

**A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES  
OF ALBERTANS INVOLVED WITH CHILD  
CUSTODY AND ACCESS**

Prepared for:

Alberta Law Foundation

Prepared by:

Monica Pauls, M.A.  
Lorne D. Bertrand, Ph.D.

Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family

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Suite 510  
One Executive Place  
1816 Crowchild Trail N.W.  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
T2M 3Y7

Telephone: (403) 216-0340  
Fax: (403) 289-4887  
e-mail: [crilf@ucalgary.ca](mailto:crilf@ucalgary.ca)

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Alberta has one of the highest rates of divorce in Canada. Many cases of separating or divorcing couples involve determining custody and access arrangements for children. With one of the fastest growing populations in the country, the number of Alberta adults involved with child custody and access arrangements is significantly increasing over time. In addition, policies and practices in this area are constantly changing. Therefore, it is extremely important to gain knowledge and information about this issue.

A previous study on custody and access was completed by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (CRILF) in 1991. A number of important changes have occurred since then that significantly impact child custody and access arrangements. In Alberta, a couple with children in the process of divorce, legal separation, or any other process involving custody, access, or child support may be required to attend a Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop (mandatory in most cases). This program provides parents with information about the divorce process and its impact on children, legal issues, and communication strategies, and promotes the use of mediation and parenting plans. In Canada, the Federal Child Support Guidelines came into effect in 1997, with a number of amendments since then. The guidelines change the way child support is determined, taxed, and maintained, and ensures that cases in similar circumstances are treated in a similar fashion.

Most recently, Alberta passed the *Family Law Act* in 2005, which includes modifications around child support, spousal support, guardianship, custody and access, court jurisdiction and powers, and interdependent relationships. In addition, the Federal Department of Justice has established the Child-centred Family Justice Strategy (CCFJS). Promoting the best interests of children, the CCFJS encourages an approach in which family law, the court system, and the legal and social services that implement the law meet the needs of families undergoing relationship breakdown.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to gain a greater understanding of Albertans' views and experiences with child custody and access, particularly in light of recent legislative changes. Findings from this study were analyzed in comparison with the study conducted in 1991, contributing new and additional information. This allowed for a description of changes in arrangements of custody and access over the past 15 years, and an exploration of the impact of the Parenting After Separation workshop and the Federal Child Support Guidelines.

### 1.2 Objectives of the Project

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- identify the nature of custody and access arrangements among Albertans;

- identify the relationships of those involved in child custody and access arrangements and the types of difficulties experienced;
- describe reactions and attempted solutions to child custody and access problems; and
- compare perceptions and experiences of the 1991 respondents with respondents of the 2006 study.

### **1.3 Research Activities**

The research team for this project consisted of: Project Director, Lorne D. Bertrand, Project Co-director, Monica Pauls, Project Consultant, Joseph P. Hornick, and Administrator/Research Associate, Joanne J. Paetsch. An advisory committee was also established to review project materials and provide feedback on the research process. The advisory committee consisted of three of CRILF's Board members: The Honourable Heino Lilles, The Honourable Colleen Kenny, and Dr. Merlin Brinkerhoff. Funding for this project came from the Alberta Law Foundation.

The following research activities were accomplished:

- a screening survey sent to a random sample of 20,000 Albertans<sup>1</sup>;
- follow-up surveys sent to interested respondents who had personal experience with child custody and access (custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and extended family members);
- data analysis of surveys, including comparisons to the 1991 study; and
- preparation of the final report.

### **1.4 Organization of the Report**

Chapter 2.0 of this report discusses the methodology followed in the project. The screening survey and the follow-up surveys are explained in greater detail, along with the sampling strategy, data analysis strategy, and limitations to the project. Chapter 3.0 presents the findings from the screening surveys, and includes a comparative analysis to the screening surveys from 1991. Chapter 4.0 presents the findings from the follow-up surveys, and also includes a comparative analysis with the follow-up surveys from 1991. Chapter 5.0 concludes the report. The screening survey and one of the follow-up surveys (custodial parent) are included as appendices.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was sent to two samples of 10,000 Albertans, due to problems with the mailout process. This is explained in greater detail in Section 2.4.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

This project was a follow-up to the study conducted in 1991. A similar methodology was utilized in order to facilitate a comparative analysis and to capture differences in perceptions and experiences of Albertans. Survey content was slightly modified and adapted to account for changes in legislation and programming around child custody and access situations.

The project consisted of two major components:

- 1) A screening survey to a random sample of 20,000 Albertans (see Appendix A). The survey collected information on Albertans' general knowledge and opinions of parental responsibility following family breakdown. The survey also determined whether or not respondents had personal experience with custody and access issues, and if so, requested participation in a follow-up survey.
- 2) A follow-up survey to individuals in Alberta who have dealt with parental responsibility following family breakdown (see Appendix B). This survey collected more detailed information on experiences with custody and access from custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and extended family members.

#### 2.1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- 1) What are the current perceptions and experiences of child custody and access in Alberta?
- 2) What is the nature of custody and access arrangements among Albertans?
- 3) What changes in arrangements have occurred over the past 15 years?
- 4) What are the relationships of those involved with custody and access arrangements?
- 5) What types of difficulties are experienced by Albertans involved with child custody and access?
- 6) What types of reactions and solutions are attempted in response to child custody and access problems?

## **2.2 Screening Survey**

The instrument for the screening survey was based on the 1991 study in order to maximize the comparability of findings, and was updated where necessary to capture current practices. A brief explanation of the study and related definitions were provided at the beginning of the survey. Questions were then asked in the following areas: 1) general knowledge of the issue; 2) attitudes and opinions regarding parental responsibility following family breakdown; 3) personal experience with child custody and access; and 4) personal information for demographic purposes. Space was also provided at the end of the survey for any additional comments.

In order to identify the follow-up study group, the survey closed with a request for participation in a second survey, providing the respondent had personal experience with the issue. If the respondent wanted to participate further, he or she was to provide a name and mailing address.

Two significant additions to the 2006 screening survey were questions about the Parenting After Separation workshop, which is specific to Alberta, and questions about the Federal Child Support Guidelines. Both have been implemented since the 1991 study was conducted. Respondents were asked about their knowledge of these initiatives, how they gained such knowledge, and whether they thought these initiatives were beneficial. The Parenting After Separation workshop and the Federal Child Support Guidelines were addressed in greater detail in the follow-up surveys.

The draft instrument was reviewed by the advisory committee prior to mailout.

## **2.3 Follow-Up Surveys**

Follow-up surveys were developed to gain a more in-depth understanding of people's experiences with parental responsibility following family breakdown. In order to capture a range of experiences and perspectives, separate surveys were developed for custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and extended family members (aunts/uncles and grandparents).

Each survey started with a letter explaining the purpose of the survey and outlining instructions. A definition of the designation of the respondent was also provided (custodial, non-custodial, or extended family member). The letter stated that if the respondent had any questions or concerns about the study, he/she could contact researchers at CRILF.

The first section of the follow-up survey asked for general information about the respondent's experience with custody and access. Respondents were asked to answer the questions based on their current or most recent experience with parental responsibility following family breakdown. Section two asked about parenting arrangements, including questions on custody and access time and financial arrangements. Section three asked about access activities and section four asked about the suitability of parenting arrangements. Section five asked about strategies and



solutions attempted in response to custody and access problems; this section specifically addressed the Parenting After Separation workshop and other available programs related to parental responsibility following family breakdown. The final section provided space for additional comments from the respondent. Although questions were slightly modified for each group of respondents (custodial, non-custodial, and extended family member), the general format and topics covered remained the same.

All draft instruments were reviewed by the advisory committee prior to mailout.

## **2.4 Sampling Strategy**

The initial proposal for this project intended that the screening survey be mailed out to a random sample of 10,000 Albertans. CRILF contracted a business services company to conduct the mailout. The company obtained a mailing list of 10,000 randomly selected individuals living in Alberta. A survey package was sent to each person on the list, which included: a cover letter explaining the study, a screening survey, and a business reply envelope for the respondent to return the completed survey. Each package was addressed to a specific person, with the hope that this would encourage people to open the envelope instead of assuming it was junk mail. The cover letter indicated that respondents were to complete the survey and return it by a specific date.

There were a number of problems with the mailout process, which resulted in respondents receiving the screening survey on differing dates, many close to or past the date responses were due. The impact of this was that the response rate was much lower than expected; only 7.4% (n=737) of the sample returned the surveys (Table 2.1). This seriously jeopardized the quality of the study and further steps had to be taken in an effort to obtain a greater sample.

CRILF renegotiated a second mailout to another random sample of Albertans (N=10,000), cross-referencing with the first list to ensure there were no duplicate addresses. The cover letter in the second mailout asked that respondents return the survey within a week of receiving it, rather than by a specific date.

However, the second mailout was also delayed, and respondents reported receiving the screening survey 3 weeks past the date originally targetted. While no return date was specified in the cover letter, Albertans received the surveys approximately one week prior to Christmas day. Considering the busyness of the holiday season, respondents may have neglected to complete the survey and return it. This again impacted the response rate in a negative way; only 7.2% (n=721) of the second sample returned the surveys (Table 2.1).

Given the time and budgetary constraints of the project, a third mailout was not feasible. Although not a direct representation of the Alberta population, data analysis was conducted on the useable surveys from the combined samples (N=1,437).

**Table 2.1**  
**Screening Survey Return Rate, Mailout 1 and 2**

	<b>Mailout 1</b>	<b>Mailout 2</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sent	10,000	10,000	20,000
Returned	737	721	1,458
Useable <sup>1</sup>	726	711	1,437
Return Rate	7.3%	7.1%	7.2%

<sup>1</sup> Useable surveys include all screening surveys that were returned and completed.

Respondents from both mailouts who indicated that they would be willing to complete a follow-up survey were sent another survey specific to their situation (custodial parent, non-custodial parent, or extended family member).

## **2.5 Data Analysis Strategy**

Considering the descriptive nature of the study, data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, frequencies, and cross-tabulations. Prior to analyzing the sample as a whole, demographic frequencies were run on the two samples independently. Gender, age, education, employment, and marital status were compared to ensure there were no significant differences between the two groups. Results showed minimal differences, providing confidence in analyzing the two samples as one.

The next step of the analysis was to describe the general knowledge, attitudes and opinions, and personal experiences of the sample in the current project. This provided a general overview of the respondents in relation to parental responsibility following family breakdown. Analysis was then conducted on the follow-up surveys of the current sample to obtain more in-depth information about respondents' experiences. Finally, a comparative analysis was undertaken with the findings from the 1991 study to explore changes in perceptions and experiences of respondents over the last 15 years.

In both the screening and follow-up surveys, respondents were given an opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the survey. Research questions (Section 2.1.1) were used to guide the organization, reading, and interpretation of this data. Comments were organized to highlight common and recurring themes, which were based on their relevance to the study.

## **2.6 Limitations to the Study**

There are a number of limitations that should be recognized in this study. First is the size of the sample. Due to various problems with the mailout process (explained above, Section 2.4), the number of surveys returned was very small. It was not

feasible, in terms of time or money, to undertake a third mailout in an effort to obtain additional respondents.

The small sample limited the amount of analysis that could be done and did not allow for generalizations to be made. Regardless, analysis was conducted on the sample as it was, and insight into the perceptions and experiences of those who responded provides valuable information on the topic. While the return rate was low, the sample size was greater than the sample from the 1991 study, and comparisons were made to identify changes over time.

The follow-up surveys also had poor return rates, considering these respondents had agreed to participate further after completing the screening survey. Small samples for all three groups, particularly the non-custodial parents, limited the analyses that could be done and prevents the generalization of findings. As this was not the result of mailout difficulties, one may need to consider that mailout surveys are simply out of date. With advanced technologies and busier lives, perhaps people are reluctant, too busy, or not interested in completing this type of survey. In future projects, CRILF researchers will consider this as a real possibility and look to more current and innovative methods of collecting data.

The second limitation concerns the wording in some sections of the survey. After receiving some phone calls from respondents and reviewing the surveys that were returned, the researchers realized that some respondents were confused as to how to answer if they had adult children now, but had experienced family breakdown and dealt with parental responsibility in the past (particularly the distant past). Respondents were encouraged to answer the questions based on their experience in the past. For example, if a respondent had a child support agreement in the past, but it was no longer valid because his/her child was now an adult, the respondent was asked to answer questions about the agreement as if it were still active. In hindsight, more detailed explanations should have been provided, or questions should have been worded to appropriately address such situations.

The third limitation is the extent to which conclusions can be made in the comparative analysis. While we can see that changes in attitudes, opinions, and experiences may have occurred over the past 15 years, it is difficult to determine the actual cause of these changes. There are a number of factors that impact parental responsibility following family breakdown, which must be considered when assessing change. In addition, some of the 2006 respondents report on experiences that occurred in the past; this may not be reflective of the issue today. This report describes the context of parental responsibility following family breakdown, as reported by respondents, and explores possible explanations for change.



### 3.0 SCREENING SURVEY

The screening survey was designed to collect information on Albertans' general knowledge and opinions of parental responsibility following family breakdown. The survey was based on the survey in 1991 in order to facilitate a comparative analysis. Section 3.1 describes the sample of respondents who completed the screening survey in 2006, in comparison to the sample in 1991. Findings from the 2006 survey are then presented (Sections 3.2 to 3.5), followed by a comparison to the findings in 1991 (Section 3.6).

#### 3.1 Demographics

A total of 1,458 screening surveys were returned. Of those, 1,437 were useable (returned completed). Tables 3.1 to 3.5 present the demographics of the current sample in comparison to the sample from the 1991 survey. Further comparisons between the two samples will be made throughout the analysis.

In 2006, significantly more women than men completed the screening survey: 63.1% compared to 36.9%, respectively (Table 3.1). This is somewhat different from the sample in 1991, where there was a fairly even distribution of males and females, males making up slightly more of the sample (52.3%).

**Table 3.1  
Gender of Respondents, Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

Gender	2006 (N=1,422)		1991 (N=890)	
	n	%	n	%
Male	525	36.9	465	52.3
Female	897	63.1	425	47.7
Total	1,422	100.0	890	100.0

Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 and 1991.

The mean age of respondents in 2006 (valid n=1,401) was 51 years; the youngest respondent was 18 years old and the oldest respondent was 92 years old. Approximately half of the respondents fell between the ages of 40 and 60 years (51%). Interesting to note, 10.6% of the respondents in 2006 were 70 years and older.

The breakdown of age groups beyond 55-59 years is not available for the 1991 sample (Table 3.2). The researchers felt it was important to continue grouping respondents by age up until 70 years, considering over a quarter of the sample is over

55 years old. Factors such as marrying later in life, having children later in life, and people living longer and healthier lives will impact their life experiences, including custody and access situations. This also speaks to attitudes and opinions of parental responsibility and helps determine whether new legislation and programming would have impacted certain respondents.

**Table 3.2  
Age of Respondents, Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

Age	2006				1991			
	Males (N=516)		Females (N=884)		Males (N=465)		Females (N=425)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
18-24	4	0.8	17	1.9	17	3.7	31	7.2
25-29	12	2.3	38	4.3	43	9.2	66	15.6
30-34	23	4.5	70	7.9	53	11.4	64	15.1
35-39	41	7.9	96	10.9	76	16.4	66	15.6
40-44	43	8.3	108	12.2	72	15.4	40	9.4
45-49	74	14.3	128	14.5	46	9.9	43	10.1
50-54	85	16.5	130	14.7	42	9.0	20	4.6
55-59 <sup>1</sup>	65	12.6	95	10.7	116	25.0	95	22.3
60-64	49	9.5	75	8.5	-	-	-	-
65-69	45	8.7	49	5.5	-	-	-	-
70+	75	14.5	78	8.8	-	-	-	-
Total	516	100.0	884	100.0	465	100.0	425	100.0

Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 and 1991.

<sup>1</sup> This category in the 1991 survey represents those respondents 55 years and older.

The majority of respondents in the 2006 sample had completed a university degree (35.4%) or a non-university certificate or diploma (30.9%) as their highest level of education (Table 3.3). Only 1.6% had completed Grade 9 or less, 5.4% had completed some high school, and 16.8% had completed high school as their highest level of education. While the categories are slightly different in 1991, the level of

education overall seems higher in 2006. More respondents in 1991 had completed high school or less as their highest level of education. In addition, only 26.7% in 1991 had completed a university degree and only 23.9% in 1991 had completed a post-secondary certificate or diploma.

**Table 3.3**  
**Education of Respondents, Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

EDUCATION	2006 (N=1,419)		1991 (N=881)	
	n	%	n	%
Grade 9 or less	23	1.6	45	5.1
Some high school	76	5.4	-	-
Completed high school	238	16.8	287	32.2
Non-university certificate or diploma	439	30.9	213	23.9
Partial university degree	141	9.9	98	11.0
Completed university degree	502	35.4	238	26.7
Total	1,419	100.0	881	100.0

Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 and 1991.

In 2006, most of the respondents were employed full-time or part-time (63.3%), and almost a quarter of respondents were retired (22.4%) (Table 3.4). Five percent of respondents indicated other kinds of employment situations, which most commonly included being self-employed, owning a business, or being on disability. In the 1991 sample, a few more respondents were employed full-time or part-time (67.8%) and a few less were retired (16.9%).

**Table 3.4**  
**Employment of Respondents, Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

Employment	2006 (N=1,420)		1991 (N=890)	
	n	%	n	%
Employed (full-time or part-time)	899	63.3	603	67.8
Temporarily unemployed	19	1.3	37	4.2
Retired	318	22.4	150	16.9
Full-time homemaker	95	6.7	49	5.5
Student	17	1.2	39	4.4
Other	72	5.1	12	1.3
Total	1,420	100.0	890	100.0

Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 and 1991.

“Remarried,” “Separated,” or “Common-law” were not options provided in the 1991 survey. It is assumed that the category “Married” may have included people who were remarried and possibly those who were common-law. “Divorced” may have included people who were separated, and “Single” (which was used instead of “Never Married”) may have included people who were separated or divorced. It is difficult to compare the two groups on marital status because of these differences. The categories provided in the 2006 survey provide a clearer picture of the respondents’ marital status.

Almost 60% of the respondents in 2006 reported being married (Table 3.5). While it is difficult to know for sure, considering the topic it is possible that some were actually remarried but answered “married” to the question about their current marital status. Of the remaining respondents, 13.7% were divorced, 8.1% were never married, 5.4% were widowed, 5% were remarried, 3.9% were separated, and 5.6% were common law.



