## Importance of Maternal and Paternal Relatives Access

One advantage of co-parenting is the opportunity for your child to have an increased relationship with both sides of relatives. The Parenting Plan should also include grandparents and other extended family members. It's important to recognize that grandparents and other close relatives are vital in the unique developmental stages of the process. If given the opportunity to participate, grandparents are more likely to become an important support resource to your children as they adjust to the new family dynamic. This bond can be a critical ingredient to their development. The grandparent-grandchild relationship always continues and so their role in helping your children adjust can provide a safe place for the child's emotional needs.

*For more information on Grandparent rights:*

https://www.coloradojudicial.gov/self-help/grandparent-family-time/request-grandparent-or-great-grandparent-visitation

## What is Co-Parenting?

Co-parenting is a phrase used to describe how parents who aren't living together can be sensitive to their child's needs. It means learning to make decisions together that both serve their children's best interests and avoid putting them in the middle. Most serious problems occur when children are stuck in the middle of divorced parents who hate (or at least act like they hate) one another. Our recommendation (not something all parents want to hear) is that kids need both parents. In addition, experts in child development agree that in most cases, children will thrive best when there is input from both a mother and a father. While some may question this, there is little doubt that most damage to children results from being stuck in the middle of warring parents.

Studies have shown that when there is high conflict between parents, kids who have more frequent contact with a non-custodial parent fare WORSE than kids who see the noncustodial parent less frequently. This happens because there are more opportunities for these parents to argue and fight with one another in the presence of their children. It is not easy to collaborate with someone you dislike or hate. At the same time, remember, this is about your children.

Begin with the realization that healthy children have positive relationships with both parents. Your job is to begin focusing on those areas (however small they may seem) where you can feel positive about the other parent and what he or she has to offer your children. All parents have something to offer. Nurturing the seeds of what is good in the other parent can often help more positive things grow. This means that whatever good that parent has to offer should have some pathway of getting through to the child. Step back and look at your

co-parent in the role of a parent. Many people make lousy partners but have the potential to be terrific parents. Don't assume that the parent he or she was in your relationship will be the same parent once you aren't together anymore. Remember also that in some ways, your child identifies with your ex-spouse. On some very basic level, children have a sense that they are 50% Mom and 50% Dad. Any trashing of your ex inadvertently trashes 50% of your child. Also, children have a shared history with both parents, and a shared present and future. Your co-parent is an important part of your child(ren)'s lives, and just as you would help your children succeed in school or sports, it is important to help them succeed in that relationship.

Encourage the other parent to stay involved in the children's school and extra-curricular activities. Respect your child's needs to have both parents there, without making them worry about the embarrassment of a public fight. If you cannot be civil with one another, work out an arrangement where your child does not have to witness ongoing conflict. If exchanging the children is problematic, you can find creative ways to minimize your contact with each other. You can arrange for someone else to send and pick up the children, or arrange the exchange at a neutral place. The key is to let your children go back and forth between homes with ease, rather than going through a minefield of conflict.

**Helpful Co-Parenting Behaviors**

1. Flexible with each other's new schedule
2. Respectful of family needs vs your own
3. Focus on kids' emotional well-being
4. Supportive of each other's goals
5. Respects boundaries
6. Positive communication dialogue
7. Respectful of new partners and stepparents

**Harmful Co-Parenting Behaviors**

1. Confrontational for no reason
2. Condescending or narcissistic
3. Constant feeling of instability of boundaries
4. Emotional or physical threats to motivate desired behaviors
5. Family avoids having hard conversations out of fear
6. Inflexible with needs of the family
7. Doesn't pay child support/alimony on time
8. Inconsistency with schedules
9. Uses children to communicate through
10. Verbalizes resentments and anger towards Co-Parent around the children

**The Gray Rock Method**

When faced with a co-parent who thrives on conflict or drama, consider the "gray rock" approach. Make yourself as uninteresting and unresponsive as possible to provocative

behavior. Respond to necessary communications with minimal emotion and information. Keep conversations focused strictly on the children's needs, schedules, and logistics. This strategy often reduces the difficult parent's attempts to create conflict because they're not getting the emotional reaction they may be seeking.

**Impact of Culture on Parenting Styles and Preferences**

Culture is defined as a shared pattern of social norms, values, language, and behavior, which significantly influences parenting. As a result, parenting approaches vary across cultures.

