

Kindred *Spirits*

Negotiating Grandparents' visitation rights

Visitation statutes

In both Missouri and Kansas, grandparents do have visitation rights if parents are divorced or divorce is pending, the parent is deceased or the child is born out of wedlock. However, it is not automatic. Grandparents must prove they have a substantial relationship with the grandchild and that visitation is in the best interest of the minor child. Grandparents have the burden of proof on both of these issues.

Published in partnership with the Family Friends Program and Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics.

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Traditionally, grandparents visit their grandchildren whenever they want. Grandparents often send cards and gifts, visit via telephone or e-mail and plan activities or trips. "Many grandparents also provide childcare while parents work," says Kris Jenkins, University of Missouri Extension human environmental sciences specialist. "This regular contact is mutually beneficial to everyone."

But in recent years, the rights of grandparents have been complicated by issues of divorce, parental custody and the increasing number of children who are born to unmarried parents. Grandparents' rights are a controversial issue. What often happens is that parents of the non-custodial parent get to see their grandchildren little or not at all.

The best approach for grandparents is to attempt to find a resolution without a court visit. Jenkins suggests these tips:

- If the grandchild's parents are getting a divorce or separating, ask them to include a visitation

schedule for you in the divorce or custody agreement.

- If your relationship with the parents has been difficult, try to work out a compromise for the sake of the grandchildren.
- Seek a trained mediator; much less expensive than a lawyer, these experts help families find a middle ground.
- Keep in touch with your grandchildren with cards, telephone calls or by e-mail. Keep a log of these contacts to prove an established relationship.
- Never put your grandchildren in the middle with negative remarks about their parents.

If none of these tips work, there is still hope. In all 50 states, grandparents have certain visitation rights—but how extensive or limited depends on the state.

It is important for children to spend time with their grandparents and extended family. In today's difficult world, there can never be too many caring and loving people in a child's life.

Laughter is healthy

Begin to look for humor in everyday situations

Researchers recommend the average American laugh 15 times or more a day for health maintenance. If you are a serious person, don't take time out for pleasure and always look at things in a negative way, you are likely to have health problems in the future. "If you are a serious workaholic and don't take time for humor or laughing, you may find yourself less productive and effective," says Dr. Nina Chen, University of Missouri Extension human development specialist.

She lists the benefits of everyday laughter:

- Laughter can make you feel

better. Good laughter is like a social lubricant to help break the ice and ease social tension.

- Laughter is good for reducing stress. Physicians report that laughter enhances muscle relaxation, which makes an important contribution to reducing stress and headaches. Laughter also is a powerful tool to release pent-up feelings of anger and anxiety. Laughter is an emotional weight-loss technique to help you feel lighter and healthier.
- Laughter is good exercise, a form of internal jogging. Laughter activates your

muscles, flooding oxygen to the brain and dilating the cardiovascular system.

Laughter can stimulate the production of endorphin in the brain, the body's natural pain-reducing enzyme.

- Laughter is free, non-fattening, non-polluting, non-taxable and constantly renewable; does not contain sodium; and does not require batteries or special assembly.

So where do you get a steady supply of laughter? Be positive to begin with. Try giving away 15 hugs today. You will laugh yourself to good health.

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Preserve mind and body

Regular, short bouts of moderate exercise can improve brain function and lower risk for many chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, says Lynda Johnson, R.D., University of Missouri Extension nutrition and health education specialist.

Updated physical activity guidelines for adults recommend moderate-intensity aerobic activities for 30 minutes a day, five days per week and strength training twice a week, along with stretching and balance exercises.

Get started by exercising 10 minutes at a time:

- Walk - First thing in the morning, take a brisk five-minute walk or take a 10-minute walk at the mall.
- Stretch – Relax and reduce stress by stretching.
- Build strength – Use hand weights and ankle weights while watching your favorite TV program.