



## **COAFCC SNIPPETS**

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### **The Perils of Summer Parenting Time in Long-Distance Cases**

*Marlene Bizub, Psy.D.*

Summer parenting time can take on a lot of different looks, especially in long-distance cases. Even in cases where both parents are in the same locale, parents sometimes alter the schedule to allow for flexibility or longer periods of time with each parent.

In long-distance cases, summer parenting time can be a challenge, especially the older the child gets. Younger children spending time away from the school-year parent may become homesick for the primary home, but that can usually be alleviated with a phone call or other contact.

As kids get older, however, it becomes more of a challenge to meet their developmental needs. One of the tasks of the adolescent stage, which begins at around age 11 or 12, is a process known as “individuation and separation.” During this stage, the child is becoming their own individual person and separating from parents. This prepares children for becoming adults and acting, thinking, and doing on their own and for themselves. It should come as no surprise that during this stage, friends become more important than family members in terms of what kids do and how they spend their time. Quite frankly, after about age 11 or 12, kids often prefer to spend time with their friends instead of their parents.

For parents in a long-distance situation, kids may resist traveling to another location for parenting time because it means leaving their friends. Often it has nothing to do with the parent; rather, it has everything to do with children not wanting to leave their friends. It may be that the “away” parent will need to travel to where the child spends the majority of their time.

Many years ago, my former husband traveled to where my son lived with me during the school year, only to discover that even though his dad was here visiting, my son still spent the majority of time with his friends. A couple days after he arrived, my former husband looked at me and said, “You don’t see him much either, do you?” Our son was doing exactly what kids in the adolescent stage do—spend most of the time with their friends.

Parents should think about meeting children where they are at, if possible, acknowledging their developmental needs. A child’s resistance to leaving their primary area should not be taken too personally. After all, it really has nothing to do with either parent, and has everything to do with the adolescent child’s developmental needs and their need to be around their friends.

For additional suggestions on parenting time, check out the Child-Focused Parenting Time Guide on the AFCC website:

<https://www.afccnet.org/Portals/0/Minnesota%20Child%20Focused%20Parenting%20Time%20Guide.pdf?ver=nXtz62TqRfBm IGRB-8A0A%3d%3d>