Each parent has a unique approach to interacting with and guiding their children, thereby shaping their morals, principles, and behavior. As societies become more interconnected, parenting practices have also evolved. Multicultural families often blend the parenting styles of both parents' cultures that lead to hybrid methods that can be both challenging and enriching.

For instance, a child raised by a parent from an authoritative Western culture and another from an authoritarian Asian background may benefit from both worlds. The child may learn independence and self-expression while also understanding the importance of respect and discipline. This kind of cross-cultural blending can foster cognitive flexibility and emotional resilience, giving children tools to navigate different social contexts.

However, balancing these cultural influences is not without its challenges. Parents in multicultural families may have different ideas about discipline, autonomy, and success, which can lead to conflict. But when approached with open communication and mutual respect, these differences can be harmonized in ways that enrich the child's upbringing.

**Practical Tips for Multicultural Parenting**

For parents raising children in multicultural settings, navigating the intersection of different cultural expectations can be challenging but rewarding. Here are some tips to help:

**Communicate openly**: Have honest discussions with your partner about your respective cultural values and how you want to incorporate them into your parenting.

**Celebrate both cultures**: Involve your children in both parents' cultural traditions. This could include celebrating holidays, learning languages, or telling stories from each culture.

**Balance discipline and autonomy**: Understand that cultural differences may require flexibility. Find a balance between the autonomy often valued in individualistic cultures and the respect for authority emphasized in collectivist cultures.

**Model adaptability**: Show your children that it is possible to respect and blend cultural differences in a way that enriches their development. This will prepare them to navigate a multicultural world with confidence.

## Parallel Parenting vs. Cooperative Parenting

Recognize that traditional cooperative parenting may not be possible with a truly difficult co-parent. In these cases, parallel parenting can be more realistic and less stressful. This approach allows each parent to maintain their own parenting style and rules within their respective households, with minimal direct communication between parents. Focus on major decisions that legally require both parents' input, and let go of trying to control what happens in the other parent's home, as long as the children are safe.

Parallel parenting may be a long-term or temporary solution until differences can be set aside and each can work together more directly. In parallel parenting each parent has certain responsibilities they carry out in the day-to-day duties without involving the other parent depending on your parenting plan. For example, parents can switch out attending their children's appointments and social events to minimize the time they have to spend with each other. This allows both parents to stay involved in their children's lives.

When parents successfully parent within a parallel parenting arrangement, it's important each maintain their end of the parenting agreement. When trust is restored, parents are more likely to put aside their differences and a more collaborative and cooperative parenting relationship becomes established. Parallel parenting can provide a foundation for cooperative parenting as parents move from disengagement and towards a more direct style of communication and negotiation.

## How do I Deal with a Parent Who is Sabotaging my Co-Parenting Efforts?

Dealing with a parent who will not cooperate or negotiate under any circumstances is extremely frustrating. It can also make it difficult for you to make good decisions. It is all too easy to sink to the uncooperative parent's level and make choices not in your children's best interests. For example, one parent communicating adult issues through a child can tempt the other parent to do the same. Resist the urge to do this, and **keep doing the right thing**. Making good choices for your children must be your focus. Parents often wait years for the payoff, but it will be worth it.

It is never too early to begin working on your negative feelings toward your ex. Having angry or painful feelings about your ex is not the problem. The problem comes when parents don't find appropriate ways of expressing and dealing with these away from their children. It is best to have a support system of family and friends, as well as a trusted mental-health professional with whom you can process these feelings appropriately. Don't expect to get through negative feelings overnight. Most parents report a back-and-forth process between negative feelings and a sense of resolve. Remember that this happens over time, and you

have to find your own timetable. Parents who avoid dealing with these difficult feelings merely prolong the suffering for themselves and their children.

Parents who are unwilling to cooperate on any level usually have unresolved anger, grief, sadness, or all of the above. One parent's unresolved feelings can create an emotional atmosphere that prevents both parents from remaining child-focused. Do not stoop to that level. Historical arguments are better left behind; leave the issues of your relationship in the past and resist playing out those never-ending conversations that just leave everyone frustrated, angry, and tired. Everyone feels the lure of these arguments, but they are dead-ends to cooperative parenting. Simply refuse to engage in such conversations, and continually stress that you are interested in communicating about what is currently affecting your child's life. Doing this consistently may help, in that at least you (and your children) won't have to be exposed to these dead-end conversations.