**Table 3.5**  
**Marital Status of Respondents, Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

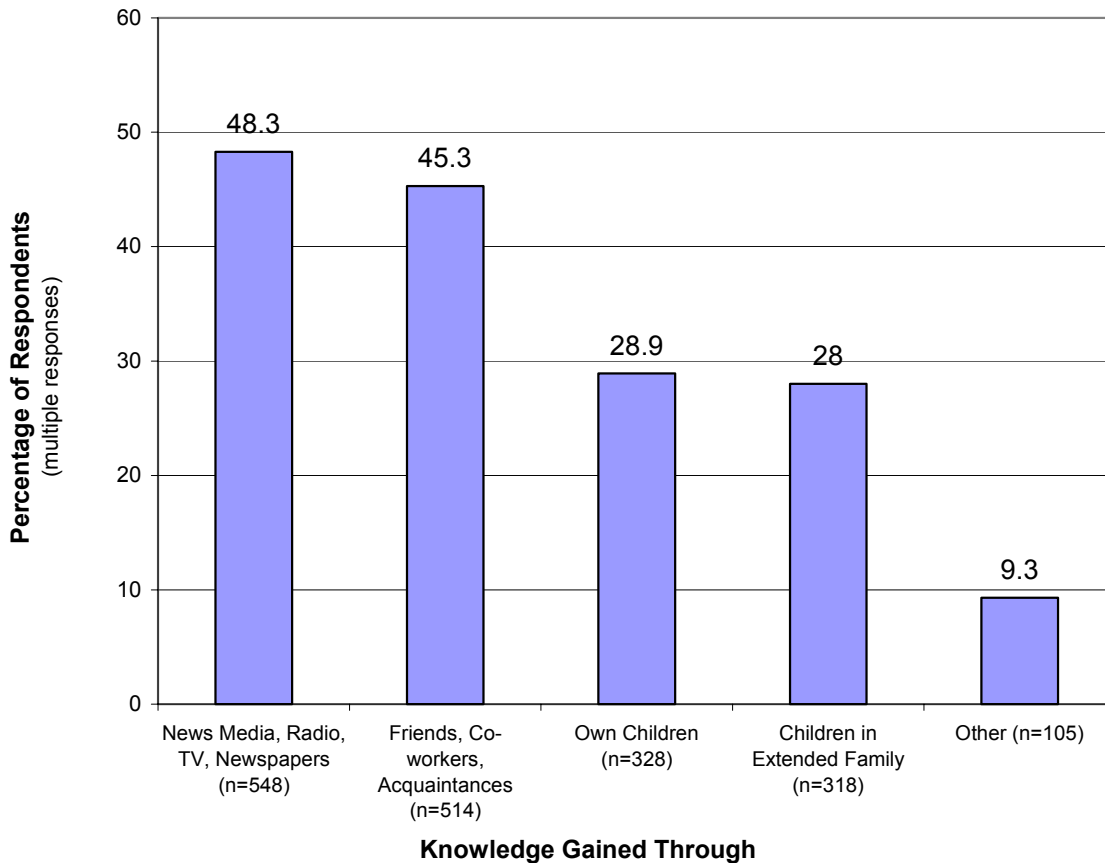
Marital Status	2006 (N=1413)		1991 (N=884)	
	n	%	n	%
Married	826	58.5	554	62.2
Divorced	193	13.7	92	10.3
Never Married	114	8.1	200	22.5
Widowed	76	5.4	38	4.3
Remarried	70	5.0	-	-
Separated	55	3.9	-	-
Common-law	79	5.6	-	-
Total	1,413	100.0	884	100.0

Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 and 1991.

### **3.2 General Knowledge**

The screening survey started with a question about the respondents' general knowledge of parental responsibility. Most of the respondents reported that they have been aware of the issue over the last few years (81.3%). When asked how they gained this knowledge, 28% stated that they had personal experience with children in their extended family, 28.9% stated that they had personal experience with their own children, 45.3% stated that they had personal experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances, and 48.3% stated that they gained their knowledge through the news media, radio, television, and newspapers (Figure 3.1). Some respondents (9.3%) described other avenues through which knowledge was gained. These included: work/professional roles (e.g., law, teaching, child care, social work, counseling, accounting/tax preparation); the respondent themselves was the child in a family breakdown in the past; formal education and training; and other family relationships (e.g., step-parents).

**Figure 3.1**  
**General Knowledge of Parental Responsibility Following Family Breakdown**  
**Among Those who are Aware of the Issue, 2006**

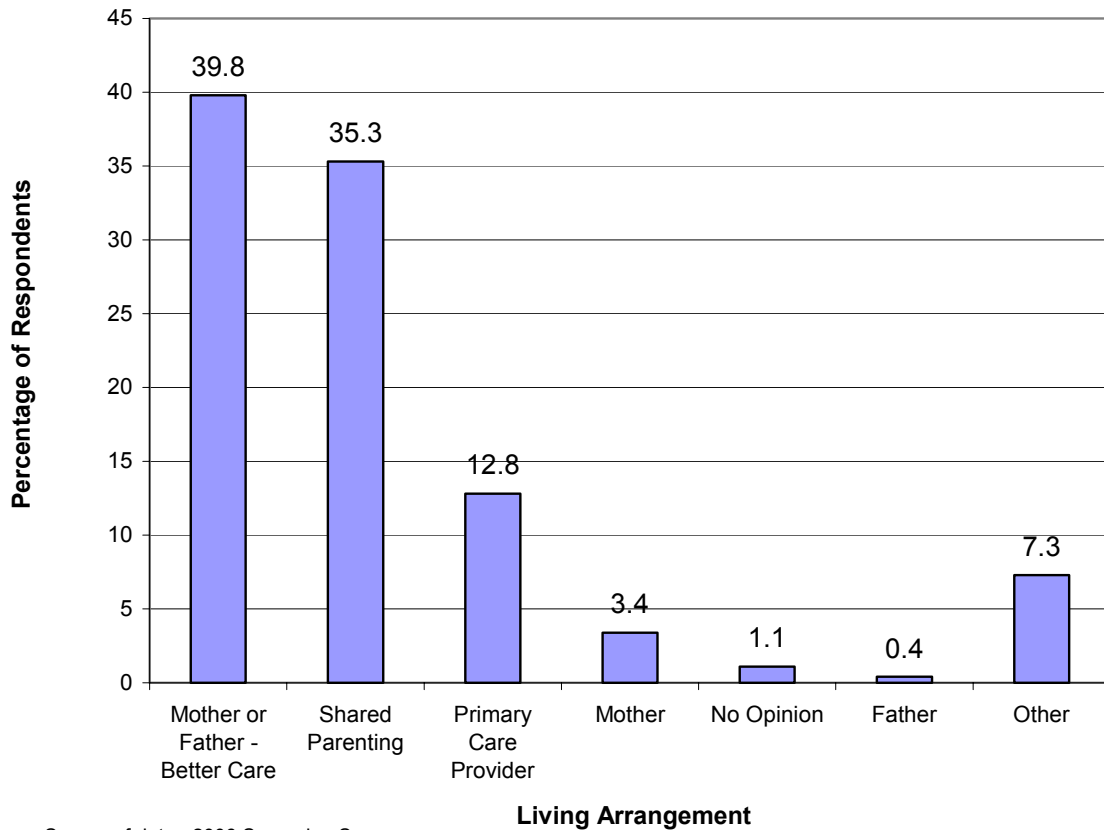


Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 1,134

### 3.3 Attitudes and Opinions

The next section of the survey asked respondents about their attitudes and opinions on specific issues related to parental responsibility following family breakdown. Respondents were first asked with whom they thought a child should normally live following the breakdown of a marriage or a relationship. Figure 3.2 presents various living arrangements for a child. For the most part, respondents felt that a child should live with “mother or father, whoever is a better care provider” (39.8%), or “both mother and father through shared parenting” (35.3%). A number of respondents (12.8%) stated that a child should live with “whoever has been the child’s primary care provider.” Very few respondents felt that a child should live with the mother alone (3.4%) or the father alone (0.4%).

**Figure 3.2**  
**With Whom Should the Child Live, 2006**



Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 1,394

Seven percent of respondents provided other comments regarding living arrangements. For the most part, these respondents felt that each case should be looked at individually; there is no one living arrangement that fits every situation. Depending on the circumstances, a decision should be made that serves the best interests of the child. Other respondents felt that shared parenting was probably the best arrangement, unless one of the parents is unsuitable (e.g., abusive, dangerous, irresponsible) and unable to care for the child. A couple of these respondents suggested that rather than having the child move weekly from house to house, the parents should move back and forth to the house where the child lives. Many of these respondents also qualified their comment by stating that if neither parent is suitable, an alternative caregiver should be sought.

A few of the respondents elaborated on having the child live with the “better” parent. They said that determining the better parent does not just mean assessing a person’s financial situation. Rather, the better parent has a vested interest in the child, is physically, mentally, and emotionally competent, is responsible and stable, and will love the child and look after him/her properly. Many respondents also stated that child input into such decisions is important.

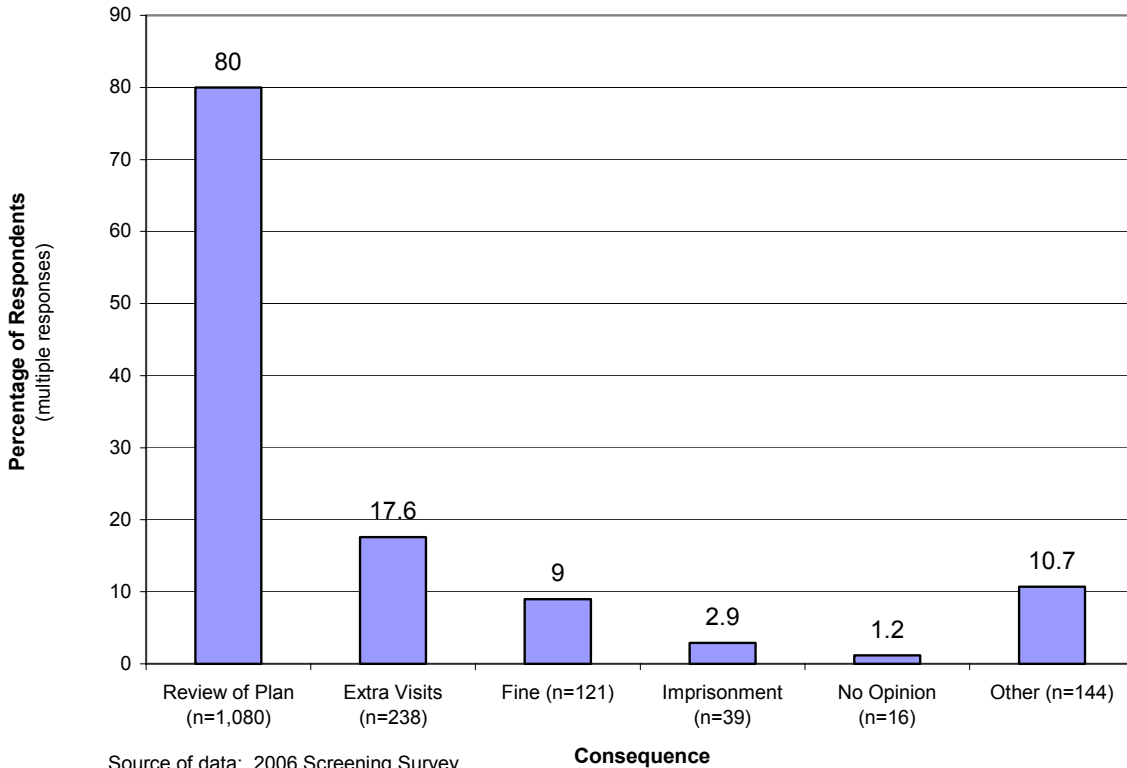
Questions around contact were also asked in this section. When asked if a child should have contact with both parents following a separation or divorce (valid n=1,423), 57.3% of respondents said it depends on the circumstances and 42.4% of respondents said yes. Only one respondent said no. When asked if a child should be allowed to have visits from grandparents, aunts, and uncles (valid n=1,424), 40.3% of respondents said it depends on the circumstances and 59.1% of respondents said yes. Again, very few respondents said no. Of the 1,418 respondents who answered, about half felt that a child's wishes should be considered when deciding parental responsibility and parenting orders (55.1%), while 43.2% felt that it depends on the circumstances (age was indicated as a factor to consider).

Respondents were asked whether the non-custodial parent should be required to maintain contact with their child. Most of the 1,415 respondents who answered felt it depends on the circumstances (64.2%); the remaining responses were split between yes (19.9%) and no (14.9%). Further to this, respondents were asked whether the non-custodial parent should be allowed to make decisions about their child. Again, the majority of the respondents who answered (valid n=1,422) felt it depends on the circumstances (61.8%), 25.7% said yes, and 12% said no.

The issue of disobeying a parenting order was addressed in this section. Respondents were first asked if they thought the behaviour of the custodial parent should be reviewed by the court if he/she denied access to the non-custodial parent. Not surprisingly, 96.2% of the respondents who answered (valid n=1,402) felt that the behaviour of the custodial parent should be reviewed. When asked what consequence was appropriate for such behaviour, 80% of respondents felt that a review of the parenting plan was necessary, 17.6% of respondents felt that there should be extra visits to make-up for the ones missed, 9% of respondents felt that a fine was appropriate, and 2.9% of respondents felt that imprisonment was an appropriate consequence (Figure 3.3).

Eleven percent of respondents suggested other consequences, such as: counseling, mediation, and education; a review and change of custody; supervised visits; phased consequences (a combination of those listed in the survey, but phased depending on the number of offences); and a hold/reduction/adjustment of child support payments. The majority of these respondents felt that the consequence really depends on the circumstances of the situation. They emphasized the need to determine the reason why access to the child was denied (it may be a justified action), before a decision on consequence is made.

**Figure 3.3**  
**Appropriate Consequence for Disobeying Parenting Order Among Those who Think it Should be Reviewed by Court, 2006**



Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 1,349

Respondents were asked what they thought about mediation and counseling services to assist parents with resolving parental responsibility problems. Almost all of the 1,426 respondents who answered (96%) felt that mediation or counseling should be available. When asked who should pay for this service (valid n=1,338), 53.7% of respondents thought that individual parents should pay with government subsidy, 23.8% of respondents thought that the provincial government should pay, 14.9% of respondents thought that individual parents should pay on their own, and 7.5% of respondents suggested other scenarios.

For the most part, the respondents who suggested other scenarios felt that the cost of mediation or counseling should be a sliding scale based on income. They said that if the parents can afford it, they should pay themselves, and if not, government subsidy should be provided. However, there were a few respondents who targeted one parent to pay for counseling or mediation: the parent with the highest income, the parent who started the problem, the parent not holding up the agreement, the parent with custody, or the parent who left the marriage. An interesting suggestion made by a few respondents was that health care plans and employment benefits cover the cost of counseling or mediation in such situations.

The section on attitudes and opinions addressed the two new additions to the current screening survey: the Parenting After Separation workshop and the Federal Child Support Guidelines.

### 3.3.1 Parenting After Separation Workshop

Respondents were provided with the following information about the Parenting After Separation workshop:

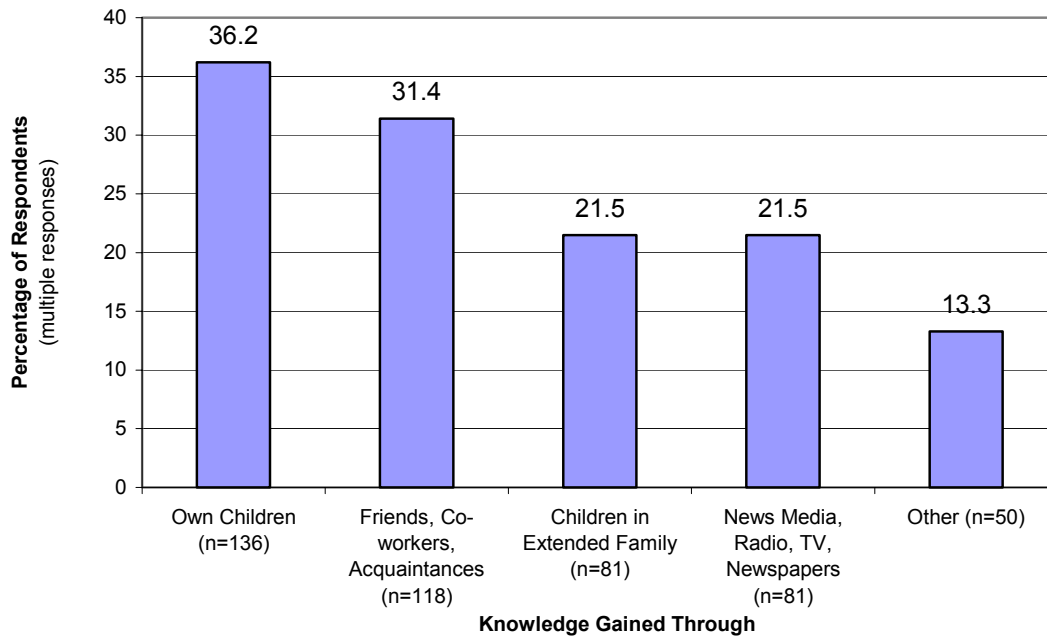
*In Alberta, a couple with children in the process of divorce, legal separation, or any other process involving custody, access, or child support must attend the Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop. The PAS program provides parents with information about the divorce process and its impact on children, legal issues, and communication strategies.*

Only 26.6% of the 1,416 respondents who answered reported being aware of the Parenting After Separation workshop in Alberta. When those respondents were asked how they gained knowledge of PAS, 36.2% said they had experience with their own children, 31.4% said they had experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances, 21.5% said they had experience with children in their extended family, and 21.5% said they learned about PAS through the news media, radio, television, or newspapers (Figure 3.4). Other ways respondents gained knowledge of PAS were through their own work or professional role and through the work of their family members and friends. When asked if they thought PAS was beneficial to parents dealing with custody, access, or child support issues, 62.4% of the 1,383 respondents who answered thought it was, 5.1% of the respondents thought it was not, and 32.5% of the respondents had no opinion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that some respondents who reported having no knowledge of PAS did have an opinion on whether it was beneficial or not.

