

**What are the questions we need to ask in parenting cases involving children in the 0-4 age group?**

1. **What do we know about this particular child?**

**How old is the child?** 3 years or 3 months can make a difference.

**What are the particular traits of this child?:** what is the child's temperament? How does this child cope with change?

**What is the child's capacity for reflective functioning?** Does the child have the capacity to form a clear plan with the parent (usually Mother) about the separation and reunion from and with that primary attachment figure.

2. **What do we know about the relationship between the child and each parent?**

**What is the nature of the relationship between the child and each parent?** How old was the child when the parties separated? What are we building on?

**What were the arrangements pre-separation?** If time with a parent has been sporadic or disrupted or even non-existent, very different from living with each parent full time until separation at say, nearly 3 years of age.

3. **What do we know about the relationship between the parents?**

**Are they communicating well and listening to each other?** Do they trust and respect each other as parents?

**What has been observed at changeovers?**

Because separation and reunion from and to an attachment figure will trigger attachment responses in a child, what happens at changeover is very significant, and the number of transfers in any given period will be significant. So we need to ask:

**How is the child managing transitions?** How does the child behave before and after?

**Does the child have an older sibling transferring with him/her?** Overnights appear to be easier for young children when they have an older sibling going with them to ease the transition. That relationship itself will be an attachment relationship.

4. **What is the quality of each party's parenting?**

**How sensitive is each parent to the child's needs?** Can the parent maintain a consistent routine for the child in such areas as meal times, eating habits, bedtime, bath time, sleeping habits, toileting.... Of course, consistent routines are more likely to be achieved in 2 homes if the parents can talk to each other.

**What is each parent's capacity for reflective functioning?** That is: can each parent think from the child's point of view?

**What is each parent's motivation for seeking more time?** - to control the other parent? - child support? -

**What is the level of anxiety in the resident parent about the child separating?**

5. **What is the quality of the child's relationships with extended family members and are the step parents and other extended family members supportive emotionally of the child?**

Whether step-mother, aunt, grandparent, that person must have the capacity for sensitive timely responses to the child's attachment cues in an ongoing way.

6. **How practical are the proposed arrangements for a child of this age?**

Of course, as Cashmore and Parkinson point out, what is practical may not be what is optimal for the child.

**What distance is the child required to travel?** It is unrealistic to expect a young child to manage long distance travel on a regular basis.

**Where would the time allocated have to be spent?** In a park or shopping centre, or in a comfortable home?

**What are each party's working commitments, commuting times?**

**Is the baby being breast fed?**

**When does the child sleep during the day?**

**Are there financial constraints?**

**What is the child's weekly routine under the proposed regime? Is it manageable for that particular child in all the circumstances?**

**How many caregivers are there?**

7. **What mental health issues, drug or alcohol issues need to be considered?**

Paul Lodge describes the "substance dependent person" as potentially an attachment nightmare.