If you are stuck dealing with a difficult parent, especially when there is a pending court case, it is a good idea to keep good records of all your interactions. Keep track of whether they are keeping their commitments to any original agreements regarding custody, visitation, appointments, and providing consistent positive messages to the children.

An exception to the preceding discussion is when children are in jeopardy from abuse or neglect. These are the only reasons to keep a child from seeing the other parent without supervision or appropriate safeguards. When there is an element of such danger, you must get the assistance of the courts, police, and anyone mandated to become involved in protecting the safety of children. In all other disagreements, attempts to foster positive relationships with both parents must be made in the children's best interests.

If you are faced with a parent who refuses to keep to an agreed schedule, or is putting your children at serious physical or emotional risk, then consulting with legal counsel and/or child protective agencies may be necessary. However, under no circumstances should you make a false report of abuse or neglect. Unlike abuse and neglect, bad parenting is not against the law.

On-going co-parent conflict and domestic violence can be extremely harmful for children and families. Below are some tips on how to minimize it's affects, especially when dealing with an uncooperative co-parent.

1. Set boundaries by adhering to the Parenting Plan and court orders whenever possible
2. Prioritize Self-Care by taking time to do activities that bring you joy
3. When necessary, take the high road when your co-parent's behavior is toxic and disengage
4. Join online or support groups for support
5. Speak in neutral terms when referring to your co-parent's actions or non-action
6. Only communication when absolutely necessary
7. Use technology to communicate through so conversations can be monitored and tracked

***If you know that a sex offender or a person who has been convicted of a dangerous crime against children will be around your child, the co-parent must be notified immediately.***

## Establishing Boundaries and Communication Protocols

When dealing with an uncooperative co-parent, establishing clear boundaries becomes essential for your own wellbeing and your children's stability. Consider implementing structured communication methods that minimize conflict opportunities. Email or text messaging often works better than phone calls, as written communication allows you to think before responding and creates a record of interactions. Set specific times for communication rather than allowing constant interruptions throughout your day.

Practice the "BIFF" method when responding to hostile communications: keep responses **Brief, Informative, Friendly, and Firm**. Avoid defensive explanations or emotional reactions. For example, if your coparent sends an angry message about a scheduling change, respond with: "I understand you're concerned about the schedule change. Johnny will be picked up at 6 PM on Friday as discussed. Please let me know if this doesn't work." This approach acknowledges their concern without engaging in the emotional drama.

## Documentation Strategies

Expand your record-keeping beyond basic interactions. Document patterns of behavior that affect your children's wellbeing: missed pickups, last-minute schedule changes, inappropriate conversations in front of children, or failure to communicate important information about the children's health or school activities.

Keep a calendar noting your children's emotional state after visits, any concerning behaviors, or positive developments. This isn't about building a case against your coparent, but rather tracking patterns that might help you better support your children or provide important information to professionals if needed.

## Resource Tools to Help Improve Your Co-Parent Relationship

https://www.ourfamilywizard.com

https://www.2houses.com/en/

https://talkingparents.com/home

Another point to keep in mind is that both of you, as parents, are experiencing changes. For example, spending time alone with your children might be a new experience for you. Sharing time is a further adjustment, especially if you are used to having access to your kids at all times. You may feel differently about how the other parent is handling a situation from your reactions while you were together. That is normal. Try to understand that the other parent is in a different role that may prevent them from handling a situation as you think they should. Allow for differences. Your children will adjust to your parenting differences, and they may even come to appreciate such differences.

## The Long View

Remember that co-parenting situations often evolve over time. What feels impossible today may become more manageable as emotions settle and new routines develop. Your consistent, child-focused approach serves as a stabilizing force for your children, even when their other parent remains difficult. Children notice which parent maintains boundaries, stays calm, and prioritizes their wellbeing, and this creates a foundation of trust and security that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Stay focused on your ultimate goal: raising healthy, well-adjusted children who feel loved and supported despite their parents' inability to work together harmoniously. Your commitment to taking the high road, even when it's challenging, is an investment in your children's future emotional health and your relationship with them.