**Figure 3.4**  
**How Knowledge of PAS was Gained by Those**  
**Aware of the Program, 2006**



Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 376

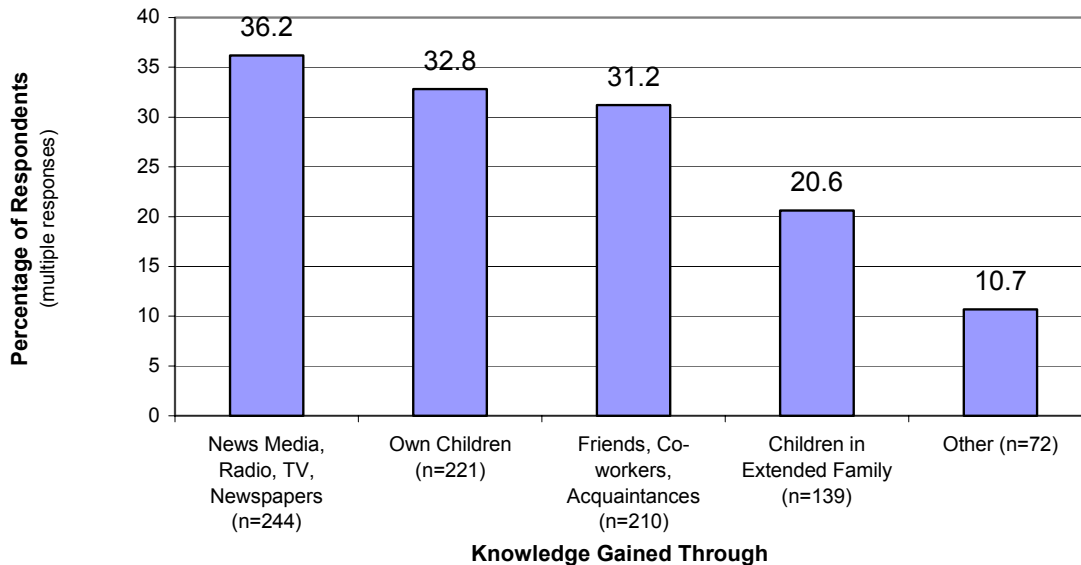
### 3.3.2 Federal Child Support Guidelines

Respondents were provided with the following information about the Federal Child Support Guidelines:

*Child Support Guidelines came into force in Canada in 1997. The Child Support Guidelines improved the way child support was determined, taxed, and maintained, and ensured that cases in similar circumstances would be treated in a similar fashion.*

Almost half of the 1,424 respondents who answered reported being aware of the Federal Child Support Guidelines (47.3%). Respondents gained knowledge of the guidelines through the news media, radio, television, or newspapers (36.2%), through experience with their own children (32.8%), through experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances (31.2%), and through children in their extended family (20.6%) (Figure 3.5). Respondents stated that their work or professional role, their family and friends who work in the field, formal education, other family relationships (e.g., step-parent), tax preparation and regulations, and being children of divorced parents themselves were other ways they gained knowledge about the guidelines. Out of 1,366 respondents, many (58.6%) had no opinion as to whether the Federal Child Support Guidelines have resulted in a better system of determining child support, 24.3% thought they have, and 17.1% thought they have not.

**Figure 3.5**  
**How Knowledge of Federal Child Support Guidelines**  
**was Gained by Those Aware, 2006**



Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 674

Overall, a lot of the 1,385 respondents who answered felt that the legal system does not effectively deal with parental responsibility following family breakdown (57%), and many had no opinion on the subject (31.8%).

### 3.4 Personal Experience

The third section of the screening survey asked whether respondents had any personal experience in situations involving parental responsibility following family breakdown. These questions were intended for custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. If the respondent did not have any personal experience, he or she was to skip the questions in this section and continue on to the last section. Answers to the questions around personal experience provided some general information on the respondents' custody and access situations, and also allowed the researchers to identify potential respondents for the follow-up surveys. Just over half of 1,409 respondents (52.7%) reported having personal experience with this issue.

Those 725 respondents were then asked some questions specific to their own experience. Over half of the respondents (52%) reported that their situations began prior to 1998, and 48% reported that their situations began since 1998 (98 of those respondents specified that their situation happened within the last year).

The year 1998 was chosen as a distinguishing factor because this is the year cases of parental responsibility following family breakdown would have fallen under the newly implemented Federal guidelines for determining child support. As well, since 1998, the Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop has been developed and made



available to Alberta couples in the process of divorce, legal separation, or other process involving custody, access, or child support.

Just over half (52%) of those respondents whose experience happened since 1998 (valid n=346) were aware of PAS, compared to only 23.1% those whose experience happened before 1998 (valid n=372). Most respondents with experience occurring since 1998 gained knowledge of PAS through personal experience with their own children (54.4%). Respondents with experience occurring before 1998 (valid n=86) gained knowledge of PAS through personal experience with their own children (40%), through experience with friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances (27%), and through the news media, radio, television, and newspapers (26%). Approximately the same percentage of respondents whose experience occurred since 1998 (valid n=334) as those whose experience occurred before 1998 (valid n=360) thought that PAS was beneficial (68% and 65%, respectively); more respondents whose experience happened before 1998 had no opinion on the subject (30%), as opposed to those whose experience happened since 1998 (20.7%).

Questions about the Federal Child Support Guidelines reveal a similar pattern. Approximately 66% of those whose experience occurred since 1998 (valid n=346) were aware of the guidelines; 55.7% of those whose experience occurred before 1998 (valid n=375) were aware of the guidelines at the time they completed the survey. Over half of those with experience since 1998 (valid n=229) gained knowledge of the guidelines through personal experience with their own children (52.8%), 30.1% gained knowledge through experience with children in their extended family, and 28.8% gained knowledge through experience with friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances. On the other hand, of those with experience before 1998 (valid n=209), less than half reported gaining knowledge through personal experience with their own children (43%), 32% reported gaining knowledge through the news media, radio, television, and newspapers, and 25% reported gaining knowledge through experience with friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances. A few more of those with experience since 1998 (valid n=328) than those with experience before 1998 (valid n=355) thought the guidelines resulted in a better system (34.1% and 28.2%, respectively), and a few less had no opinion on the subject (41.8% and 48.2%, respectively).

For the majority of respondents (valid n=735), personal experiences happened in Alberta (86.5%). For the others, personal experiences happened in British Columbia (29%), Ontario (22.4%), Saskatchewan (15.9%), and a few in Newfoundland/Labrador, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories. Approximately 13% of respondents reported experiences which occurred outside of Canada.

Almost half (44.6%) of 727 respondents' experiences were situations involving 2 children. Thirty-three percent of the situations involved 1 child, 14.9% of the situations involved 3 children, and 7.4% of the situations involved 4 or more children. Children's ages ranged from newborn to 18 years; the average age of children involved was 8 years.<sup>3</sup>

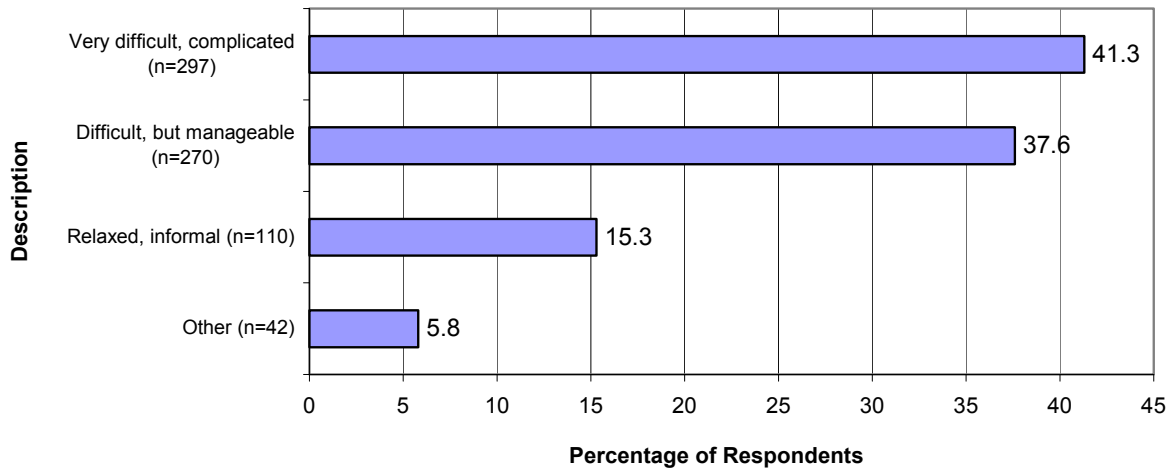
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<sup>3</sup> Children over the age of 18 years were not included in the average.

Respondents (valid n=728) were asked to define their relationship with the children. Custodial parents (parents living with the children) made up 40.5% of those with personal experience, non-custodial parents (parents not living with the children) made up 9.1%, grandparents made up 18.1%, and aunts or uncles made up 11.1%; 21% described their relationship differently than those listed. These included: parent with shared custody, step-parent, having a personal relationship with a parent (e.g., common-law, dating), friend, professional relationship (e.g., psychologist, police officer, social worker, minister/pastor, teacher, child care worker, lawyer), being the child themselves, and co-worker to a parent. Only custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and extended family members (grandparents, aunts, and uncles) were included in the follow-up survey.

Respondents were then asked to generally describe their experience with parental responsibility and child access arrangements. Figure 3.6 shows that 41.3% of respondents described their experience as very difficult, strained, and complicated, 37.6% of respondents described their experience as somewhat difficult, but manageable, and 15.3% of respondents described their experience as relaxed, informal, and uncomplicated. Other experiences were described as: sometimes good, sometimes difficult, complicated and changed over time; no contact or involvement by the other parent; difficulties because of addictions issues of other parent; and difficulties around access to the child and child support payments.

**Figure 3.6**  
**Respondents' Description of Personal Experience, 2006**

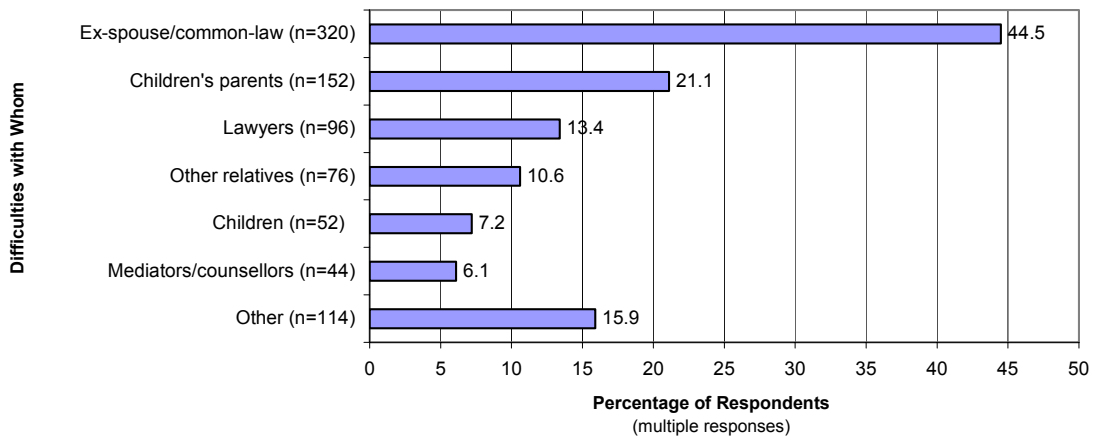


Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 719

If respondents experienced difficulties with parental responsibility, Figure 3.7 presents who the difficulties were with. Most commonly, difficulties were experienced with the respondent's ex-spouse or common-law partner (44.5%). Respondents also reported having difficulties with the children (7.2%), other relatives (10.6%), mediators/counselors (6.1%), and lawyers (13.4%). Respondents who were extended

family members reported having difficulties with the children’s parents (21.1%).<sup>4</sup> Sixteen percent of respondents reported having difficulties with others than the list provided. These included: a new spouse of ex-partner, friends of the parent, local law enforcement, government, social services, the court system, and some reported having their own emotional problems.

**Figure 3.7**  
**Difficulties with Whom for Respondents with Personal Experience, 2006**



Source of data: 2006 Screening Survey  
 Total N = 719

### 3.5 Additional Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the screening survey. Just over 30% of the respondents chose to comment, resulting in a substantial amount of qualitative data. In order to analyze this information, the research questions for the study (Section 2.1.1) were used to organize the comments. This allowed for various themes to emerge within the following categories: 1) Current Perceptions; 2) Nature of Arrangements; 3) Changes in Arrangements; 4) Relationships; 5) Difficulties; 6) Solutions; and 7) Suggestions and Recommendations.

#### 3.5.1 Current Perceptions

For the most part, current perceptions of the issue had a negative tone. Of those who commented, an overwhelming number felt that the legal system is biased in custody and access cases, favouring the mother and penalizing the father regardless of either parent’s conduct. Respondents commented that custody is almost always given to the mother, although she may not always be the better or healthier caregiver, and that fathers are rarely considered as a viable option for custody. Other respondents stated that the legal system is not fair to non-custodial parents in general (who most often are fathers), particularly around child support payments and access to the children.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the respondents who had personal experience were now adult children of a family breakdown in the past (19.5%). They identified themselves as children in the situation and many reported having difficulties with their parents.

Child support was consistently addressed in the comments. Almost all of the respondents who wrote about child support felt that payments are unfair — the non-custodial parent has to pay too much and suffer financially themselves — and that there is no accountability for spending by the custodial parent. Many respondents stated that access to the child(ren) by the non-custodial parent is not equal to the amount of child support he/she is providing.

The perception of many of the respondents who commented was that the system is based on money. They felt that decisions are made in favour of the parent with more money, power, and a better lawyer. A few respondents stated that the legal system overall is too expensive.

The overall message among respondents who commented was that the system is not doing a very good job addressing custody and access issues. A number of comments discussed the focus on parental rights, rather than the rights of the child. Respondents believed this is having a negative impact on children and that children's needs are not being met. Court proceedings are slow, dragged-out, expensive, and very destructive to family relationships.

### 3.5.2 Nature of Arrangements

Two themes emerged under the question, “What is the nature of custody and access arrangements among Albertans?” The first was that of joint/shared custody. Respondents who commented on this arrangement were split between supporting it or not. Those who did not support shared custody identified problems with sharing of information between parents, appropriate and adequate access to children, and fair child support payments. Most of these respondents felt that shared custody is hard on the children, who bounce back and forth from parents' homes and struggle with issues of loyalty. One respondent stated that shared custody is simply the “current legal trend” and not necessarily the best situation.

On the other hand, some of the respondents supported shared custody, stating that this “eliminates child support, unless one parent has no income.” Others talked about their own successful experiences with shared parenting; the arrangement worked for those respondents and they believed it could work for others as well. Respondents who supported shared parenting felt that it relieves tension and is better for the child.

The second theme that arose under the nature of arrangements was common-law relationships. Respondents who commented on common-law relationships often posed questions about their situations, unsure whether a common-law couple with children has the same rights as a married couple with children. They specifically questioned guidelines around child support payments and visitation.

### 3.5.3 Changes in Arrangements

There were very few comments that addressed changes in child custody and access arrangements over time. The few that were provided were from older

respondents who generally discussed “how things used to be.” A few respondents commented on changes in family values, stating that parents used to stay together and work out their problems, even if their situation was not perfect; divorce was not as accessible as it is now. Other respondents felt that little has actually changed in terms of divorce and custody battles, stating that then, as now, divorce and separation is adversarial and judge dependent.

Some of the comments in this area addressed the change in accountability for the non-custodial parent (assumed to be the father). Respondents felt that fathers are held more accountable than in the past; it is not as easy for fathers to duck responsibilities, neglect the children, or take minimal financial responsibility. One respondent also identified changes in the needs of families involved in divorce, and in turn, changes in options available to deal with these situations (e.g., collaborative divorce process).

#### 3.5.4 Relationships

The only emerging theme under relationships was that of extended family members, particularly grandparents. All of the respondents who commented on this topic emphasized the importance of keeping the extended family involved in the children’s lives. Some respondents highlighted grandparents’ rights in custody and access situations, while others discussed the strong and positive influence that grandparents have on children growing up. Overall, these respondents believed that custody and access relationships extend beyond the parent-child relationship.

#### 3.5.5 Difficulties

Reoccurring themes arose under the topic of difficulties. The majority of the comments in this area addressed child support and the Federal Child Support Guidelines. Most respondents who commented thought the Federal Child Support Guidelines were biased in favour of the lowest income earner, not flexible enough, too wishy-washy, too complicated, and unfair to fathers. Respondents criticized the lack of accountability for spending of child support payments and many questioned the absence of a requirement that the custodial parent work.

Not only did these respondents struggle with the guidelines, but also with the way maintenance was enforced (or not enforced). Some respondents who commented in this area did not feel enough was being done to ensure payments were made. They also felt that strategies currently being used (e.g., suspension of driver’s license) were inappropriate and ineffective. A few respondents stated that the Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP) in Alberta does not work. Overall, comments revealed respondents’ struggle with child support and maintenance enforcement.

Another theme that emerged was dealing with custody and access across provinces. Several respondents commented that their ex-spouse had moved out of province. This resulted in access and visitation problems for some if the custodial parent had moved with the children, or financial problems for others if the non-custodial parent had moved and was neglectful of his/her responsibilities. Respondents who

commented emphasized the need for communication among various systems across Canada.

Finally, many of the respondents who commented on difficulties had trouble with the legal system in general. Some felt that court proceedings are too complicated and intimidating, and suggested that the process be less formal. Others thought the paperwork is too daunting and complicated, and suggested making it more user-friendly. Respondents found lawyers intimidating, expensive, and insensitive to the nature of the case. Comments revealed a sense that lawyers treated divorce and custody cases as games, and that they were only there to make money. Respondents who commented generally felt that the entire process (lawyers, court, and follow-up services) was too expensive and took too long.

### 3.5.6 Solutions

Comments that were grouped under the topic of solutions were related to solutions that had been attempted by respondents, rather than new ideas or suggestions (addressed under the next heading). Overall, respondents who commented on solutions felt that there is no one solution that can address all custody and access issues, but rather, each case needs to be decided based on individual and situational circumstances. Respondents felt it is important to look at what is best for the children, and review decisions periodically as things change in people's lives.

Some of the comments in this area addressed the Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop. Most of the respondents who wrote about PAS felt the workshop was excellent and provided a lot of useful information. Many qualified this statement by saying that what people get out of the workshop is dependent on participants' individual attitudes and willingness to learn. There were a couple of respondents who felt that PAS is a waste of time and money.

The other two solutions mentioned were mediation and counseling. Mediation was recommended by a number of respondents; they felt that it is easier, less adversarial, and less intrusive than going through the court process. Respondents who commented on counseling found it to be a helpful solution.

### 3.5.7 Suggestions and Recommendations

Respondents included a few suggestions in their comments about custody and access situations. Many of the respondents talked about the need for prevention. They suggested: counseling and financial support to keep marriages together; marriage preparation courses; courses offered in high school on marriage and having children; education on raising children prior to having children; and initiatives to prevent teenage pregnancy. Respondents felt money would be better spent trying to prevent family breakdown, rather than paying for the aftermath of divorce and parental responsibility. Respondents suggested that such services be provided at no cost.

