

The Parent's Guide to Birdnesting
 A Child-Centered Solution to Co-Parenting During Separation or Divorce

"A perceptive and essential guide to an uncommon family arrangement." (Kirkus Reviews)

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Why Do I Do What I Do?

- I am a clinical psychologist specializing in family issues and issues relating to divorce, parenting, parenting planning, and co-parenting counseling. I work primarily as a Collaborative Divorce Coach.
- I am a child of a high conflict divorce.

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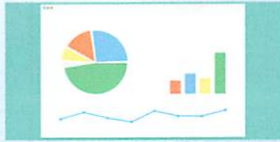
Why Do I Do What I Do?

- My mission is to protect kids from damage caused by divorce.
- My goal is to help families recover, restructure, and work together for the benefit of the kids.
- My hope is to build trust between the parents for optimal co-parenting.

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Why Do I Do What I Do?

- According to the American Psychological Association (the APA), there is one divorce approximately every 36 seconds in the US.
- That's nearly 2,400 divorces every day, 16,800 divorces every week, and 876,000 divorces a year.
- Sixty percent of all divorces involve minor children, kids under 18.



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Why Do I Do What I Do?



- This means 525,600 families are divorcing with minor children each year.

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Conflict Harms Children

- Your entry point with clients—a key message
- Conflict, whether parents are married or divorced, harms kids.
- Ensure that parents understand that this is something they can and must control.



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Birdnesting Can End the Conflict



- Parents need to be willing—and able—to put their children ahead of their emotions.
- Their children's welfare is the primary motivator.
- Keep clients focused on their children.
- Remind them that the stakes are high.

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What is Nesting or Birdnesting?

- Nesting means the kids stay in the family home while the parents rotate on and off duty according to a written, agreed-upon schedule that is tailored specifically to their family's needs.



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What is Nesting or Birdnesting?

- Many nesting arrangements can work. During COVID families were forced into involuntary nesting within the home, but there are many other possible living arrangements for the off-duty parent.



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What is Nesting or Birdnesting?

My own experience showed me how important it is to think through everything from budgets, privacy, dating, the condition of the home when the off-duty parent returns and bringing the off-duty parent up to date on the kids and home before they come on duty.



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How Does Nesting Help Kids and Families?

- Nesting keeps the kids stable while giving the parents respite from the conflict.
- It gives parents time to sort out the future of their relationship.
- It gives the children respite from the parents' conflict



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How Does Nesting Help Kids and Families?



- The kids adjust to having one parent at a time, and the parents adjust to solo-parenting.
- The parents experience the "backing and forth" that the kids will do later, which builds empathy.

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How Does Nesting Help Kids and Families?

- The parents have the time to make well-thought-through decisions knowing their kids' lives are not disrupted.
- The parents can work toward reconciliation or divorce at their own pace, adjust, and begin to manage their emotions.



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What Does Nesting Look Like in the Real World?

A variety of living situations and time share schedules tailored to the needs and budget of the family.

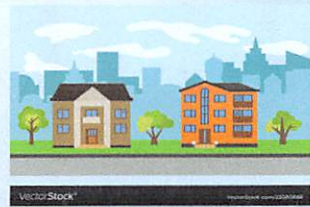


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What Does Nesting Look Like in the Real World?

Considerations to, well, consider!

- How much contact can the parents tolerate?
- What can they afford?
- Help them visualize and think through all their options



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Nesting Can Be Successful for Most People— *given certain conditions*

- Both parents want to be actively involved parents.
- Both are able to be respectful with each other/ willing to work on improving communication.
- Parents are able to prioritize their kids' needs over their own emotions.
- Parents agree to work together to construct an arrangement and agreements they can commit to.



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Issues to Consider Before Nesting

- Can parents work around conflicts of responsibility, such as a work schedule with a lot of travel, or caring for an elderly parent?
- Do the parents have "good-enough" communication? Or are they willing to cultivate it?
- Do they respect each other's role as parents?



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Issues to Consider Before Nesting

- Can they develop a realistic schedule?
- Can they make and keep agreements?
- Are they motivated to protect their children?
- Are parents convinced of the value of nesting?



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Nesting Deal-Breakers

Red flags:

- IPV or child abuse.
- Unmanaged addiction (with some exceptions).
- Untreated mental illness.



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Successful Nesting Agreements

- Shared goals for children's future "narrative."
- A commitment to keep agreements.
- On- and off-duty schedule, including birthdays and holidays.
- The condition of the home and off-site if shared.



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Successful Nesting Agreements

- Parallel vs Co-Parenting
- The parenting continuum
- Tolerance for differences in parenting styles
- Highlight the problems with controlling or intrusive parents



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Successful Nesting Agreements

- Finances and budget.
- Dating and new relationships.
- Right of "First Care."
- Communication about the children.
- How they will talk about the other parent to the children.
- Care of the home.



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Budgets and Finances

- Parents need to understand their finances.
- Spending may have been an issue in the marriage.
- Clients will need to be transparent and clear about their spending.
- Making a realistic budget is essential.



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Budgets and Finances

How will the nesting be funded?

- Joint nesting account.
- Family account and separate accounts.
- Monthly check-ins to evaluate.



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Successful Nesting Agreements



- Rules and chores.
- Screen time.
- Industry ratings of TV, video games, etc.
- Bedtimes, diet, discipline.
- Parallel or co-parenting continuum.

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Successful Nesting Agreements

- Communication expectations.
- What to do if problems arise.



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Successful Nesting Agreements

- Worksheets include:
- Assessing Your Ability to Co-Parent Questionnaire.
 - Mission Statement.
 - Parenting Plan.
 - Budgets.
 - Personalized Nesting Agreement.
 - Ready to Nest Pledge.
 - Emotional Vocabulary list.



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Successful Nesting Agreements

- How will transitions happen?
- How will chores be handled, grocery shopping, housekeeping.
- Are visits during off-duty time permitted?
- Who takes care of maintenance or repairs?
- Rules about privacy and personal property (computers, documents, etc.).
- How much notice to give if one wants to end nesting.



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Ready-to-Nest Pledge

- I will work with my co-parent to create a nesting agreement tailored to the needs of our children and family.
- I will process my emotions separately from nesting and prioritize the needs of our children.
- I will every effort to improve communication with my spouse.
- I commit to keeping the agreements we will document in our nesting plan.
- I will not use our children as messengers, spies or confidantes.
- I will be reliable about showing up on time and leaving the home in good condition when I go off-duty.



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When Nesting Can Fail

- An agreement is not kept.
- Right of First Care is not respected.
- If parents cannot prioritize their kids over their emotions.
- If parents are willing, a therapist or coach can help save the nesting with new specific agreements.



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How Long to Nest?



- Target date, milestone or end of divorce process.
- Open-ended.
- New relationship.
- One wants to end it.
- Decisions made, whether to reconcile or divorce.
- No such thing as failure!

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New Resources For Parents and Clinicians

- <https://birdnestproject.org/>
- "We collate, support, and share, high quality research and information on child-centred co-parenting after divorce"
- Ambitious goals
- "Extreme Co-Parenting After Divorce"
- One small study conducted by Vanessa A. K. Hurwitz, suggested that parents' perceptions of how well bird-nesting had worked for their families were overwhelmingly positive.
- **Family Nesting: Birdnesting Coparenting After Divorce** (Facebook group)

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