## How do I Begin Seeing my Ex in a New Light?

It is not easy to develop a new perspective about your ex solely as a parent. You will most likely have some leftover negative feelings about them. It can be particularly difficult when there was a lot of stress, tension, and difficult times during the relationship. Remind yourself that your common goal now is the well-being of your children. Issues that were alive and well in your relationship can be left in the past when you are dealing with present situations.

Many parents feel they are doing a good job if they are not saying bad things about the other parent in front of the kids. This is good, but it is not enough. Most kids pick up on parents' actual feelings through subtle, usually nonverbal cues. By getting support for yourself, you are less likely to create unhealthy messages even inadvertently. If you become overwhelmed with feelings of anger, resentment, jealousy, or revenge, make special efforts to address these with members of your support system or a good practitioner of mental health.

## Six Keys to Successful Co-Parenting

1. How you feel about your ex is less important than how you act toward him/her. Putting aside your negative feelings is definitely in the best interests of your child.
2. Respect your need for privacy and the other parent also. The only information that needs to be shared between co-parents is that pertaining to their children.
3. Both parents' time with the child is sacred. Don't make or change plans for the time your child is scheduled to spend with your ex. Honor the pre-arranged schedule.
4. Both parents have the right to develop their own parenting styles. As long as no abuse or neglect is happening, let your ex relate to your child as he or she sees fit.
5. Acknowledge what your co-parent has to offer your child. Remember the qualities that first attracted you. Those qualities still exist and are available to your child.
6. Expect to feel awkward and uncomfortable with this new way of relating. But keep affirming your commitment to the new relationship, and eventually your ex will begin to play by the same rules.

**How do I Balance my Children's Needs With my Own Needs?**

Parents should realize that focusing on their own needs helps their children. Most children, regardless of their age, will feel secure if they sense their parents are emotionally healthy. Making time for yourself, while often difficult, is important. Healthy outlets include counseling with a professional therapist, meeting with friends or support groups, or any activity that brings you pleasure. Neglecting yourself makes it difficult to be effective with your kids' needs. You must have outlets for dealing with your own difficult feelings.

Be mindful that your needs and those of your children will often be very different. While you might be feeling angry, anxious, or depressed about your new living situation, it is entirely possible that your child feels a great sense of relief now that things have changed. Avoid assuming that your children feel or think exactly the way you do. Their experience of your ex is very different from your experience. That is the way it should be. Remember, the relationship your children have with both parents is different from the relationship parents have with each other. You may feel betrayed or rejected by your ex, but that may not be what your child experienced. Parents and children rarely experience their parent's separation in exactly the same way. If you suspect you are confusing your own feelings with those of your kids, get some outside objective feedback from someone you trust.

In the next section, we will explore one important way parents can create a stable home environment for their children: a well-thought out and flexible parenting plan.

**What is a Parenting Plan?**

A parenting plan is a written proposal by a parent indicating how two parents will handle their future relationship with their child. It contains provisions on custody, visitation, decision making, and many other co-parenting responsibilities. A carefully constructed parenting plan is an important part of raising healthy children. A parenting plan must evolve with the changing needs of your children. Therefore, it does not have to include every potential

situation you may encounter. However, it must be revisited regularly to make sure it meets your family's needs.

As stated above, an effective parenting plan will outline how both parents will maintain a close and loving relationship with their children. Although the plan should contain many specifics, it should also permit some flexibility. You should be prepared to make occasional

changes to schedule or routines if it will assist your co-parent. These times should be the exception and not the rule, however. Remember, when you show flexibility and understanding, you are loving your children; ideally, your co-parent is acting in kind. If they are not, keep doing the right thing.

Below is a summary list of what should be included in a parenting plan. This list is not exhaustive, and parents should use it as a guide to construct a plan that is right for them, their children, and their particular situation.

**Things to Consider When Making a Parenting Plan:**

1. Schedules will cover time spent with both parents on weekdays, weekends, the school year, summers, birthdays, vacations, and holidays. This section should also outline how changes to the schedule will be handled.
2. Decision-making will include day-to-day decisions like eating meals and ensuring that homework is done as well as major decisions like health care and moving.
3. Information sharing will outline how parents will communicate about the variety of issues that involve their children.
4. Parent-child communication should be addressed and provisions made for how children will communicate with one parent while with the other parent.
5. Exchange of children for visitation will describe schedules and places for the effective transfer of children from one parent to the other.
6. Handling disputes will provide a brief plan for how parents should deal with the inevitable differences and conflicts that arise when raising children.