Many respondents also suggested the use of mediation to deal with custody and access issues, rather than going through court. Some of these respondents felt that

mediation should be mandatory before court is even accessed. They felt that most custody issues could be settled in this way. Again, respondents suggested that mediation services be provided at no cost to the participants.

The theme of free services extended beyond the first two areas mentioned; respondents suggested that all services, from counseling to court costs, be provided free of charge. Many respondents believed that cost hinders people from accessing support.

Finally, respondents made a couple of suggestions regarding child support. They suggested that Social Insurance Numbers (SIN) be used to track non-custodial parents and enforce maintenance payments. Others suggested that the income and spending of the custodial parent be taken into account when determining child support payments, an issue many respondents reported struggling with.

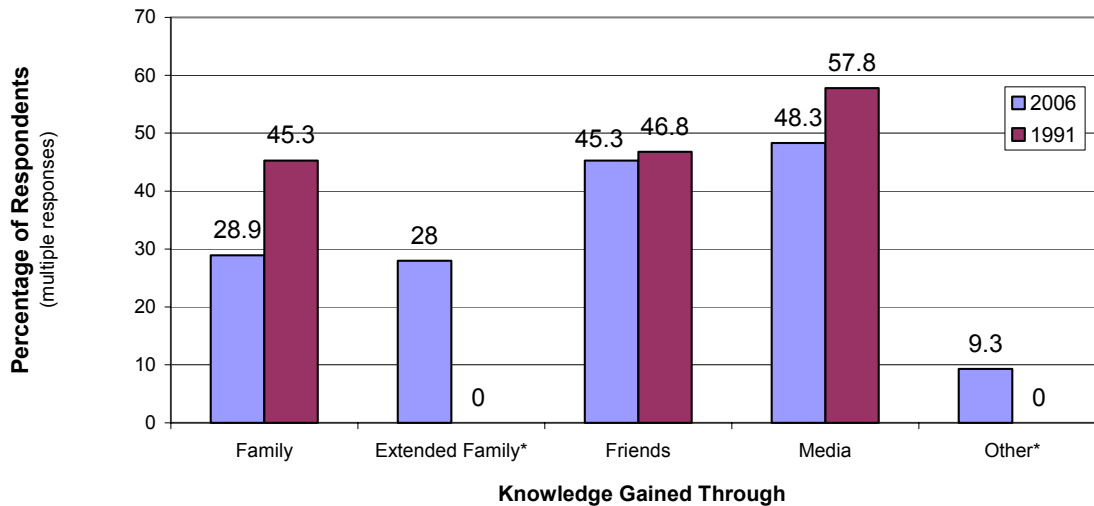
### **3.6 Comparative Analysis: Screening Survey 1991**

#### **3.6.1 Knowledge, Attitudes, and Opinions**

An important component of the 2006 study is the comparison of findings to the study completed in 1991. While the return rate in 2006 was extremely low (7.2%), the actual number of surveys completed in 2006 (N=1,437) is substantially higher than in 1991 (N=890).

General awareness of the issue is relatively the same among respondents in both samples: 81.3% (valid n=1,395) in 2006 and 83% (valid n=890) in 1991. Awareness in 2006 was mostly gained through the media (48.3%) and through personal experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances (45.3%) (Figure 3.8). While the categories in 1991 survey are somewhat different, 10% more of respondents in 1991 reported gaining awareness of the issue through the media (57.8%) and 46.8% of respondents reported gaining awareness through their friends. In 1991, personal experience with family included the respondent's own children and extended family members; 45.3% of respondents gained awareness this way. In 2006, 28.9% of respondents gained awareness through personal experience with their own children and 28% gained awareness through personal experience with extended family members.

**Figure 3.8**  
**How Respondents Became Aware of Parental Responsibility**  
**Following Family Breakdown: Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

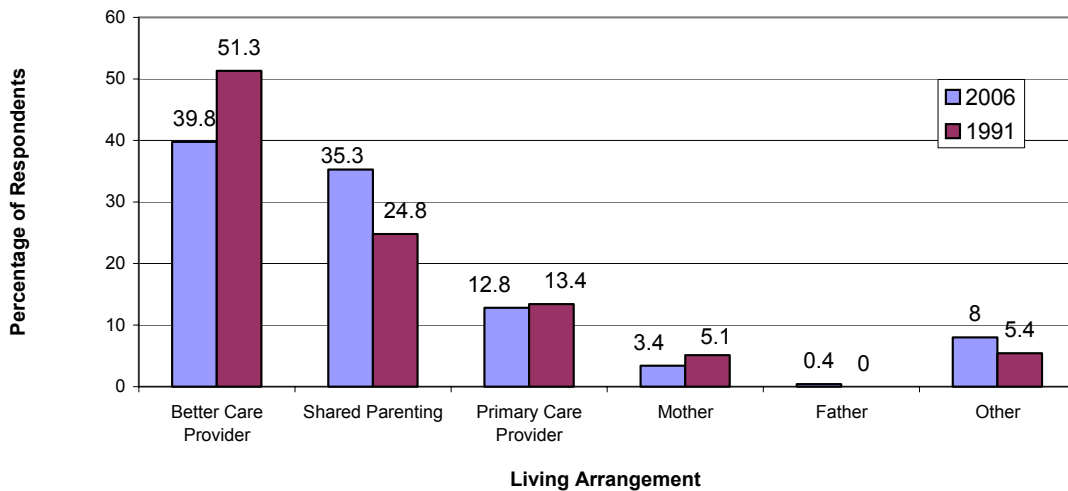


Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=1,134) and 1991(N=739)  
 \* Extended Family and Other were not categories in the 1991 survey.

More noticeable differences exist between samples for the question, “Following the breakdown of a marriage or a relationship, with whom should the child(ren) normally live?” (Figure 3.9). In 1991, 51.3% of the respondents felt that the child(ren) should live with mother or father, whoever is a better care provider; only 39.8% of respondents in 2006 chose this living arrangement. In turn, 35.3% of respondents in 2006 thought the child(ren) should live with both mother and father through shared parenting, as opposed to 24.8% of respondents in the 1991 study. The other options provided (whoever has been the child’s primary care provider; mother; and father) were similar in the percentage of respondents who selected them.



**Figure 3.9**  
**With Whom Should the Child Live Following Family Breakdown:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

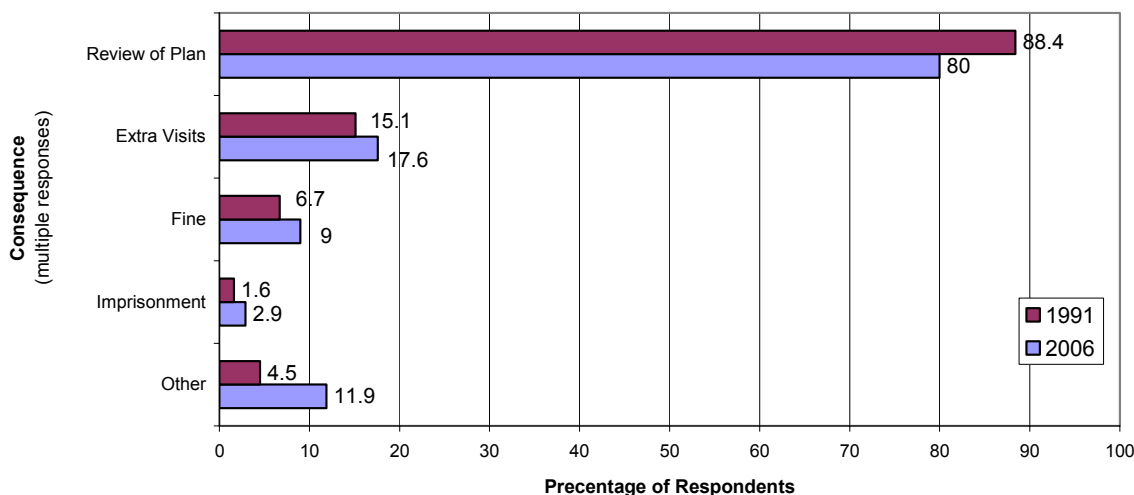


Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=1,394) and 1991 (N=880)

Slightly more respondents in 2006 (valid n=1,423) than in 1991 (valid n=890) thought that contact with both parents following family breakdown was important (42.4% compared to 36.9%, respectively). Almost 60% of respondents in both samples (59.1% in 2006 and 56.2% in 1991) thought that extended family members should be allowed to visit children whose parents are separated or divorced.

Just as in 1991, almost all of the respondents in 2006 felt that behaviour of the custodial parent should be reviewed by the court if he/she disobeys a parenting order (96.2% in 2006 and 92.9% in 1991). Respondents in both samples appeared to agree on which consequences were appropriate (Figure 3.10): 80% in 2006 and 88.4% in 1991 thought a review of the parenting plan was necessary; 17.6% in 2006 and 15.1% in 1991 thought extra visits were needed; 9% in 2006 and 6.7% in 1991 thought a fine was appropriate; and 2.9% in 2006 and 1.6% in 1991 thought the custodial parent should serve jail time. Both sets of respondents suggested an inquiry into the reason for disobeying the parenting order before deciding the consequence, stating that there may be a justifiable reason.

**Figure 3.10**  
**Appropriate Consequence for Disobeying Parenting Order:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



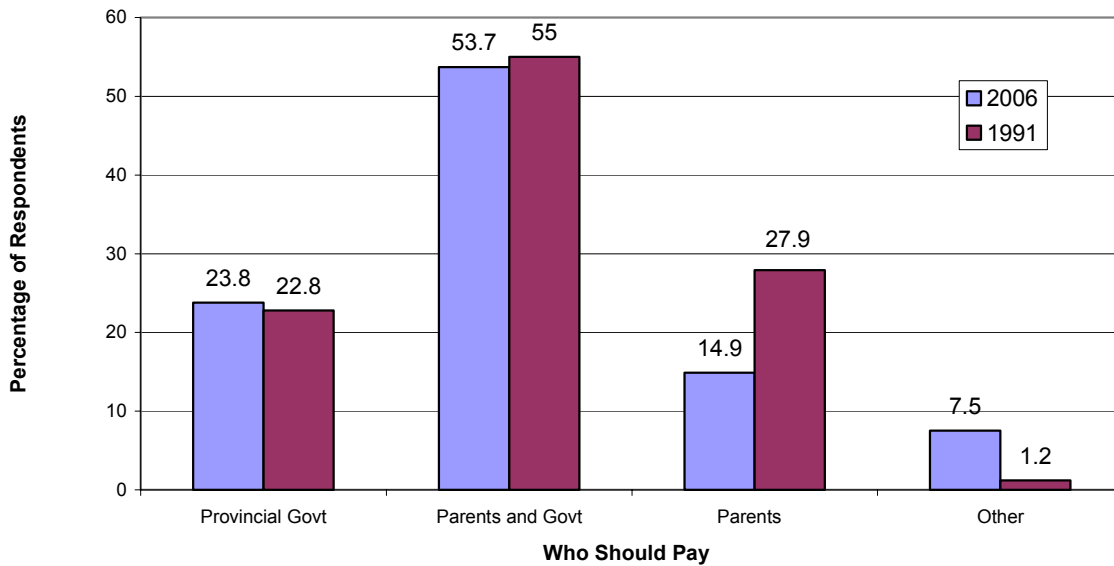
Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=1,349) and 1991 (N=827)

Respondents from both samples were asked whether mediation or counseling services should be made available to parents resolving parental responsibility problems. The majority of respondents in 2006 (96%), as in 1991 (91.4%), thought such services should be provided. When asked who should pay for these services, just over half of respondents in 2006 thought that individual parents should pay with government subsidy (53.7%), which is similar to the 1991 sample (55%) (Figure 3.11). Other respondents in 2006 thought the provincial government should pay (23.8%), which is similar to respondents in 1991 (22.8%). A difference should be noted in respondents who thought individual parents should cover the cost themselves; 27.9% of respondents in 1991, compared to 14.9% of respondents in 2006. Rather, respondents in 2006 suggested other options for covering the cost of mediation or counseling services (7.5%).

Overall, half of the respondents in 1991 thought the legal system was not effectively dealing with parental responsibility following family breakdown (50.3%) (Figure 3.12). Unfortunately, this number increased to 57% in 2006. At least a third of the sample in 2006 had no opinion (31.8%), which is slightly lower than respondents who had no opinion in 1991 (40.8%).<sup>5</sup>

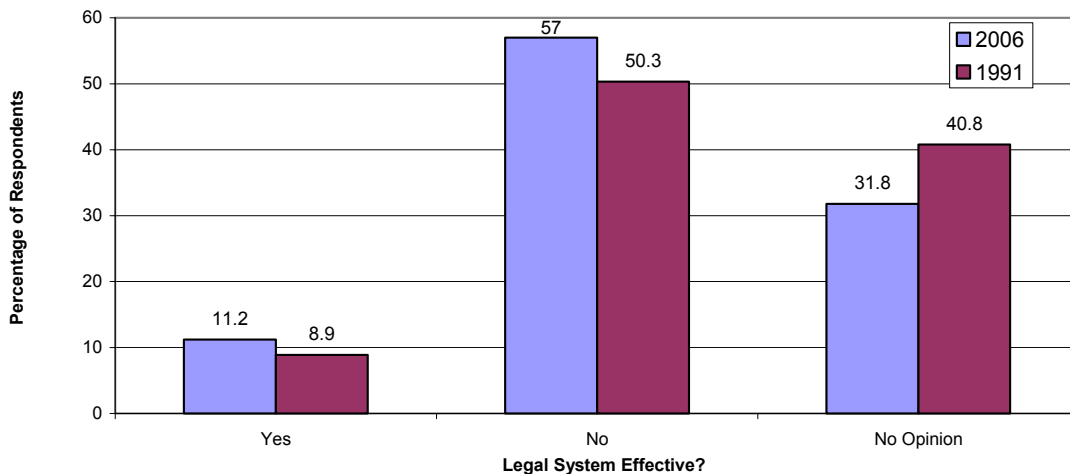
<sup>5</sup> A comparison could not be done on respondents' attitudes and opinions on the Parenting After Separation workshop or the Federal Child Support Guidelines, as these both came into effect after the 1991 study was conducted.

**Figure 3.11**  
**Who Should Pay for Mediation or Counseling:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=1,369) and 1991 (N=813)

**Figure 3.12**  
**Is the Legal System Effective?**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



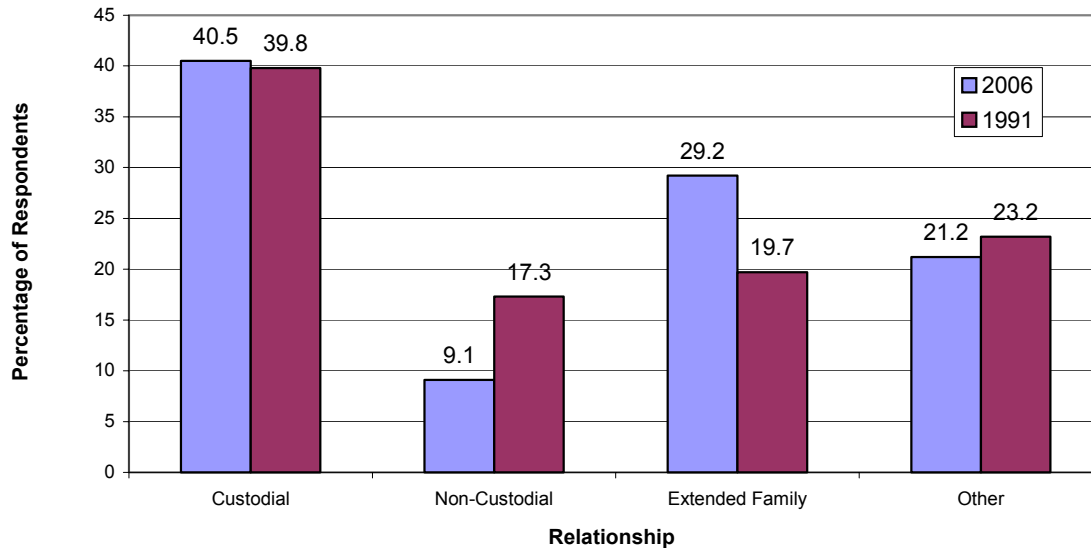
Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=1,385) and 1991 (N=890)

### 3.6.2 Personal Experience

The sample in 2006 yielded far more respondents with personal experience (52.7%) than the sample in 1991 (28%). Of those with personal experience in 2006, 40.5% were custodial parents, 9.1% were non-custodial parents, 29.2% were extended family members, and 21.2% of respondents identified their relationship differently than those listed (Figure 3.13). The percentage of custodial parents in the 1991 sample was similar to 2006 (39.8%), but there were substantially more non-custodial parents

(17.3%) and less extended family members (19.7%). Approximately the same percentage of those with personal experience in 1991 identified their relationship differently than those listed (23.2%).

**Figure 3.13**  
**Type of Relationship for Respondents with Personal Experience: Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

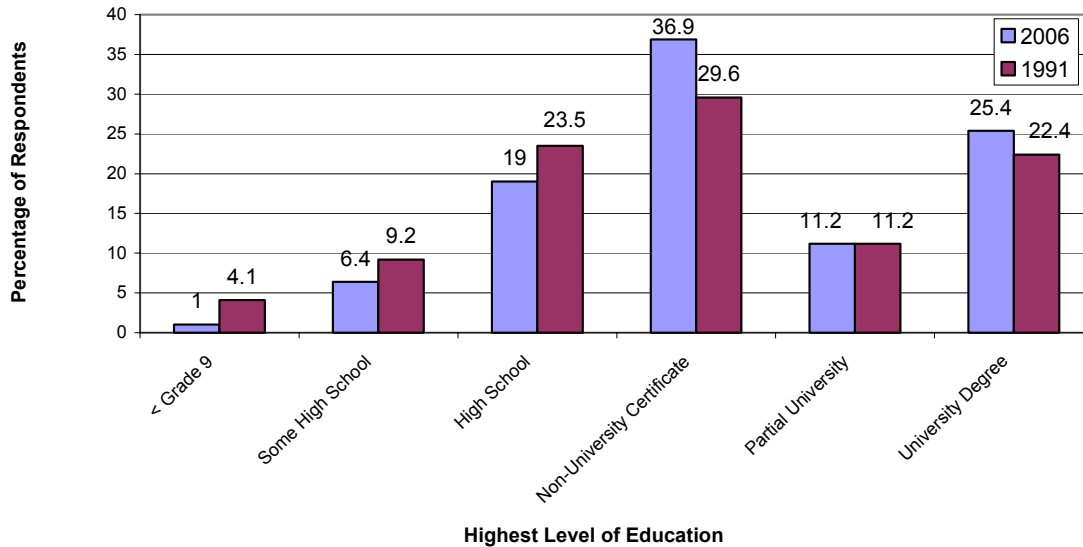


Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=728) and 1991 (N=249)

The gender breakdown of custodial and non-custodial parents in the 1991 sample compared to the 2006 sample may be reflective of current trends in parenting roles following separation and divorce. In 1991, 68.7% of custodial parents were female; this increased to 75.9% in 2006. Similarly, in 1991, 79.1% of non-custodial parents were male; this increased to 83.1% in 2006. It appears that little has changed in the tendency of mothers to assume the role of custodial parent, and in fact, this pattern may be growing stronger.

