How to make a ‘bird’s nest’ co-parenting arrangement successful
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According to Edward Kruk, a Professor of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, who specialises in child and family policy, a “bird’s nest arrangement is one that is uniquely child-centred”. In bird nesting arrangements the children remain in the family home, and the parents (rather than the children) move in and out, usually transitioning between the family home and a separate residence, taking it in turns to provide care. Thus the children experience far less disruption to their daily lives and routines. While little academic research exists on the topic, one study conducted by Vanessa A. K. Hurwitz, provides valuable insights for those considering this option. Hurwitz analysed the first-hand accounts of parents whom had bird-nested; two men and five women ranging in age from 37-62 years old. Her research uncovered several elements that facilitated success in nesting arrangements.

The first theme to emerge from the interviews concerned logistical factors which included having an equal division of labour between both parents and living in close proximity to the ‘nest’ or main residence. The author states that the findings are in accordance with earlier research “An earlier study found a correlation between proximity of residences and joint physical custody (Weston et al., 2011).”

The second theme related to communication, specifically, having frequent communication about parenting issues, even for those who stated that communication with their ex-partner was “poor”. Kruk notes “Bird nesting works best when parents are able to separate their co-parenting responsibilities from their previous marital conflicts, and remain amicable and cooperative as they confer about continuing household arrangements and the children’s needs. Both need to be prepared to maintain a certain level of consistency of purpose, discipline, and child-raising techniques to make it work well; this means being able to communicate clearly and peacefully rather than taking each discussion as an opportunity to argue”.

Summary of: ‘Bird’s Nest Parenting: Parents’ Perceptions of Their Nesting Process’
Vanessa A. K. Hurwitz, 2016
In addition to communicating about parenting issues, boundaries also emerged as an important theme. The author stated that “Most of the parents in this study reported having explicit boundaries. Explicit boundaries limit the potential for conflict [] (Emery, 2012). For example, having clearly defined rules governing who was permitted in the nest at a given time eliminated future discussions about this issue”.

Flexibility was another common theme: the author notes “Flexibility is of particular importance when considered in the context of findings from Haugen (2008) that for children, favorable feelings toward shared physical custody might be more common when parents are flexible and from Kelly (2007) that living arrangements and visitation should be flexible and based upon children’s developmental needs”.

Having a shared parenting style also emerged as an important factor, the author noted that “Sharing a common parenting style with the co-parent might be an element that contributes to a cooperative relationship”.

Kruk sums up on the topic by stating “Parents who opt for this type of living arrangement are to be commended, as they are clearly placing their children’s needs and their responsibilities to those needs above their own interests. [] as more parents recognize that bird nesting is clearly the best arrangement for their children, the number of bird nesters is steadily rising. As with all co-parenting arrangements, it is vital that social institutions such as the courts and legal system, school systems, and social welfare institutions actively support co-parents in bird nesting arrangements. This is of paramount importance if parents are going to achieve success to the benefit of their children.”

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References


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