**Drafting a Parenting Plan:**

The written parenting plan pays attention to how the parents will make decisions pertaining to the child(ren)'s education, health care, religious training, and personal care; it is a blend of specific information with generalized plans of action. It should reflect what the parents are currently doing or what they actually plan to do. It should reflect a commitment to the minor child(ren)'s needs as predominant.

To assist parents creating a parenting plan, please click on the following link to get a copy of a template to guide you through the process.

https://www.coloradojudicial.gov/self-help/form-parenting-plan-aprcustody

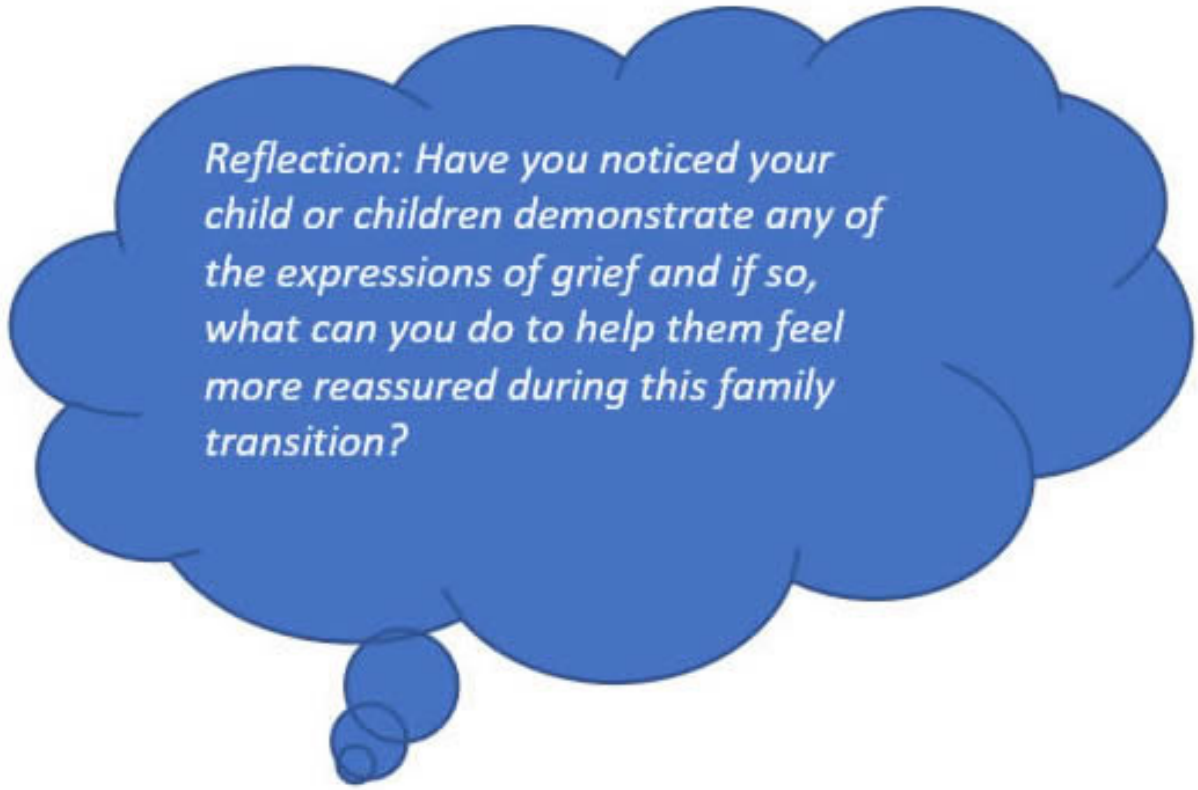
**In order for the court to approve a parenting plan, the court may look into the following:**

1. The best interests of the minor child(ren) are served;
2. The plan designates legal decision-making as joint or sole;
3. The plan sets forth each parent's rights and responsibilities for the personal care of the minor child(ren) and for decisions in areas such as education, health care, and religious training;
4. The plan provides a practical schedule of parenting time for the child, including holidays and school vacations;
5. The plan includes a procedure for exchanges of the child, including location and responsibility for transportation;
6. The plan includes a procedure by which proposed changes, disputes and alleged breaches may be mediated or resolved, which may include the use of private counseling;
7. The plan includes a procedure for periodic review (e.g., parents agree to review the terms of the agreement every 12 months.);
8. The plan includes a procedure for communicating with each other about the child, including methods and frequency;
9. The plan includes a statement that each party has read, understands, and will abide by the notification requirements.