The overall level of education for custodial and non-custodial parents seems to have increased from 1991 to 2006 (Figure 3.14). In 1991, almost a quarter of custodial parents listed the completion of high school as their highest level of education (23.5%), whereas in 2006, only 19% listed high school as their highest level of education. The increase in education appears in custodial parents with a non-university certificate or diploma in 2006; 36.9% in 2006 compared to 29.6% in 1991. Approximately the same percentage of custodial parents in 2006 as in 1991 had completed partial university (11.2% for both) or a university degree (25.4% and 22.4%, respectively).

**Figure 3.14**  
**Highest Level of Education for Custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

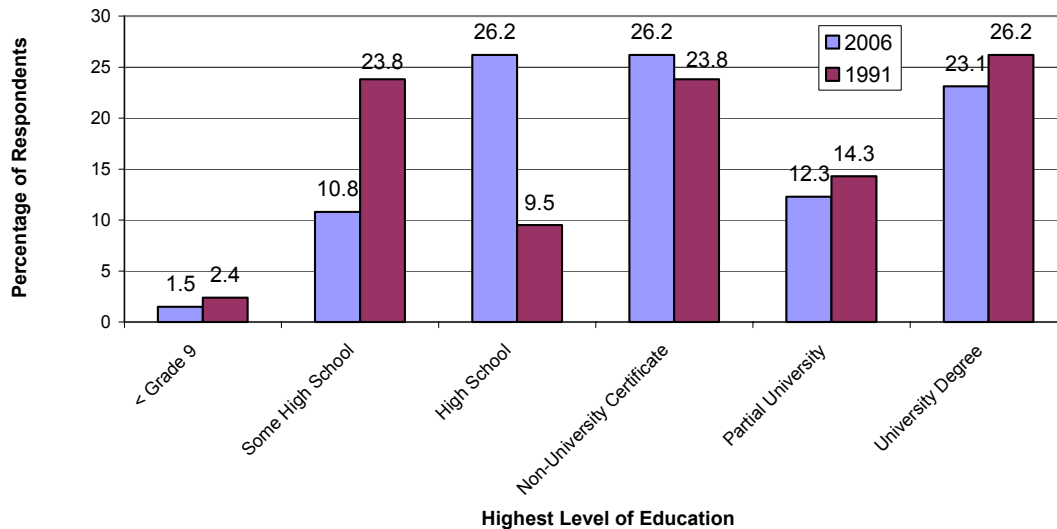


Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=728) and 1991 (N=98)

A similar increase is seen with the education level of non-custodial parents (Figure 3.15). In 1991, 23.8% of non-custodial parents had completed some high school as their highest level of education, and only 9.5% listed high school as their highest level of education. In 2006, only 10.8% of non-custodial parents had completed some high school as their highest level of education, and 26.2% reported the completion of high school as their highest level of education (a 16.7% increase). Minor differences are seen in completing a non-university certificate (23.8% in 1991 and 26.2% in 2006), in completing partial university (14.3% in 1991 and 12.3% in 2006), and in completing a university degree (26.2% in 1991 and 23.1% in 2006).

Little information is provided for the employment status of custodial and non-custodial parents in 1991. The percentage of custodial parents employed full-time or part-time virtually stayed the same from 1991 to 2006 (75.8% to 76.3%, respectively). This percentage decreased slightly from 1991 to 2006 for non-custodial parents (67.4% to 62.1%, respectively).

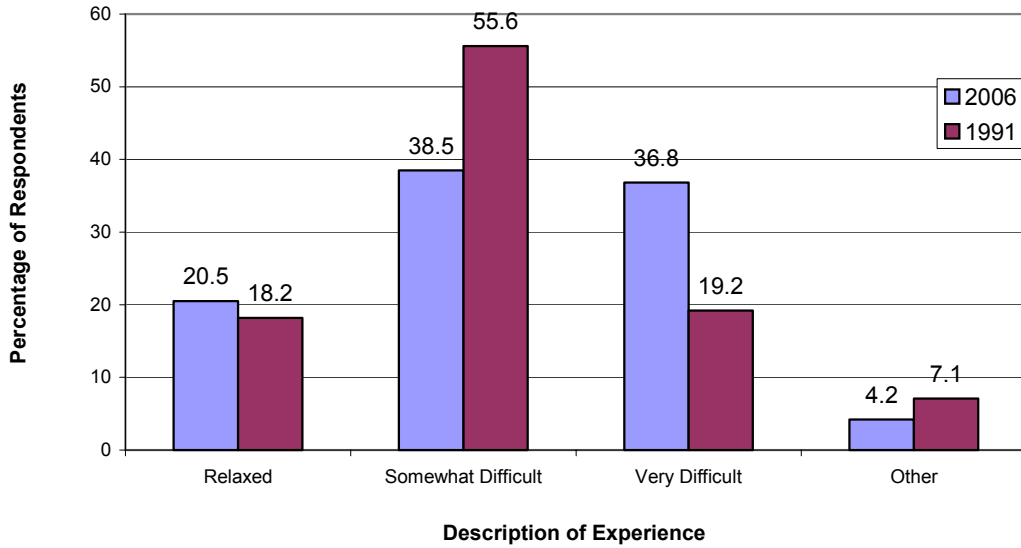
**Figure 3.15**  
**Highest Level of Education for Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=66) and 1991 (N=42)

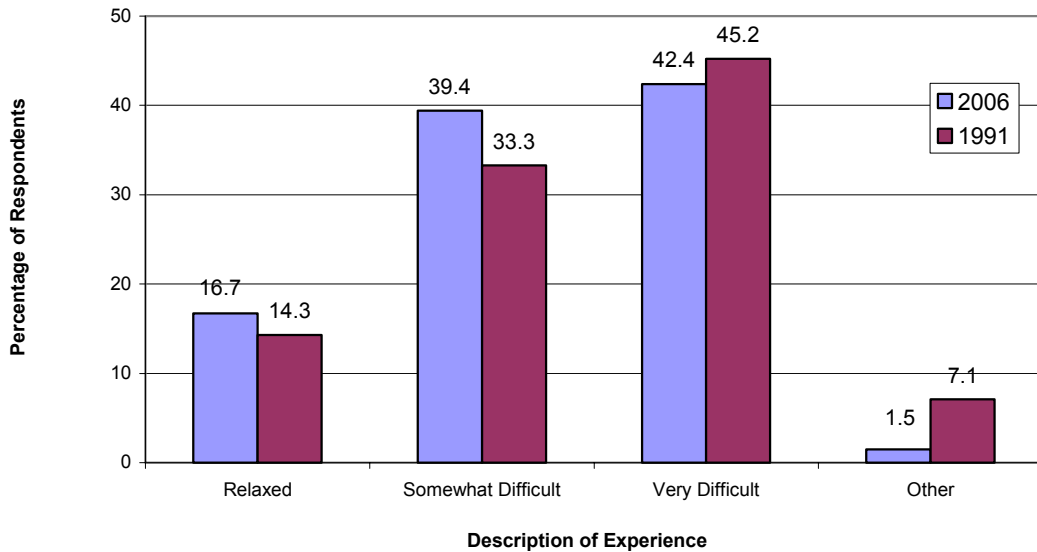
The experience of custodial parents in 2006, overall, seems to be a little worse than for custodial parents in 1991 (Figure 3.16). Whereas 55.6% of custodial parents in 1991 described their experience as somewhat difficult, but manageable and 19.2% described their experience as very difficult, strained, and complicated, only 38.5% of custodial parents in 2006 described their experience as somewhat difficult but manageable and 36.8% described their experience as very difficult, strained, and complicated. In contrast, more non-custodial parents in 2006 described their experience as somewhat difficult (39.4%) than those in 1991 (33.3%), and less non-custodial parents in 2006 described their experience as very difficult (42.4%) than those in 1991 (45.2%) (Figure 3.17). However, for both years, most non-custodial parents described their experience as very difficult, more so than custodial parents from both years.

**Figure 3.16**  
**Description of Experience by Custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=288) and 1991 (N=99)

**Figure 3.17**  
**Description of Experience by Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

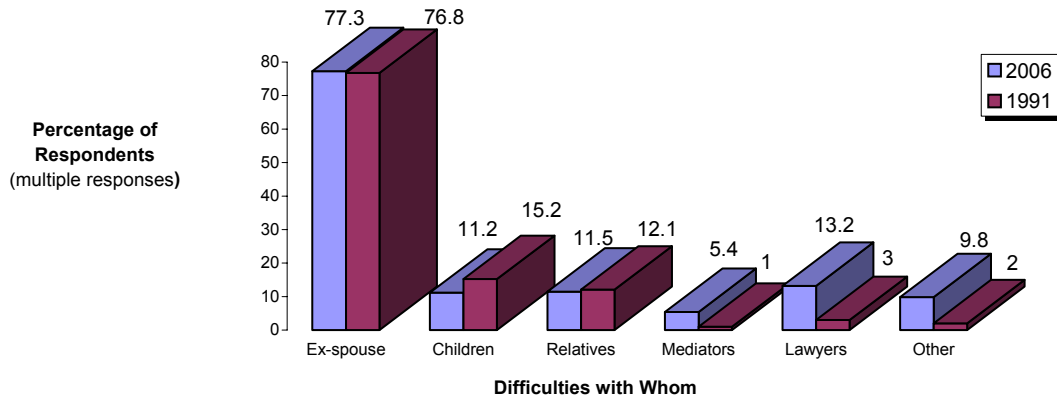


Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=66) and 1991 (N=42)

In terms of whom custodial and non-custodial parents had problems with (Figures 3.18 and 3.19), both groups in 1991 and in 2006 had the most trouble with their ex-spouses/common-law partners; this decreased slightly for non-custodial parents from 1991 to 2006 (88.4% to 80.3%). Custodial parents had far more trouble with lawyers in 2006 than in 1991 (13.2% from 3%), and non-custodial parents had far

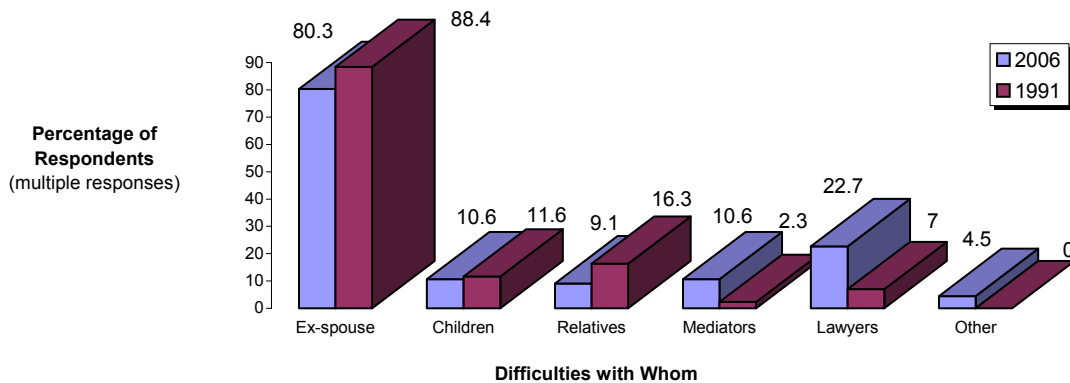
more trouble in 2006 than in 1991 with mediators (10.6% from 2.3%) and lawyers (22.7% from 7%). On the other hand, non-custodial parents in 1991 had more trouble with other relatives (16.3%) than they did in 2006 (9.1%).

**Figure 3.18**  
**Difficulties with Whom?**  
**Comparison of Custodial Parents in the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=295) and 1991 (N=99)

**Figure 3.19**  
**Difficulties with Whom?**  
**Comparison of Non-custodial Parents in the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Screening Surveys 2006 (N=66) and 1991 (N=43)



## 4.0 FOLLOW-UP SURVEYS

As discussed in Section 2.3, follow-up surveys were developed to provide a more in-depth understanding of participants' experiences with parental responsibility following relationship breakdown. Respondents who completed the screening survey and indicated that they had had previous experience with relationship breakdown involving children were asked if they would be willing to complete a longer follow-up survey. Respondents who agreed to receive the follow-up survey were classified into one of three groups based on their responses to the screening survey: custodial parents; non-custodial parents; or extended family members. Respondents were mailed the appropriate survey and were requested to complete it and return it to CRILF in a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope.

A total of 162 custodial parent surveys were mailed out and 67 valid surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 41.4%. Non-custodial parent surveys were mailed to 44 individuals and 17 completed surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 38.6%. A total of 91 extended family member surveys were distributed and 61 valid surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 67%.

This chapter presents the findings from the follow-up surveys. Results from the custodial parent survey are discussed in Section 4.1, results from the non-custodial parent are presented in Section 4.2, and the extended family survey is discussed in Section 4.3. Section 4.4 contains a comparative analysis of the follow-up surveys from the 2006 and 1991 studies.

### 4.1 Custodial Parent Survey

#### 4.1.1 General Information

The first section of the custodial parent survey asked respondents for general information regarding their experiences with custody and access. Respondents were initially asked how many biological or adoptive children they have. Out of the total responses to this question (n=67), the majority of respondents stated that they had one (22.4%) or two (49.3%) children. Fewer respondents indicated that they had three (17.9%) or four or more (10.4%) children. When asked how many of these children live with the respondent, the majority who answered this question (n=61) stated that they had one (41%) or two (44.3%) children living with them. Fewer respondents had three (13.1%) or four or more (1.6%) children living with them. Part of the reason for the discrepancy between the number of children the respondents had and the number living with them is likely due to the fact that some respondents reported that their children were adults at the time the survey was completed, and were likely living on their own.

When asked the age of the children who were living with them, 60 respondents reported on the ages of 107 children. Children's ages ranged from 1 to 28 years with an average age of 14 years. When asked the gender of the children who live with them, 62 respondents reported on 110 children. There were slightly more male children (51.8%) than female (48.2%).

Respondents were asked if they are the custodial parent of the children who live with them or if they share custody with the other parent as determined by a formal court process. A total of 62 parents provided the custody arrangements of 109 children. For over two-thirds of the children (68.8%), respondents indicated that they are the custodial parent; 31.2% of the children are living in a shared custody situation. When asked if they are a non-custodial parent to any of their children, 19 of 62 respondents (30.6%) indicated that they are, while 43 (69.4%) stated that they are not. Respondents who indicated that they are not the custodial parent of at least one of their children were asked with whom these children live. Out of 13 parents who responded to this question, 4 (30.8%) stated that these children live with the other parent and 9 (69.2%) indicated that they live on their own. Not surprisingly, since the majority of children not living with the respondent were on their own, the age of these children tended to be quite high, ranging from 13 to 39 years.

Respondents were further asked if they have any step-children living with them. Only 4 of the 64 parents who answered this question (6.3%) stated that they currently have at least one step-child living with them. Of the six step-children reported, their ages ranged from 9 to 22 years; four of the step-children were male and two were female.

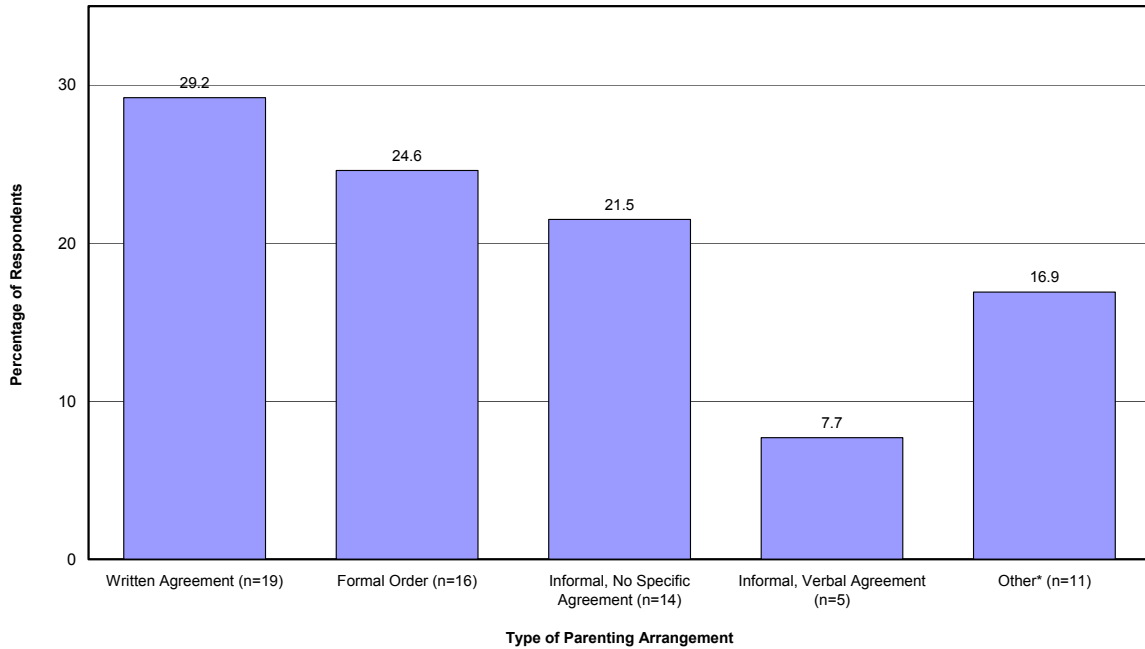
#### 4.1.2 Parenting Arrangements

Respondents were asked how long it had been since they had lived with their child(ren)'s other parent. One of the 66 respondents who answered this question stated that they had never lived with the other parent. The remaining respondents indicated that they had been separated from the other parent for an average of 11.3 years (range of less than 1 to 41 years).

Figure 4.1 presents the type of parenting arrangements that respondents reported they currently have with the other parent. The most common type of arrangement was a written agreement, which may have been approved through a court process (29.2%), followed by a formal order decided through a court process (24.6%). The least common type of parenting arrangement was an informal, verbal agreement (7.7%).

