

A SINGLE PARENT'S BILL OF RIGHTS

Many parents are not represented by counsel at the time they reach an agreement, or a final judgment is entered, and they never have their parental rights explained to them. Third parties who work with children from single parent homes are also very likely to unwittingly violate or facilitate the violation of the parental rights by the other parent because of their lack of understanding of the term “**Shared Parental Responsibility**” and the rights each parent (married or single) constitutionally possesses.

When you divorce, unless there is a specific limitation spelled out in the court’s order or final judgment, the parents will **Share Parental Responsibility** for their minor children. This means both parties retain full parental rights and responsibilities, and they are expected to work together and to make all major decisions affecting their children’s welfare together.

If **Shared Parental Responsibility** has been awarded without specific limitation, there are certain parental rights which are generally recognized and enforced by the family law courts in Florida. The following is a list of some of these rights. This is not intended to be a complete list. If you believe your rights as a single parent have been violated, you should discuss the matter with a family law attorney. If you do not know an attorney specializing in family law, you may contact Attorney Reineke for additional information or your Local County’s Bar Association for a referral.

- (1) You have the right to reasonable telephone contact with your child when he/she is in the care of the other parent.
- (2) You have the right to speak with your child privately and to expect the other parent not to eavesdrop on phone calls or read correspondence and e-mail between you and your child.
- (3) You have the right to notice of all school functions and extracurricular activities and to participate in these activities.
- (4) You have the right to participate in the decision of who will be providing daycare and before and after-school-care for your child. You have the right to the name, address, and phone numbers of all babysitters and care providers for your child and to meet and speak with these individuals.
- (5) You have the right to reasonable notice when your child has been sick or injured.
- (6) You have the right to the name, address and telephone number of all physicians providing care to your child. You have the right to meet with the physician, to copies of your child’s medical records, and to participate in all decisions regarding non-emergency medical care.
- (7) You have the right to receive prior notice of and to participate in the decision to take your child to a psychologist or a licensed mental health worker. This

includes the right to the name address and phone number of the counselor and copies of the counselor's curriculum vitae and any other information relevant to the counselor's credentials.

(8) You have the right to be on the emergency pick up list for schools, childcare, and extracurricular activities.

(9) You have the right to copies of your child's school records, medical records, and in most cases, mental health records.

(10) You have a right to an itinerary whenever the other parent will be spending time with the child away from their home. This includes dates of departure and return, travel, hotel and flight information, the names of persons who will be traveling with your child, and phone numbers where the traveling parent and your child may be reached during their trip.

(11) You have the right to expect the other parent not to discuss your disputes with your child, or in front of your child.

(12) You have the right to expect the other parent to encourage the child to love you, visit you, telephone you, and not to speak badly of you in the presence of the child.

(13) You have the right to expect the child and the other parent to be consistently on time when dropping off or picking up the child and to a phone call when the other parent is going to be late.

(14) You have the right to speak with (or at least correspond or e-mail) the other parent directly regarding your parental rights and scheduling contact. The child or others should not be used as messengers.

(15) You have the right to expect the other parent to be reasonably flexible with the time sharing (visitation) schedule upon reasonable notice for special events.

About the Author. Attorney Beth Reineke is a licensed Family Law Attorney and a Supreme Court Certified Mediator. She has received additional training as an arbitrator, a Collaborative Divorce Attorney and Facilitator, and as a Parent Coordinator for high conflict custody litigation. Attorney Reineke devotes herself full time to mediating and assisting families to resolve their differences without litigation. *The foregoing article was prepared as a summary and is not intended to substitute for legal advice from an experienced family lawyer. If you have questions about your rights and obligations under the terms of your parenting agreement, your final judgment or Florida Law you should consult with an attorney experienced in family law.*