**The following questions may be used as a starting place when drafting a parenting plan:**

1. The geographical location of the parents: Where do parents live relative to one another? What are their addresses? Permanent or temporary?
2. Arrangements regarding the residential requirements of the minor child(ren): How much time will the minor child(ren) spend with each parent? Be as specific as possible, including days and times.
3. Arrangements for holidays and vacations: What are your plans for summer vacation and school breaks? List specific details including dates and times.
4. Arrangements for education: How will decisions be made for educational matters? For example, if preschool age, what school will the minor child(ren) attend? If private school, who pays what?
5. Additional transportation arrangements: Will any additional transportation arrangements be needed? If so, what will be the responsibilities of each parent?
6. Determinations regarding minor child(ren)'s health care: For example, how will medical decisions be made? Who will provide insurance? How are non-insured expenses paid? Who decides on seeking non-emergency treatment? Is there a dental plan? If not, who will pay what?
7. Arrangements regarding extraordinary expenses: For example, what financial arrangements are made for the minor child(ren) (such as each sharing extraordinary expenditures and the parent with whom the minor child(ren) resides bearing the ordinary ones during the minor child(ren)'s residency)? A fixed amount per month?
8. Arrangements for minor child(ren)'s religious training, if any: For example, how will decisions be made for religious training? What, if any, are the plans for religious training?

Any other factors: What other arrangements (such as music lessons, sports/activity fees, camp or Scouts) are needed?




## Case Study

Tommi (51) and Carmen (52) were married for 25 years before they decided to divorce. Not unlike many couples, they were faced with an empty nest after their two children left for college. When they arrived in my office, they showed all the signs of familiarity that such a long marriage entails.

At the time they were despondent, but they were also, given their age, quite realistic people. This is always something that can be capitalized on when helping a couple through divorce-related problems. The big issue they faced was the fact their son, Christopher (19), had special needs, and so he required round-the-clock attention.

I knew it was going to be a difficult case, but I was also positive that Tommi and Carmen had a practical sense that I could use to help them sort through their problems. The dilemma at the heart of proceedings was that they both wanted to keep Christopher with them in their homes.

Tommi had moved into a small house nearby, and had even outfitted the new home with the resources required to look after his child. The house they shared was still occupied by Carmen and had the resources needed for Christopher's care.

Recognizing that they both clearly loved their son, I found the need, as with many couples, to remind them that trying to change one another is a trap. Although it is a cliché, people going through a separation often times need to be reminded that they can only change themselves. The good news is than one person's changes almost always causes the other person to change as well. In this instance, both Tommi and Carmen were trying to convince the other of the proper living arrangements and visitation schedule. Their arguments were getting out of hand and clearly disruptive to Christopher. Like many couples, they believed that moving apart would put a stop to chronic fighting. In fact, without outside intervention, most couples will continue the same type of bickering throughout and after the break-up.

I asked Tommi and Carmen what the consequences would be of continued fighting regarding living arrangements? I asked follow-up questions about the consequences surrounding the possibility that neither would give in. Like it often does, this type of questioning helps couples to reevaluate their situation. They both agreed that continued disagreements would be harmful to Christopher. I appreciated that this perspective came from them and not something that I needed to point out to them. In a relatively short time, this couple compromised on an outcome that would provide Christopher with an active life that allowed him to move between the homes fairly frequently.

With the living situation resolved, this couple was able to feel comfortable knowing that whatever the general faults of their partner, they knew the other was a good parent, and that this should take precedence over anything else. Once this had been affirmed, it was a short step to setting up a visitation schedule. Over time they even began to pool resources to make sure that Christopher had the optimal care possible. They had, in essence, bonded again over the love of their child.

This also allowed them the space to see one another from a different perspective. They no longer saw the other as the frustrating partner of old, but rather, as a unique and singular co-parent; dedicated to their child as they were. This transformation was a pleasure to witness. This case punctuates how easy it can be to overlook those under our care beneath the fog of court proceedings. The last time I encountered the couple, they brought Christopher along to meet me; a true honor.

***Please click on the link below for a printable copy of this chapter.***