Respondents who indicated that they have a written agreement or formal court order for parental responsibility were asked what type of arrangement was agreed to or ordered for both custody and access. Figure 4.2 presents the type of custody arrangements in place. The most frequent arrangement reported was sole physical and legal custody to one parent (36.4%), followed by shared physical and legal custody (30.3%). The least common type of custody arrangement was split custody (3%).

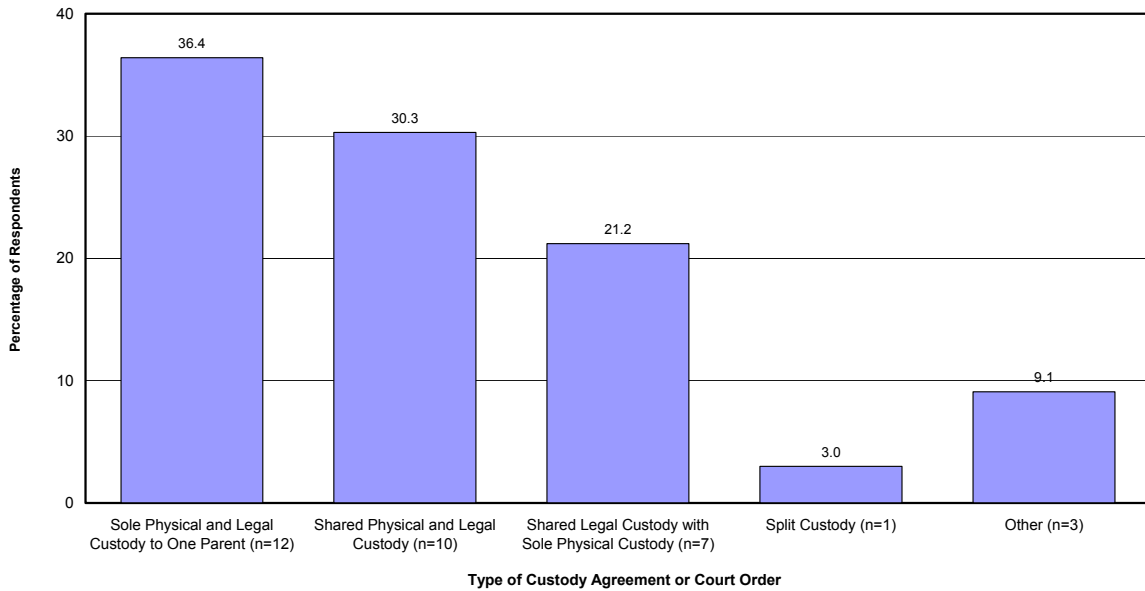
**Figure 4.1**  
**Type of Parenting Arrangement, as Reported by Custodial Parents, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 65

\* Examples of "other" arrangements include: children have grown up; father has no contact with children; we had a formal written agreement, but it has evolved over the years into a more flexible arrangement.

**Figure 4.2**  
**Type of Custody Agreement or Court Order, as Reported by Custodial Parents, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 33

Out of the 28 respondents who reported on the type of access arrangements that are in place, the most common was reasonable access by the non-custodial parent (67.9%), followed by specified access by the non-custodial parent (25%), and no access by the non-custodial parent (3.6%). When asked how the actual amount of custody or access time compares with what is included in the written agreement or order, the most common responses offered by the 32 parents who responded were that the current time is about the same as specified (43.8%) and that the current time is less than specified (40.6%). Relatively few respondents (9.4%) indicated that the current time is more than specified or that the other parent does not have shared custody or access time (3.1%).

Custodial parents were asked if the other parent has access visits with the child(ren). Of the 66 respondents who answered this question, over three-quarters (77.3%) said yes, while 10.6% said no and 12.1% indicated that both parents share custody. The most common reason offered by the seven respondents who stated that the other parent does not have access visits was that the other parent is not interested in visiting the child(ren) (n=6).

Respondents were asked if they have a child support order in place that outlines the financial arrangements between themselves and the other parent. Three-quarters of the 66 custodial parents who responded to this question (75.8%) indicated that they do have a formal child support agreement, while 10.6% stated that they have an informal arrangement and 13.6% said that they do not have an agreement at all. Respondents who stated that they have either a formal or informal child support arrangement were then asked if the payments are made. Of the 47 parents who responded, almost three-quarters (70.2%) stated that the payments are made, while 17% said that they are sometimes made and 12.8% said that they are not made. When asked if the child support payments are made on time, 64.3% of 42 respondents said yes, while 16.7% said sometimes and 19% said no. Respondents were also asked if the child support payments are made in full. Of the 41 respondents who answered this question, 68.3% said that the payments are made in full, while 9.8% said sometimes and 22% said no.

The Federal Child Support Guidelines came into effect on May 1, 1997. Custodial parents who indicated that they had either a formal or informal child support agreement in place were asked if this agreement was decided upon prior to or after 1997. Approximately equal numbers of the 49 parents who responded indicated that the agreement was decided upon before 1997 (51%) or after 1997 (49%). The 24 parents who stated that their agreement was made before 1997 were asked if the Federal Child Support Guidelines have affected or changed their agreement. Most respondents indicated that the Guidelines have not affected their arrangement (45.8%), while approximately equal numbers stated that the Guidelines have affected their arrangement (29.2%) or that they do not know whether the Guidelines have affected their arrangement (25%). When the seven parents who indicated that the Guidelines have affected their child support arrangements were asked about the nature of the change, five indicated that the payments have increased and also that the arrangement is fairer. Only two respondents indicated that the amount of the support payment has decreased and only one stated that the arrangement is less fair. When asked if the

current financial arrangement for child support affects the amount of access the other parent has with the child(ren), all 66 respondents stated no.

Custodial parents were asked if they currently discuss various aspects of their child(ren)'s life with the other parent. Table 4.1 presents the extent to which respondents discuss these aspects with the other parent. With the exception of health and medical issues, less than one-half of the custodial parents indicated that they frequently discuss these aspects of their child(ren)'s lives with the other parent. Custodial parents were least likely to discuss lessons their child(ren) takes (47.6%), their child(ren)'s religion or moral development (46.2%), and their child(ren)'s friends (42.2%) with the other parent.

**Table 4.1**  
**Extent to Which Custodial Parents Discuss Various**  
**Aspects of Their Child(ren)'s Lives with the Other Parent, 2006**

Issue	Yes		Sometimes		No	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Health/medical Issues (n=66)	37	56.1	11	16.7	18	27.3
Religion/moral Development (n=65)	20	30.8	15	23.1	30	46.2
School Progress (n=64)	28	43.8	12	18.8	24	37.5
Sports (n=63)	26	41.3	12	19.0	25	39.7
Lessons (n=63)	21	33.3	12	19.0	30	47.6
Child(ren)'s Friends (n=64)	20	31.3	17	26.6	27	42.2

Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey.

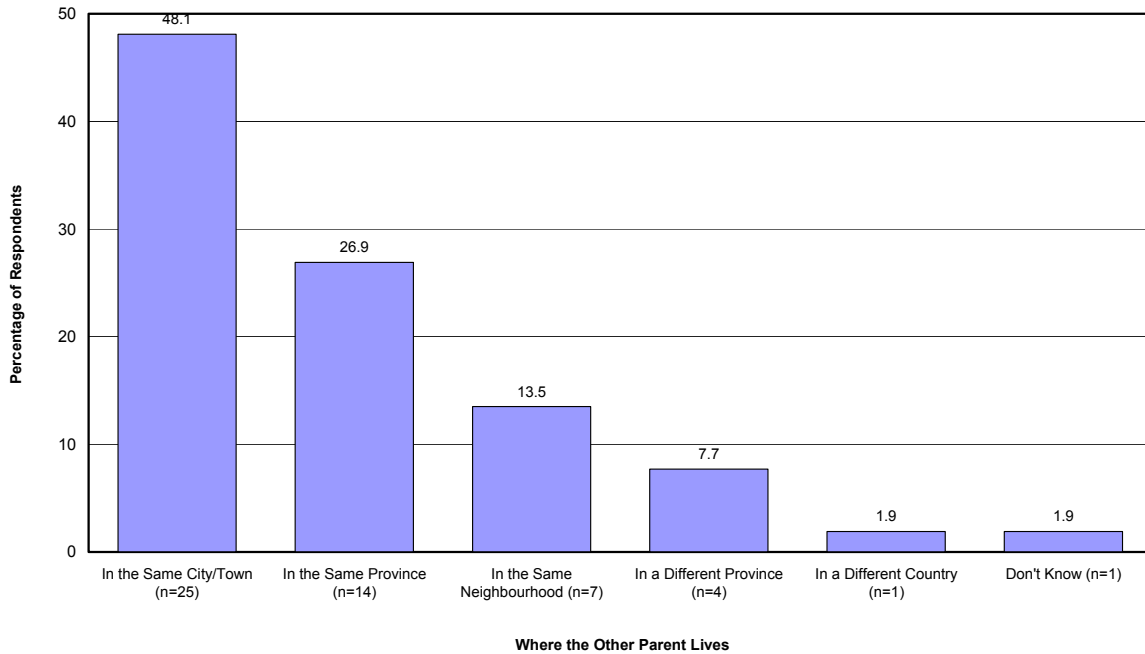
#### 4.1.3 Access Activities

Custodial parents who reported that the other parent has access visits with the child(ren) were asked a series of questions regarding the access activities. With regard to the type of access, of the 52 parents who responded, the vast majority (90.4%) indicated that access visits were unsupervised; a few parents stated that the access visits were always (5.8%) or sometimes (3.8%) supervised.

When asked how frequently the other parent has access visits with the child(ren), the responses of 50 custodial parents ranged from no visits to 15 visits in an average month. The average number of visits per month was 3.2. The average length of a typical access visit as reported by 47 respondents was 24.3 hours, suggesting that overnight access visits are a relatively common occurrence among this sample of respondents.

Custodial parents were asked where the other parent lives in relation to them and the child(ren). Figure 4.3 presents the residence of the non-custodial parent. Most respondents reported that the other parent lives in the same city or town (48.1%) or in the same province (26.9%). Few respondents indicated that the other parent lives in a different country (1.9%) or that they do not know where the other parent lives (1.9%).

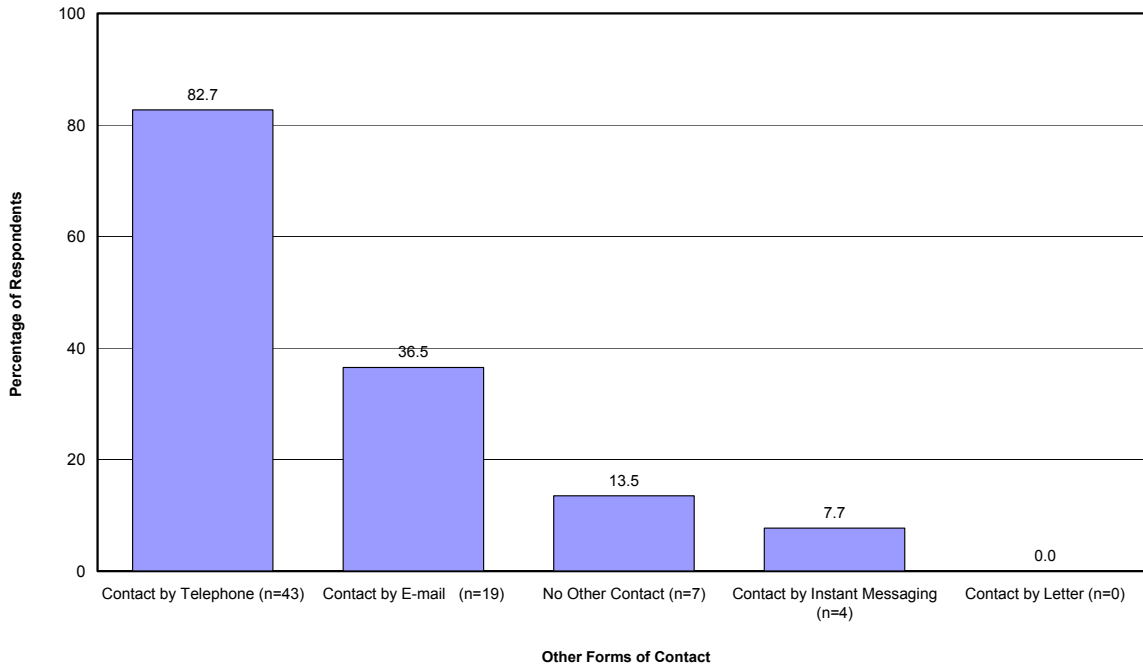
**Figure 4.3**  
**Where the Other Parent Lives, as Reported by Custodial Parents, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 52

Custodial parents who indicated that there are access visits with the other parent were also asked if there are other kinds of contact between the child(ren) and the non-custodial parent. Findings are presented in Figure 4.4. Few respondents reported that there were no other forms of contact (13.5%). The most common forms of other contact reported were by telephone (82.7%) and e-mail (36.5%). No respondents reported contact by letter.

**Figure 4.4**  
**Percentage of Respondents Reporting Other Forms of Contact**  
**Between the Child(ren) and the Non-custodial Parent, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 52

#### 4.1.4 Suitability of Parenting Arrangements

Custodial parents who reported that access visits occur with the other parent were asked if they have any difficulties with the non-custodial parent in a variety of areas. As shown in Table 4.2, respondents were most likely to report having problems with arranging when the visit is to take place (24.5% reported that this is always or often difficult). Parents were least likely to state that deciding on the activities for a visit was difficult (8.7% reported that this is always or often difficult).

When asked if there are visits or contact between the child(ren) and extended family members such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, the substantial majority of the 52 respondents said yes (88.5%). Respondents were also asked how often in an average month contact occurs between the child(ren) and extended family members. Of the 43 custodial parents who responded to this question, the average number of monthly contacts was 1.5, and ranged from less than 1 to 16 contacts per month.

**Table 4.2**  
**Extent to Which Custodial Parents Report Having**  
**Difficulty with the Other Parent in Various Areas, 2006**

Area	Always		Often		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Arranging when to visit (n=49)	5	10.2	7	14.3	10	20.4	13	26.5	14	28.6
Arranging how long to visit (n=49)	5	10.2	3	6.1	9	18.4	14	28.6	18	36.7
Being on time for a visit (n=49)	5	10.2	5	10.2	10	20.4	15	30.6	14	28.6
Dealing with a missed visit (n=49)	4	8.2	6	12.2	11	22.4	10	20.4	18	36.7
Rescheduling difficulties (n=49)	4	8.2	5	10.2	11	22.4	14	28.6	15	30.6
Deciding activities for visit (n=46)	1	2.2	3	6.5	7	15.2	10	21.7	25	54.3

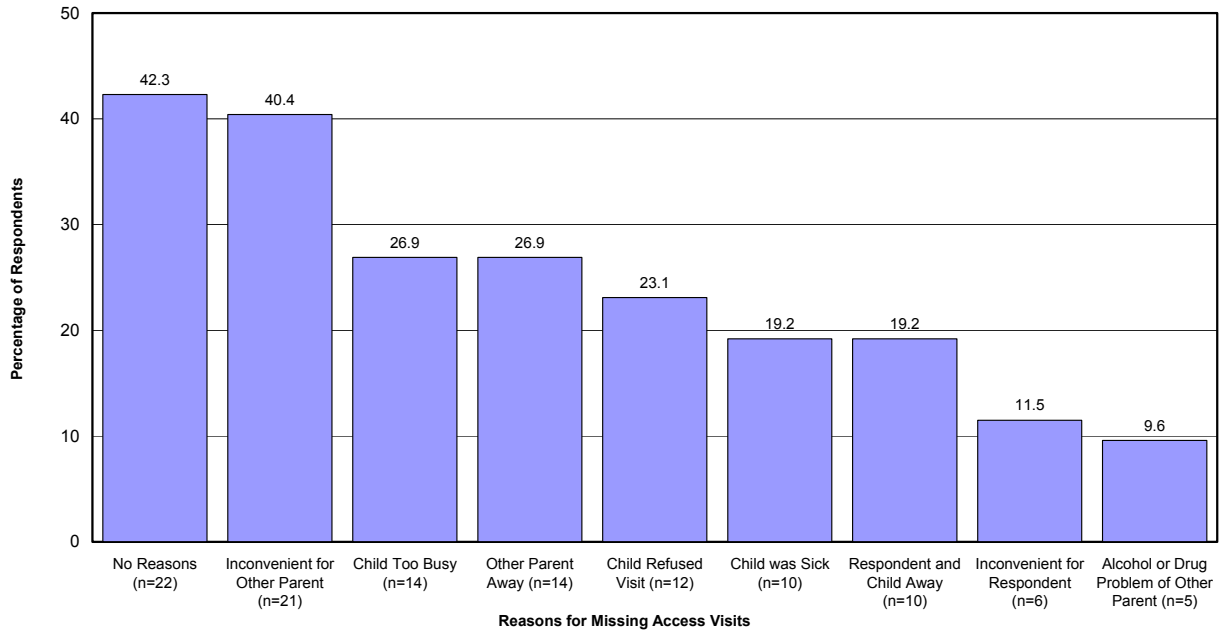
Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey.

Respondents who indicated that access visits occur with the non-custodial parent were asked about the reasons for any missed access visits. As shown in Figure 4.5, the most frequent reasons for missed access visits were no reason or always a different reason (42.3%) and that the visit was inconvenient for the non-custodial parent (40.4%). The least common reasons for missed access visits were an alcohol or drug problem of the other parent (9.6%) and the visit was inconvenient for the custodial parent (11.5%).

When asked about their satisfaction with the amount of access time by the other parent, the 50 custodial parents who responded were most likely to indicate that the access time is reasonable/appropriate (48%) or less than they would like (28%). Relatively few respondents indicated that the amount of access time is more than they would like (14%). Respondents were further asked if they would prefer that the non-custodial parent not have access to the child(ren). Relatively few of the 51 respondents to this question stated that they would prefer that the non-custodial parent not have access (19.6%); the majority of respondents were satisfied that the non-custodial parent had access (80.4%). The most common reasons given by the 10 custodial parents for not wanting the non-custodial parent to have access included that the respondent wishes to end the relationship with the other parent (40%), that the child does not want to visit (40%), and that there are concerns of physical abuse by the other parent (30%).



