement in care
    • May be used as a means of control
Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Technologies

Video conferencing

• Pros
  • Effective for seeing the loved one
  • Relatively simple to operate

• Cons
  • Requires cooperation of coparent (usually)
  • Privacy issues for children
  • Parents fear online predators
Future Technology

• *Virtual visitation* is being built into some parenting plans
• Need focus on parental care and parent-child play, activities that maintains parent-child and stepparent-stepchild closeness
• Needs to allow distant parents and stepparents to help with homework
What Children Want
(Yarosh et al., 2009)

A: A magical door that lets the dad enter the child’s room to say goodnight

B: A robot for carrying secret messages between a boy and his father
C: A system with speakers and a holographic projector that lets the parents and child speak whenever they want
Future Research

• More research needed to explore:
  • Coparents’ satisfaction with communication technologies
  • Effectiveness of parenting applications
  • How children are affected by coparents’ use of communication technologies
  • Understanding of changes in use over time (e.g., new apps)
References


