

# RELOCATION PROBLEMS

*And technosavvy ways to keep in touch*

By Scott N. Friedman

I refer to them as “relocation cases.” I have heard others refer to them as “move away cases.” When one parent either during, or after a marriage termination moves with the minor child or children, which requires the non-moving parent’s parenting time rights with the children to be affected. Relocation cases may also be as a result of the moving parent moving away but not taking the children. In either case, presumably a new parenting time schedule must be created involving some sort of long distance travel of the children and, perhaps, parents.

This issue may arise for all sorts of reasons. The moving parent needs to move because of new employment, or to be closer to family members to assist with the children, or because of a new spouse or significant other’s need to move.

Focusing on practical solutions when, in fact, one parent may be distantly removed from the children, with technological advances it is now much easier for parents and children to maintain quality interaction. There are even a line of family law cases around the country in which the courts have written about various technological alternatives for the parents and children to maintain close contact.

The most common method of regular contact is through telephone and standard email. However, even email now seems outdated as we have instant messaging chat capabilities, the ability to exchange video and photos over email and the internet, and even some parents and children set up their own websites to exchange valuable information. I have seen websites where parents and children post school projects, artwork, photos and video of children’s sporting events, and theatrical events. I had one case

where the child’s performance in a school play was recorded on video, downloaded to the website within hours of the live performance for the dad to watch on the internet.

Shared gaming websites have become popular. Children and the remote parent may sign on to the internet website to interact and play various games at the same time with one another such as chess, checkers, cards, and word games. Some popular websites with this feature include [www.pogo.com](http://www.pogo.com) and [www.gamesville.com](http://www.gamesville.com).

I recently handled a relocation case in which both parents were ordered to purchase and install a webcam device on each of their home computers so the children could speak to the parents pursuant to a set schedule every evening at a certain time. Arguably, webcam contact is not an exact replacement for face to face contact, but it is much better than the old way of relying on the US mail to send old photos or videos. Judges are now ordering this type of technology to be installed in both parents’ homes.

Recently in a relocation court case, I employed a computer expert to go to court and testify as to the various technological capabilities and the costs associated to assist the remote parent and children with maintaining consistent meaningful contact.

For children who are old enough, I have seen parents purchase cellular telephones to keep in daily contact. Text messaging on cell phones is a popular means of communication. It is important for a parent to know he or she can leave a message for the child on that child’s cell phone. It often helps to remove the wall of separation and brings to parent and child the good feeling of consistent contact.



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The cost for these various technological capabilities is usually not a barrier to employing them. In most households today, a personal computer with internet access and email is already being used. The cost for an effective webcam device can be as low as one hundred dollars. Most major cellular phone companies have fixed cost long distance plans. Even the major landline telephone companies now have reasonable fixed price long distance plans.

Obviously the age of the children affects the use of some of these technological means to communicate. With younger children, I have seen parents commit to exchange weekly digital photos and video over email. A digital camera photo frame is now available in which important photos may be changed easily to provide the children and parents updated photographs for display.

For most of these methods to work, both parents need to recognize the importance of the children maintaining remote consistent contact and therefore, both parents should encourage the children to use the tools to keep in touch. Moving away from a child or parent is neither ideal nor easy for the parent or child. It is much more manageable though, with the use of the technology available for staying in close contact.



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