

Kids In The Middle News

May 10, 2016



Dear KITM...

"My children became very attached to the family pets when we divorced. We struggled to decide who should keep the pets, and now my kids struggle to see their other parent because they don't want to leave their pets behind. Do you have any advice?"

Mom says: The two suggestions that immediately come to mind are, one: let the kids take the family pets with them when they visit the other parent who does not regularly keep the pets. Or two: the parent who does not have the family pets could take the kids to pick out another pet they can keep with them at their house.

If it's not possible to move the pets or acquire new ones, maybe the kids could take a picture of the pets with them when they leave them behind. Or mom or dad could send short videos or texts updating the kids on how the pets are doing while they are apart.

Assuring the kids that their animal friends are happy and being well taken care of even when they are apart may alleviate some of their anxiety about leaving them behind.

Dad says: Pets are often beloved members of the family, and so children, as much as the parents, can form very close bonds with their dog, cat or other pet. When a couple separates through divorce a decision must be made as to which parent the pet stays with. In recent years, the custody of beloved pets has become more and more of an issue in divorce proceedings. From the American Bar Association, "Animal custody fights between significant others ending their relationship are usually highly emotional and charged with leftover personal issues. Animal custody battles can be pursued in regular civil trial court or through the use of a mediator. If the custody dispute arises during a divorce, the fight can play out as part of the divorce proceedings."*

So children can sometimes be caught in the emotional crossfire between parents over who

retains custody of their pet. Fortunately judges will usually rule in the best interests of the children, as they should. Legal Zoom says, "Absent a clear indication of individual ownership, they [judges] have some leeway to consider who the most stable caretaker is for the animal. If children are involved in the case too, a judge will usually keep the children and pet in the same household."*

What if custody over the pet has been decided and the pet is living in one parent's household with the kids; it's time to visit the co-parent for an extended period of time, say summer vacation, and your child is having anxiety over leaving their pet behind? The obvious answer is, can the pet come with the child for the visit too? If not, maybe a few pictures of can be sent with the child along with lots of reassurance that their pet will certainly remember them even if they would happen to be gone for years. That's how pets really are! They will always remember you!

Another consideration is that life in general is full of times when we have to leave a loved one behind for a period of time, no matter how many legs they have. Be it a parent, a sibling, a friend or a pet, at one time or another we will have to separate from them for a while. Learning to deal with the pain of separation from a loved one is something we all have to do sooner or later. It is just part of life. Learning to deal with separation from a pet is good life practice for a kid.

Remind the child that you yourself will miss them too while they are away and that you will feel a similar sadness. Tell them you know that, in spite of the distance between you, you will always love them just the same and you know that they love you just the same too. And it is no different for their pet.

Credits:

*http://www.americanbar.org/newsletter/publications/gp_solo_magazine_home/gp_solo_magazine_index/animal_custody_cases.html

**<https://www.legalzoom.com/articles/sharing-fido-does-your-state-have-pet-custody-laws>

KITM expert says: In working with children, we have found that pets are extremely important to them in times of stress. They consider their pet to be part of their family. The unconditional love they receive from pets is comforting. In addition, some children will confide in pets as they know what they say is private. It is important not to underestimate the importance of your pets to your child. If you have to move into a new living situation where pets are not allowed, it is worth the effort to try and place your pet with a friend or acquaintance where your child can visit the pet if they wish, and know they are safe. When possible, having the family pet accompany your child as they go from home to home is also a good option, at least initially, to help them feel comfortable in new surroundings. While dealing with a pet can be a burden when dealing with all the stresses a separation/divorce entails, losing contact with a pet can add to your child's sense of loss.

KITM Chief Program Officer Carol Love, LMFT

Do you have a question you'd like to ask? Send an email to info@kitm.org or reply to this email to send in your question.



5 Ways to Kick Summer Anxiety

For busy kids & parents going through a family transition

1 Children thrive on routines, so give plenty of notice about any upcoming changes for summer.



2 Have time scheduled for children to talk to their other parent so it doesn't get lost in the shuffle of summertime activity.

3 For children who will be away from home, taking a special item with them may be comforting.



4 Plan ahead and communicate with your co-parent to make transitions smoother and ease anxiety.

5 Take time for yourself. Plan a trip. Relax. Ease some anxiety.



Divorce Hurts. Kids In The Middle Helps.®
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Upcoming Event

Kids In The Middle **GOLFING FOR KIDS**

Kids In The Middle Golf Tournament 2016

Thursday, June 16
The Country Club of St. Albans

Click [here](#) to register or for more information.

A HUGE thank you to everyone that helped put this year's very successful Gala together!



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