

# INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - No. 1 parenting educator



## Kids with two homes



**"More than one million Australian children now spend part of their lives in two homes. "Doing the child shuffle" no longer just means driving kids to football, ballet practice or their latest leisure activity. Many children have to negotiate two different environments, two sets of rules, and in some cases, two different families."**

Years ago adults would invariably ask a child how many brothers and sisters he had. Now with over 50,000 Australian families separating every year, you'd just as likely ask a child how many homes he has.

More than one million Australian children now spend part of their lives in two homes. "Doing the child shuffle" no longer just means driving kids to football, ballet practice or their latest leisure activity. Many children have to negotiate two different environments, two sets of rules, and in some cases, two different families.

Some kids adapt well to living in two homes, while others resist these arrangements. The age of children, as well as the circumstances that lead to these arrangements, impact on children's willingness to spread themselves between two homes.

Young children with less established social lives are often more willing to spend time in two houses. As kids move into adolescence and begin to establish strong ties to their neighbourhoods, as well as develop their own interests, they can resent the regular visits to their 'other home'. It's important to be flexible with arrangements so that they suit children's ages, lifestyles and changing interests.

The circumstances that lead to two-home arrangements can lead to resistance, as few kids want to see their original family break up. Nevertheless, kids are naturally resilient and they do usually adjust to living in two households in time. Here are some ideas to help make the transition between homes easier:

✓ **Keep a communications book.** The first rule of shared parenting is to communicate. So make sure your partner is on the same page by keeping a communications book that your children take with them as they move between households. Both parents should list things such as homework, a visit to the doctor or other important matters that the other parent should know.



- ✓ **Establish routines.** Routines remove the guess work from children's lives, enabling them to focus on playing, learning and meeting with friends. They like to know what to expect when they arrive at their second home and what will happen when they return to their original home. Perhaps you can serve a meal, play a game or just give them time to themselves to make the transition easier.
- ✓ **Make moving easy for kids.** Duplicate important items, some clothes and, even stuffed toys so kids feel comfortable in both places. Develop a checklist for kids to use and make sure they use it every time they move.
- ✓ **Give them a space of their own.** If you can't provide a bedroom of their own, they should have their own cupboard to store clothes and special items.
- ✓ **Be rational, not emotional when saying goodbye.** Parental attitudes impact on how well kids settle into new routines. Avoid hugging your child as he leaves as if you'll never see him again. Even if you don't want your child to go, it's important that he or she doesn't bring excess emotional baggage with them to their other home.
- ✓ **Work with the other parent to have similar routines.** Try to agree to basic routines and household rules such as bedtime, mealtimes and TV time. This makes life easier for kids, and stops them playing one parent off against the other.
- ✓ **Let them experience life as normal in both homes.** It's common for one parent to manage the routine parenting matters, while the other provides a great deal of the fun for kids. The aim for both parents should be to balance enjoyable relationship -building activities with more mundane activities such as helping with homework and making sure kids clean their teeth.

Living in two households is a challenge for many kids, but one that they can meet. It's easier when both parents communicate to their children that they want this arrangement to succeed, and keep the best interests of their child as their main focus.

Published by Michael Grose Presentations.  
All rights reserved. For more ideas, support and advice for all your parenting challenges visit:  
[www.parentingideas.com.au](http://www.parentingideas.com.au)

  
**Parenting**ideas  
MICHAEL GROSE

PO Box 167 Balnarring VIC 3926 P. + 61 3 5983 1798 F. 03 5983 1722 E. [office@parentingideas.com.au](mailto:office@parentingideas.com.au)