**Figure 4.5**  
**Proportion of Custodial Parents Reporting Various Reasons**  
**for the Non-custodial Parent Missing Access Visits, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 52

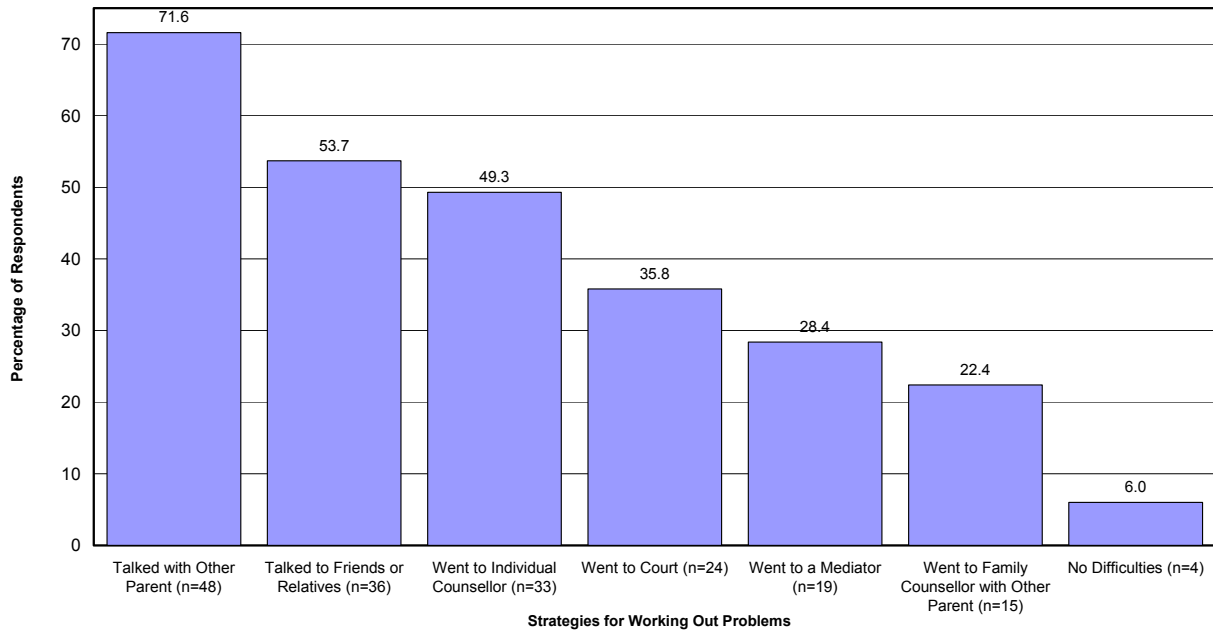
Custodial parents were asked if they had ever denied access to the non-custodial parent: 30.8% of the 52 respondents said that they had denied access and 69.2% said that they had not. Of the 15 custodial parents who reported how often they had denied access to the other parent, the vast majority indicated that they had seldom done this (86.7%).

Custodial parents who had denied access to the other parent (n=16) were asked what their reasons were for doing so. The most common reason given was an alcohol or drug problem of the other parent (37.5%), followed by the child was sick (25%) and the child refused to go on the access visit (18.8%). None of the respondents reported that they wish to end the relationship with the other parent or that they have concerns of child sexual abuse by the other parent.

#### 4.1.5 Strategies and Solutions

Custodial parents were asked a series of questions regarding any strategies they may have adopted in an attempt to deal with difficulties following relationship breakdown. Figure 4.6 presents the proportion of respondents who stated that they had engaged in various strategies. The most frequently reported strategy was talking with the other parent (71.6%), followed by talking to friends or relatives (53.7%) and going to an individual counsellor (49.3%). Respondents were least likely to report that they had gone to a family counsellor with the other parent (22.4%) or attended mediation (28.4%). Few respondents said that they had not experienced difficulties in working out parental responsibility following relationship breakdown (6%).

**Figure 4.6**  
**Proportion of Custodial Parents Who Reported that They Had Engaged in Various Strategies for Working Out Problems with the Other Parent, 2006**



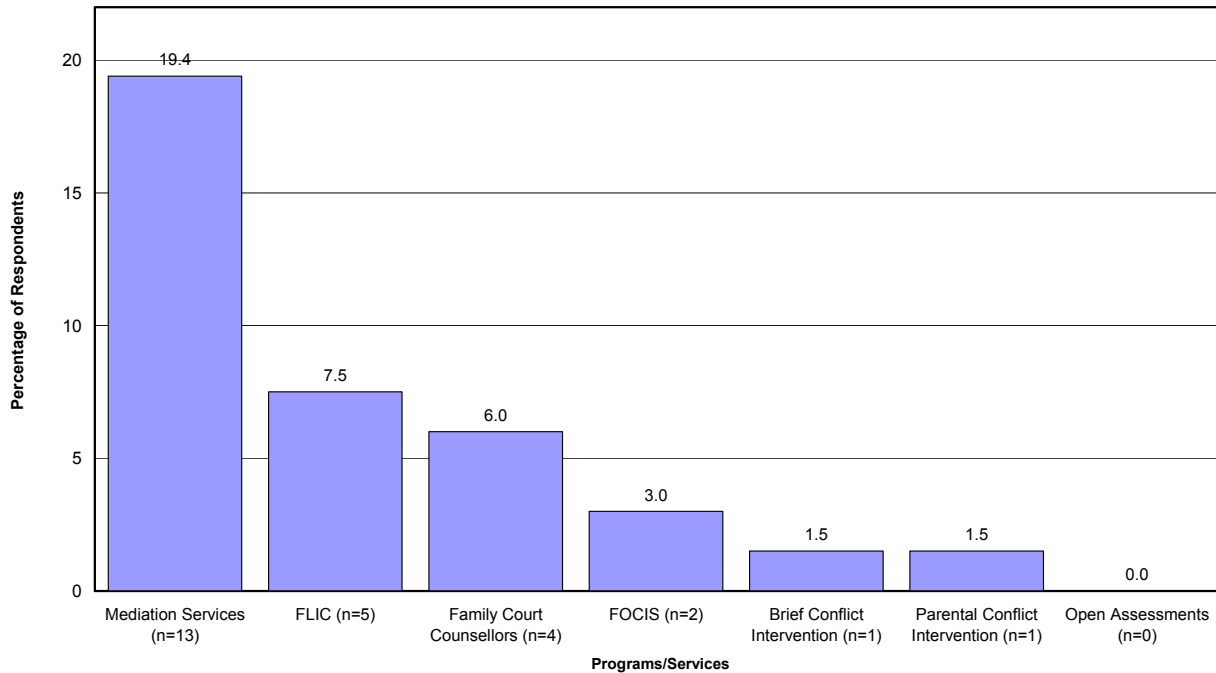
Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 67

In Alberta, a married or common law couple in the process of divorce, legal separation, or any other process involving custody, access, or child support may attend a Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop. Attendance at a PAS workshop is mandatory in most cases. PAS provides parents with information about the divorce process and its impact on children, legal issues, and communication strategies. When custodial parents were asked if they had attended a PAS workshop, about a third (34.8%) of the individuals who responded (n=66) indicated that they had. This relatively low proportion probably reflects the fact that many of the divorces or separations represented in this sample likely occurred prior to the implementation of the PAS workshops. Of the 23 respondents who indicated that they had attended a PAS workshop, over two-thirds (69.6%) stated that it was beneficial in dealing with their parenting issues.

Custodial parents were asked if they had participated in any other programs or used any other services to assist them in working out their parenting issues following their relationship breakdown. Figure 4.7 presents the proportion of respondents who reporting using each program/service. Overall, respondents did not report using these services frequently; again, this could reflect the fact that many of these services were likely not available at the time the respondent experienced breakdown of their relationship. The service that was most frequently utilized was mediation (19.4%) followed by the Family Law Information Centre (FLIC) (7.5%). Respondents were

unlikely to report using the Brief Conflict Intervention program (1.5%) or Parental Conflict Intervention (1.5%). No respondents had participated in Bi-lateral Custody Assessments/Open Assessments.

**Figure 4.7**  
**Proportion of Custodial Parents Who Had Participated in**  
**Other Programs/Services Following Relationship Breakdown, 2006**

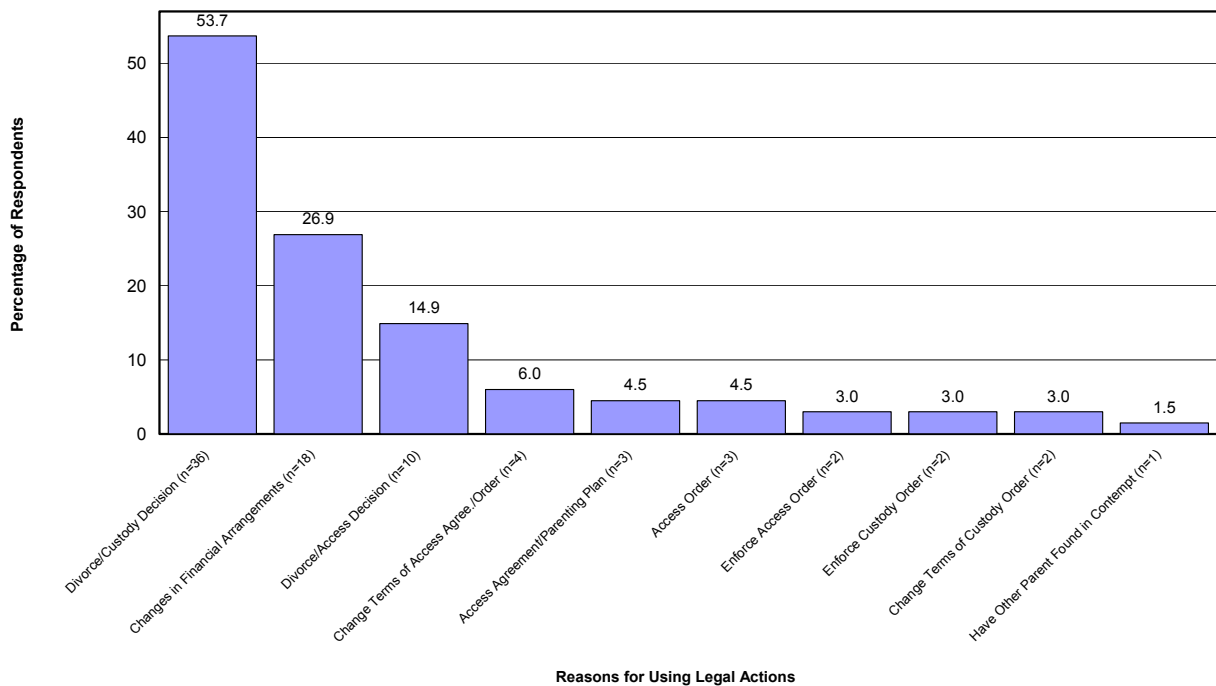


Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 67

When respondents were asked if they had taken any legal steps to solve access problems, 27% of the custodial parents who responded to this question (n=63) indicated that they had. When the 46 respondents who indicated that they had not taken legal steps to deal with access problems were asked why not, the most common response was that they have not experienced any access problems (41.3%), followed by they have worked the problems out on their own (26.1%), the legal process is too expensive (13%), they preferred not to get involved in the legal process (13%), and they were not sure what alternatives or solutions the legal process could provide (10.9%). No respondents indicated that they had worked out their problems with the help of a mediator or counselor.

Custodial parents were asked, if they had been involved in legal actions through the court system, what they were trying to accomplish (see Figure 4.8). The most common reason for going to court was to obtain a divorce, including a custody decision (53.7%), followed by seeking changes in financial arrangements (26.9%) and obtaining a divorce, including an access decision (14.9%). Few respondents reported using the court system for other reasons.

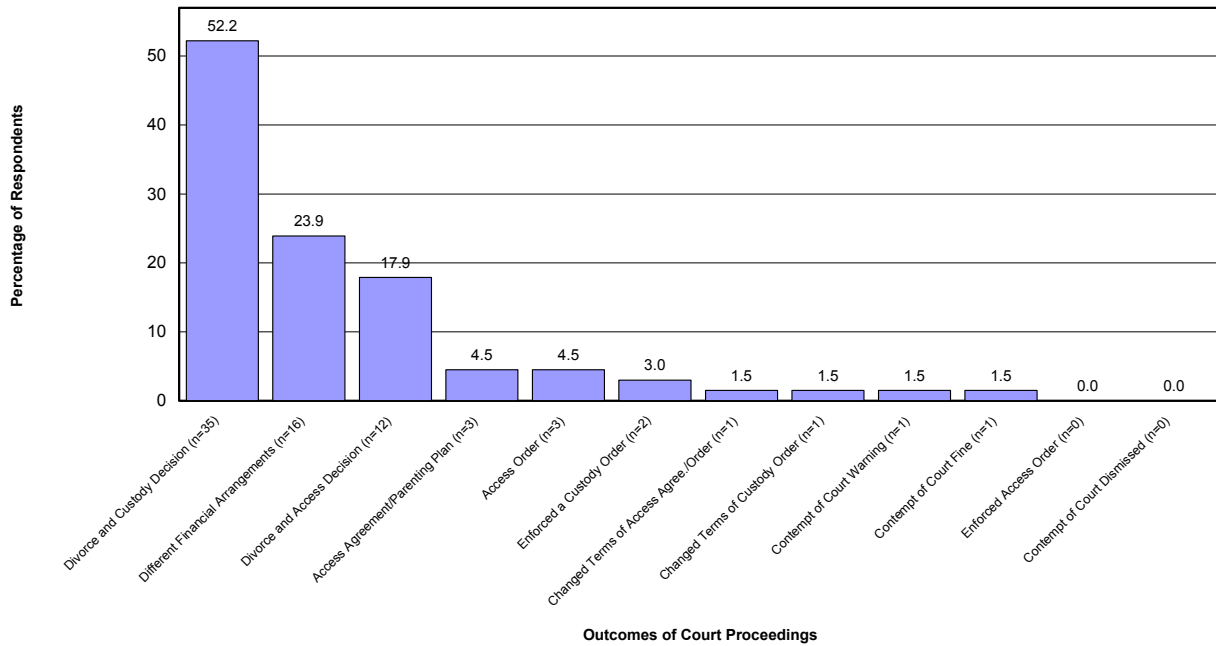
**Figure 4.8**  
**Reasons Custodial Parents Reported for Using Legal Actions, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 67

Figure 4.9 presents the outcomes of court proceedings in which custodial parents were involved. The most frequently reported outcome was obtaining a divorce, including a custody decision (52.2%), followed by obtaining a change in financial arrangements (23.9%) and obtaining a divorce, including an access decision (17.9%). Other outcomes of court proceedings were infrequently reported.

**Figure 4.9**  
**Outcomes of Court Proceedings in which Custodial Parents were Involved, 2006**



Source of data: Custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 67

## 4.2 Non-custodial Parent Survey

### 4.2.1 General Information

The first section of the non-custodial parent survey asked respondents for general information regarding their experiences with custody and access. Respondents were initially asked how many biological or adoptive children they have. The majority of respondents stated that they have one (29.4%), two (35.3%), or four or more (23.5%) children. Fewer respondents indicated that they have three (11.8%) children. When asked if any of these children live with the respondent the majority of time, only one respondent (5.9%) indicated that they have at least one child living with them. When asked the age and gender of the children living with them, this respondent indicated that they have one male and one female child living with them, and that their ages are 17 and 25.

Respondents who reported that their children do not live with them were asked who the children live with. Of the 16 respondents whose child(ren) do not live with them, 43.8% indicated that the child(ren) lives with the other parent, 37.5% stated that the child(ren) lives on their own, 12.5% said that the child(ren) lives with grandparent(s), and one respondent stated that the child(ren) lives in other arrangements. When asked the age of the children not living with them, respondents reported on 32 children. The mean age of children not living with the respondent was 24.3 years and ranged from 1 year to 48 years. The high mean age probably reflects the fact that a substantial number of the children not living with the respondent were living on their own.

Respondents reported on the gender of 36 children who were not living with them: 30.6% of the children were male and 69.4% were female.

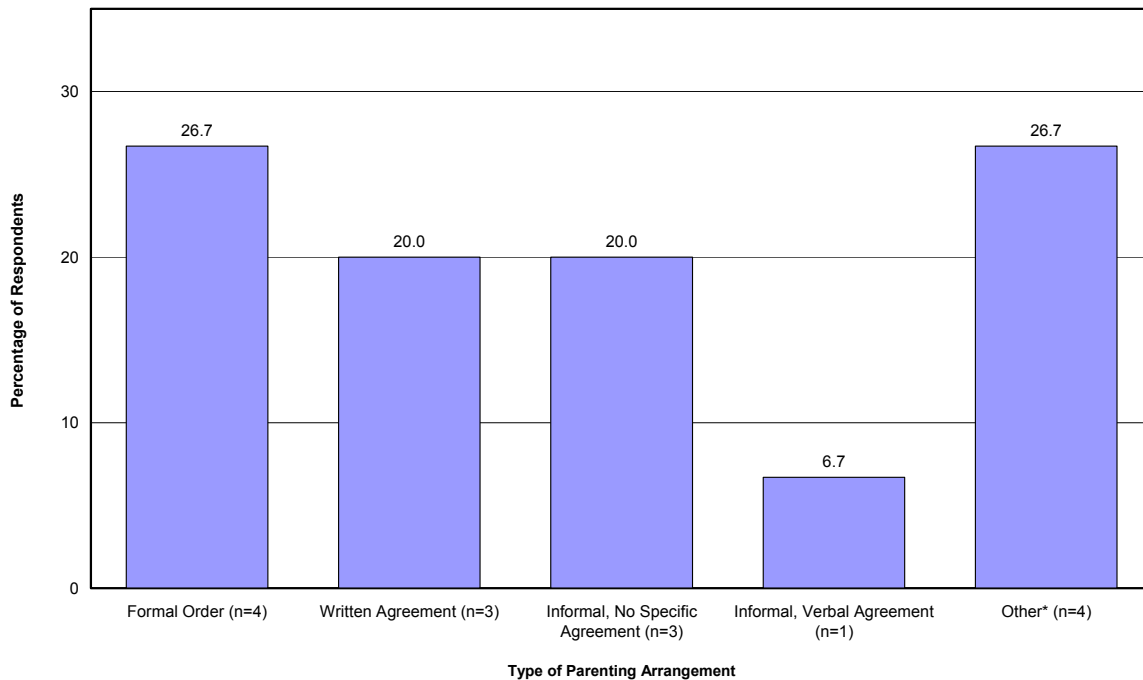
Respondents were further asked if they have any step-children living with them. Only one respondent stated that they currently have at least one step-child living with them. This respondent indicated that they have two female and one male step-children living with them ranging in age from 6 to 15.

