



Stuart Showalter is a child custody policy advisor to Indiana state policy makers as well as attorneys on child custody cases. For parents he offers child custody based life coaching to help them maintain control of their lives, increase their fitness as parents and manage their litigation so they can truly serve the best interest of their children. He provides this Law Blog as free opinion on various issues. Reader submissions of topics are welcomed. Send to Stuart@StuartShowalter.com

Friday, March 23, 2018

Responsible Parenting, Child Custody Disputes, and Parenting Awareness Month

Three years ago I wrote about the proposed Office of Marriage Promotion which was put forth as 2015 HB1482. The stated legislative purpose of the Office was to increase the number of children born to married parents. Support for this was based upon an array of factors correlating marriage and better outcomes for children.

Those of us who have experienced the often exhaustive and mentally disabling effects of child custody contests know that it has an impact upon us. We are also quite aware of the statistics that show that divorce and child custody battles are highly correlated to poorer outcomes for the children. These statistics have been used to support efforts at legislating equal parenting time and other mandates which are correlated to positive well-being for children.

The not-so-obvious actuality here is that correlation is not tantamount to causation. These correlations are no more than statistical probabilities. Consider that the parents who are not likely to fulfill the contractual commitments to a spouse through marriage and thus seek a dissolution of that contract may not have the fortitude to uphold the implicit commitment necessary to the development of a well-adjusted and healthy child. It could just be that the people who don't seem to care to uphold the terms of a contract into which they knowingly and voluntarily entered likewise have even less regard for the unknown commitments that it takes to effectively raise a child.

Parenting conflict, child custody disputes, absentee parents, and other factors associated with parenting outside of the traditional marital family structure do present greater challenges to the outcome for children. However, I do contend that a causal relationship does not exist.

About Me



[Stuart Showalter - Child Custody Advisor](#)

As a child custody policy advisor I have written and had child custody related legislation passed into law. My counseling of lawyers and appearances as an expert witness have helped them achieve more favorable results for their clients including winning appeals, gaining parenting time, reducing conflict, and mediating agreements. Additionally I made important contributions to the amended Indiana Parenting Time Guidelines that went into effect March 2013 and am currently formulating recommendations for the Indiana Child Support Guidelines which are to be amended this year. For parents I offer child custody based life coaching to help them maintain control of their lives and increase their fitness as parents so they can truly serve the best interest of their children.

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I will use the violent video games/violent youth correlation as an example. Although rigorous scientific scrutiny has soundly defeated causal claims of violent games to violent acts, there are still people who believe that violent video games are the root of youthful violence. I liked video games and I dumped handfuls of quarters into the machines as a youth. I also liked auto racing from an early age. I watched Jackie Stewart as a child. I had a model of the Tyrrell 6-wheeler from 1976 which I enjoyed in play. About eight years later or so I also didn't hesitate to jump into the sit-down version of Pole Position which took 2 quarters to play. I never played the baseball video game but I had a little leaguer friend who, while I played with race car models, often played that game.

So I do think there may be a causal link between video games and real life: Having a favourable proclivity to something in real life causes one to later choose to seek out the same subject matter in video games.

By the way, no archeological digs of ancient civilization sites where violence was know to be common, including by youth, has unearthed a violence based video game machine but the search does continue so the link can be established.

As I expressed in 2015 I don't think marriage *causes* better outcomes for children. I have seen children horribly abused by married parents and read accounts of many more. I have seen bitterly fighting divorcing parents produce superb outcomes for their children.

The short of it is this - title does not make substance. Responsible parenting, through whatever legal or cultural domain in which parenting may exist, is the factor that truly affects the well-being of children not the marital status title or living arrangement. I contend that cognition of parenting is the core of responsible parenting. That begins simply with the application of terms such as whether one sees the well-being of their child as their obligation or opportunity. Paying taxes, renewing a driver's license, and mowing the lawn are all obligations - they are written into law in some manner. Rarely do we find ourselves embracing or cherishing those activities. Vacations, dance lessons, and non-accredited community college coursework are opportunities; opportunities for life fulfillment. We will readily expend time and resources in pursuit of those life affirming objectives. Yet the facets of child-rearing are still referred to as duties and obligations by our judiciary and this sense of tasks is embodied in our cultural vernacular at-large.

Reframing the parenting role and custody situation has been my therapeutic approach for parents embroiled in child custody disputes. All too often their legal strategy has been based upon uncovering and promulgating the peccadilloes of the other parent and using custody as a means of experiencing some reconciliation for perceived past wrongs. The goal of attaining greater responsibility for the child becomes the desired outcome. And while there may have been wrongs committed by the other parent and his or her current follies are exposed, neither makes the trumpeting parent a more

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responsible parent nor promotes a concept of responsibility to the child whose upbringing is an opportunity.

April is Parenting Awareness Month Indiana [PAMI]. It is a statewide public education and awareness initiative of the Responsible Parenting Campaign, a resource of the Indiana Parenting Institute. This is a celebration of parenting which seeks to foster responsible parenting by acknowledging those who are raising children, educating parents, and providing resources to help families thrive.

The 2018 PAMI kickoff breakfast will be held on Friday 30 March 2018 in Merrillville, Indiana. The breakfast will feature Lori Desautels Ph.D, Associate Professor of Butler University's Educational Neurosciences/Brain & Trauma program. Her presentation is titled "Brain Gain: How to Raise Smarter Kids". More details are available [here](#). This event is free to eligible parents but an RSVP is required.

If you are unable to attend this event there is still a great amount of information that you can obtain from the IPI website about PAMI and the Responsible Parenting Campaign. Additionally, there is information [on the site](#) about other resources which are available throughout the year. Select a site from the Location menu at the bottom of the page.

Regardless of your current parental status or the time of year, responsible parenting should be a never ending commitment. Such a commitment produces better parent-child relationships and beneficial outcomes for the children.

In closing I leave you with a quote from that 2015 posting which the Indiana Parenting Institute has added to their website - *Rather than promoting a legal status as the bridge to better childhood experiences and well-being, I would rather see an initiative that promotes responsible parenting regardless of the legal relationship of the parents. The Responsible Parenting Campaign of the Indiana Parenting Institute is a paradigm of what I think would better serve children than an effort to impose a legal status upon parents...*

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Parents who would like to achieve the best outcome for their children in a contested child custody case should visit my [website](#) and [contact my scheduler](#) to make an appointment to meet with me. Attorneys may request a free consultation to learn how I can maximize their advocacy for their clients.

Connect with me for the latest Indiana child custody related policy considerations, findings, court rulings and discussions.