

## **RE: When Families Separate**

*Dear Families,*

*As a family child care provider, I strive to foster a sense of community within my daycare and to provide a closeness that you will not find in a child care center. Because your child's welfare is so important, my caring and nurturing your child can create an intimacy between us that makes our relationship feel more like a friendship rather than of business partners.*

*Although this is ideal, well defined boundaries in certain areas are needed. Family dynamics vary and may change and some find or may one day find themselves struggling with court orders, custody issues and feelings of estrangement. It is imperative that I remind all of the family's that I work with that I must remain a neutral third party. Please be aware that although I am aware of the turmoil you and your child face, as your child's advocate their needs are my sole priority. My role is to provide children with a safe, neutral environment where they are free to express their own feelings of sadness and fear. In consideration of this, here is a list of some of the things you must remember when faced with this type of situation.*

- 1. My home is a safe haven for children. Refrain from expressing your own sadness or frustration about your child's other parent in my home. This includes the other parent's family and significant other. Children are extremely perceptive and can sense your feelings; my home is one place where children are able to escape this tension.*
- 2. Provide me with copies of legal documents. This includes documents regarding custody or care arrangements for your child. In the absence of any court documents, I cannot legally keep a child from his or her parent, and will not agree to any such requests unless a copy of a valid legal court document is provided to me.*
- 3. Develop a plan for pick-up and drop-off. If you are sharing the responsibility of picking and dropping off a child with a child's other parent discuss and resolve an arrangement and provide me with a copy of this arrangement in writing. If one parent has difficulty following this plan or arrives early or late to pick-up or drop-off then this parent will be unable to continue to drop-off and pick the child up from my home.*
- 4. Do not make my home or surrounding area a place of confrontation. If you need to do a "switch" where the child must go from one parent to the other, choose a different location to do so. Otherwise one parent can drop off in the morning and the other parent can pick up in the evening.*
- 5. Refrain from requesting that I do anything other than the normal array of service that I normally provide to all of my clients. I will not answer questions about the other parent or spent time evaluating the child or the other parent's capability as a parent or his/her parenting skills. I will NOT document anything other than legitimately suspected mistreatment which I, as a state mandated reporter am*

*required to report, unless obligated to do so by a court order. If a court feels the need for my opinion, they can provide me with a list of written questions which I will answer honestly and to the best of my abilities.*

- 6. I do not participate in supervised visitation. My home is a "home away from home" for many children and I must consider the welfare of ALL of my clients. Please find and schedule supervised visitations elsewhere and on your own time.*
- 7. I operate an honest business and consider my integrity and trust two hallmarks of my home. Please do not ask me to do anything that goes against that grain.*

*You will also have one of two choices:*

- 1. Two separate contracts are signed, one for each parent, in which each parent's childcare days, hours, pick-up and drop-off times and payment responsibilities are clearly defined.*

*-- OR --*

- 2. One contract is signed in which case only one parent will be responsible for the child care payment.*

*Child care payment must always be done promptly and courteously. Any issues that arise with the other parent regarding child support payments or payments for my services must not involve or affect me whatsoever and must be resolved privately amongst yourselves. Finances are a primary point of contention in many separations – do NOT let this affect payment for my services.*

*In summary, I am a child care provider -- not a mediator or evaluator – and I will not choose sides. Please minimize to the greatest degree possible, any disruption to your child's regular day at my home. Separation of a family is a big issue to young children, and my home should be a place of stability where they can work through their emotions and confusion.*

*If you have questions about your specific situation, or really feel there are issues regarding your child's other parent that we need to discuss, please call me.*

*Marina Vanessa Valenzuela*

*Helping Hands Childcare*