#### 4.2.2 Parenting Arrangements

Respondents were asked how long it has been since they had lived with their child(ren)'s other parent. One of the 17 respondents stated that they had never lived with the other parent. The remaining respondents indicated that they have been separated from the other parent for an average of 14.8 years (range of 1 year to 41 years).

Figure 4.10 presents the type of parenting arrangements that respondents reported they currently have with the other parent. The most common type of arrangement was a formal order decided through a court process (26.7%), followed by a written agreement, which may have been approved through a court process (20%) and an informal arrangement with no specific agreement (20%). The least common type of parenting arrangement was an informal, verbal agreement (6.7%).

**Figure 4.10**  
Type of Parenting Arrangement, as Reported by Non-custodial Parents, 2006



Source of data: Non-custodial Parent Survey  
Total N = 15

\* Examples of "other" arrangements include: children on their own now; divorce plus mutual agreement; and currently attending court to try to obtain custody.

Respondents who indicated that they have a written agreement or formal court order for parental responsibility (n=7) were asked what type of arrangement was agreed to or ordered for both custody and access. The most frequently reported arrangement was shared physical and legal custody (42.9%), followed by sole physical and legal custody to one parent (14.3%) and shared legal custody with sole physical custody (14.3%). No respondents reported split custody.

Out of the seven respondents who reported on the type of access arrangements that are in place, the most common was reasonable access by the non-custodial parent (57.1%), followed by specified access by the non-custodial parent (14.3%). No respondents reported that there are no access arrangements. When asked how the actual amount of custody or access time compares with what is included in the written agreement or order, the most common responses offered by the seven parents who responded were that the current time is about the same as specified (42.9%) and that the current time is less than specified (28.6%). Only one respondent stated that they do not have access time and no respondents said that the current access time is less than specified in the written agreement or court order.

All non-custodial parents were asked if they have access visits with the child(ren). Of the 15 respondents who answered this question, almost three-quarters (73.3%) said yes, while 26.7% said no.

Respondents were asked if they have a child support order in place that outlines the financial arrangements between themselves and the other parent. Over one-half of the 15 non-custodial parents who responded to this question (60%) indicated that they do have a formal child support agreement, while 40% said that they do not have an agreement. No respondents stated that they have an informal arrangement. Respondents who stated that they have a formal child support arrangement were then asked if the payments are made. Of the eight non-custodial parents who responded, all stated that the payments are made. When asked if the child support payments are made on time, all seven non-custodial parents who responded said yes. Respondents were also asked if the child support payments are made in full. Of the eight respondents who answered this question, all said that the payments are made in full.

The Federal Child Support Guidelines came into effect on May 1, 1997. Custodial parents who indicated that they had a formal child support agreement in place were asked if this agreement was decided upon prior to or after 1997. A slightly greater proportion of the nine parents who had a formal child support order indicated that the agreement was decided upon before 1997 (55.6%) than after 1997 (44.4%). The five parents who stated that their agreement was made before 1997 were asked if the Federal Child Support Guidelines have affected or changed their agreement. Most respondents indicated that the guidelines have not affected their arrangement (60%), while 40% stated that the guidelines have affected their arrangement. The two respondents who reported that the guidelines have affected their financial arrangement stated that the amount of the payments has increased. When asked if the current financial arrangement for child support affects the amount of access they have with the child(ren), all but one of 13 respondents (92.3%) said no.

Non-custodial parents were asked if the other parent currently discusses various aspects of their child(ren)'s life with them. Table 4.3 presents the extent to which custodial parents discuss these aspects with the respondents. With the exception of health and medical issues, one-quarter or less of the non-custodial parents indicated that these aspects of their child(ren)'s lives are frequently discussed with them by the other parent. Custodial parents were least likely to discuss their child(ren)'s religion or moral development (75%), sports activities (66.7%), and lessons (63.6%).

**Table 4.3**  
**Extent to which Non-custodial Parents are Informed of Various**  
**Aspects of Their Child(ren)'s Lives by the Other Parent, 2006**

Issue	Yes		Sometimes		No	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Health/medical Issues (n=13)	5	38.5	2	15.4	6	46.2
Religion/moral Development (n=12)	0	0.0	3	25.0	9	75.0
School Progress (n=12)	3	25.0	4	33.3	5	41.7
Sports (n=12)	2	16.7	2	16.7	8	66.7
Lessons (n=11)	1	9.1	3	27.3	7	63.6
Child(ren)'s Friends (n=12)	2	16.7	2	16.7	8	47.1

Source of data: Non-custodial Parent Survey.

#### 4.2.3 Access Activities

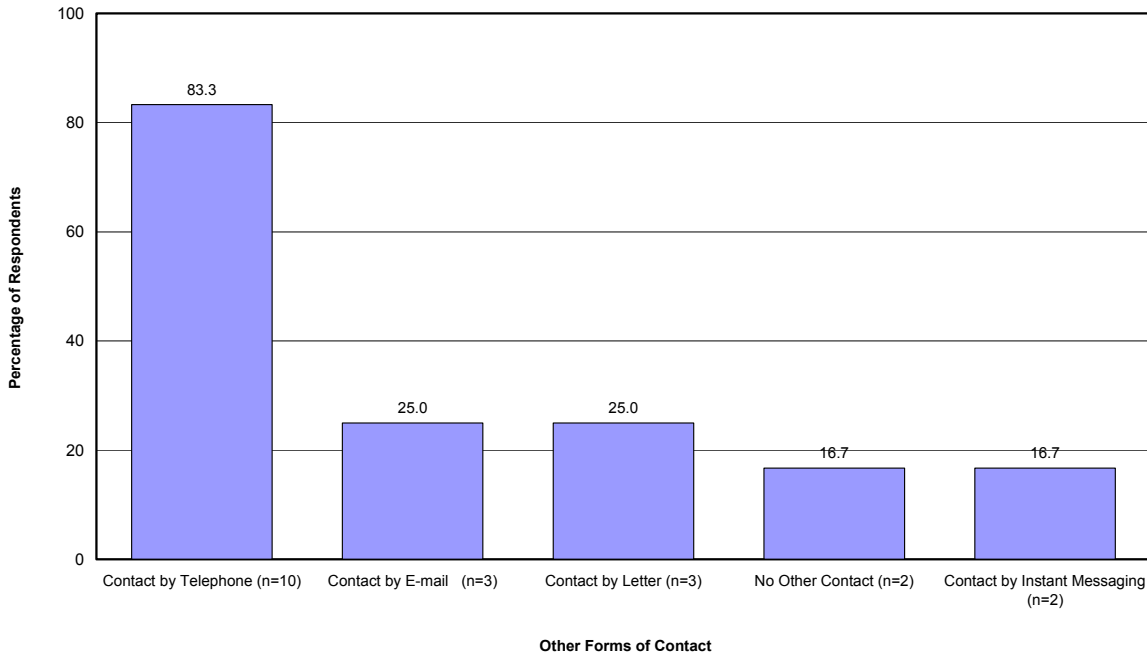
Non-custodial parents who reported that they have access visits with the child(ren) were asked a series of questions regarding the access activities. With regard to the type of access, of the 12 parents who responded, the vast majority (91.7%) indicated that access visits are unsupervised; one parent stated that the access visits are always supervised.

When asked how frequently they have access visits with the child(ren), the responses of 11 non-custodial parents ranged from less than one visit to 31 visits in an average month. The average number of visits per month was 4.9. The average length of a typical access visit as reported by 10 respondents was 24.8 hours, suggesting that overnight access visits are a relatively common occurrence among this sample of respondents.

Non-custodial parents who indicated that they have access visits with the child(ren) were also asked if they have other kinds of contact with the child(ren). Findings are presented in Figure 4.11. Few respondents reported that there were no other forms of contact (16.7%). The most common form of other contact reported was by telephone (83.3%). One-quarter of respondents reported that they have contact with the child(ren) by e-mail and letter.



**Figure 4.11**  
**Percentage of Non-custodial Parents Reporting**  
**Other Forms of Contact with the Child(ren), 2006**



Source of data: Non-custodial Parent Survey  
 Total N = 12

When asked if there are visits or contact between the child(ren) and extended family members in the non-custodial parent’s family such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, three-quarters of the 12 respondents said yes (75%). Respondents were also asked how often in an average month contact occurs between the child(ren) and extended family members. Of the 8 non-custodial parents who responded to this question, the average number of monthly contacts was 5.5, and ranged from less than 1 to 30 contacts per month.

#### 4.2.4 Suitability of Parenting Arrangements

Non-custodial parents who reported that access visits occur with the child(ren) were asked if they have any difficulties with the custodial parent in a variety of areas. Overall, as shown in Table 4.4, respondents tended to report that problems seldom or never occurred in all areas. The one area that respondents were most likely to report was always problematic was dealing with a missed visit (30%). The area that was least likely to be problematic was being on time for a visit (18.2% reported that this is always or often difficult).

**Table 4.4**  
**Extent to Which Non-custodial Parents Report Having**  
**Difficulty with the Other Parent in Various Areas, 2006**

Area	Always		Often		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Arranging when to visit (n=11)	2	18.2	2	18.2	1	9.1	2	18.2	4	36.4
Arranging how long to visit (n=11)	2	18.2	1	9.1	2	18.2	2	18.2	4	36.4
Being on time for a visit (n=11)	1	9.1	1	9.1	1	9.1	2	18.2	6	54.5
Dealing with a missed visit (n=10)	3	30.0	0	0.0	1	10.0	1	10.0	5	50.0
Rescheduling difficulties (n=11)	2	18.2	1	9.1	2	18.2	2	18.2	4	36.4
Deciding activities for visit (n=11)	2	18.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	36.4	5	45.5

Source of data: Non-custodial Parent Survey.

Respondents who indicated that access visits occur with the non-custodial parent (n=12) were asked about the reasons for any missed access visits. The most frequent reasons for missed access visits were that the non-custodial parent was away (33.3%), that the visit was inconvenient for the other parent (25%), that the child was away (25%), and that the child(ren) was too busy (25%). The least common reasons for missed access visits were that the child(ren) was sick (8.3%) and that it was inconvenient for the respondent (8.3%). No respondents stated that access visits were missed because the child refused to go or because they have an alcohol or drug problem.

When asked about their satisfaction with the amount of access time they have, the 11 non-custodial parents who responded were most likely to indicate that the access time is reasonable/appropriate (54.5%) or less than they would like (18.2%). No respondents indicated that the amount of access time is more than they would like.

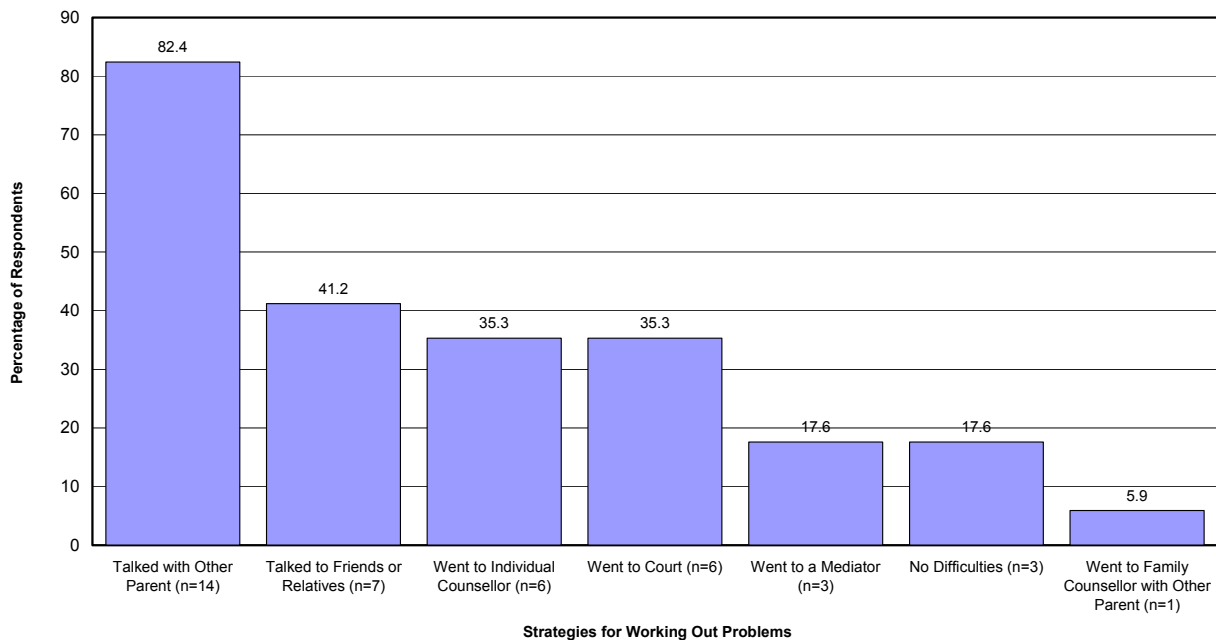
Non-custodial parents were asked if they had ever been denied access to the child(ren) by the custodial parent: 33.3% of the 12 respondents said that they had been denied access and 66.7% said that they had not. Of the 4 non-custodial parents who reported how often they had been denied access by the other parent, two indicated that this had seldom happened, one respondent indicated that this often happened, and one stated that it always happened.

Three of the four non-custodial parents who reported that they had been denied access stated that this had happened because the child(ren) was away. Other reasons access was denied provided by two respondents each were: the child(ren) was too busy and the other parent wanted to end the relationship with the non-custodial parent.

#### 4.2.5 Strategies and Solutions

Non-custodial parents were asked a series of questions regarding any strategies they may have adopted in an attempt to deal with difficulties following relationship breakdown. Figure 4.12 presents the proportion of respondents who stated that they had engaged in various strategies. The most frequently reported strategy was talking with the other parent (82.4%), followed by talking to friends or relatives (41.2%), going to an individual counsellor (35.3%), and going to court (35.3%). Respondents were least likely to report that they had gone to a family counsellor with the other parent (5.9%). A few respondents said that they had not experienced difficulties in working out parental responsibility following relationship breakdown (17.6%).

Figure 4.12  
Proportion of Non-custodial Parents Who Reported that They Had Engaged in Various Strategies for Working Out Problems with the Other Parent, 2006



Source of data: Non-custodial Parent Survey  
Total N = 17

In Alberta, a married or common law couple in the process of divorce, legal separation, or any other process involving custody, access, or child support may attend a Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop. Attendance at a PAS workshop is mandatory in most cases. PAS provides parents with information about the divorce process and its impact on children, legal issues, and communication strategies. When non-custodial parents were asked if they had attended a PAS workshop, about a third (37.5%) of the individuals who responded (n=16) indicated that they had. This relatively low proportion probably reflects the fact that many of the divorces or separations represented in this sample likely occurred prior to the implementation of the PAS workshops. Of the six respondents who indicated that they had attended a PAS workshop, four (66.7%) stated that it was beneficial in dealing with their parenting issues.

Non-custodial parents were asked if they had participated in any other programs or used any other services to assist them in working out their parenting issues following their relationship breakdown. Few respondents had used other services: five (29.4%) had attended mediation, while two each reported using the Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS) workshop, family court counsellors, open assessments/bi-lateral custody assessments, and the Family Law Information Centre (FLIC).

When respondents were asked if they had taken any legal steps to solve access problems, 38.5% of the non-custodial parents who responded to this question (n=13) indicated that they had. When the eight respondents who indicated that they had not taken legal steps to deal with access problems were asked why not, the most common response was that they have not experienced any access problems (75%). One respondent each reported they worked out the problems on their own, that the legal process is too expensive, that they were unsure what alternatives or solutions the legal process could provide, and that they prefer not to get involved in the legal process. No respondents indicated that they had worked out their problems with the help of a mediator or counsellor.

Non-custodial parents were asked, if they had been involved in legal actions through the court system, what they were trying to accomplish. The most common reasons, reported by four respondents each, was to obtain a divorce, including a custody decision and to obtain a divorce, including an access decision. The next most common reasons, reported by three respondents each, were to obtain an access agreement or parenting plan and to make changes to financial arrangements.

Non-custodial parents who had been involved in legal actions were asked about the outcomes of these actions. The most frequent outcomes reported were obtaining a divorce, including a custody decision and obtaining a divorce, including an access decision. Two respondents each reported that they obtained an access agreement or parenting plan and that they obtained an access order.

### **4.3 Extended Family Member Survey**

Follow-up surveys were designed for grandparents and aunts/uncles who wish to maintain contact with the child(ren) following relationship breakdown. The majority of the 61 surveys returned were completed by grandparents (77%); 23% of returned surveys were completed by aunts or uncles. For purposes of this report, the data from grandparents and aunts/uncles were combined.

Respondents were asked to complete the survey with regard to their current or most recent experience with parental responsibility following relationship breakdown. If they were currently involved with more than one situation, they were asked to discuss the one that is the most problematic. The survey provided space for respondents to answer each question for up to five children. For purposes of this report, it was decided to include one child per respondent in the data analysis. Thus, data collected for Child 1 are reported in this section.

#### 4.3.1 General Information

The first section of the extended family member survey asked respondents for general information regarding their experiences with custody and access. Respondents were initially asked how many of their grandchildren or nieces/nephews have parents who are separated or divorced. The majority of the 59 respondents who answered this question stated that they have one (37.3%) or two (30.5%) grandchildren or nieces/nephews with divorced or separated parents. Fewer respondents reported three (18.6%) or four or more (13.6%) children. When asked the age of the Child 1, 54 respondents reported an average age of 11.9 years, with a range of 1 to 31 years. The majority of the children reported by 59 respondents were male (61%), while 39% were female.

Respondents were asked who Child 1 lives with. Of the 59 respondents who answered this question, the majority of children live with their mother (66.1%). Relatively few children live with their father (8.5%). One-quarter of the respondents (25.4%) reported that the child lives in other arrangements; examples of other living arrangements included shared custody, the child lives on their own, the child is married/living common law, or the child lives with other family members. When asked what their relationship with this child is, the majority of the 61 respondents reported that they are the maternal grandparent or aunt/uncle (57.4%), while 42.6% of respondents stated that they are the paternal grandparent or aunt/uncle.

#### 4.3.2 Parenting Arrangements

Respondents were asked how long it had been since the parents of Child 1 lived together. One of the 60 respondents stated that the child's parents had never lived together. The remaining respondents indicated that the child's parents had been separated for an average of 6.8 years (range of less than 1 year to 20 years).

When asked about the custodial relationship between their child (if grandparent of Child 1) or sister/brother (if aunt/uncle of Child 1) and Child 1, the majority of the 57 extended family members who responded said that their relative is the custodial parent (52.6%). Approximately equal proportions of respondents stated that their relative is the non-custodial parent (26.3%) or that Child 1 lives in a shared custody situation (21.1%).

#### 4.3.3 Access Activities

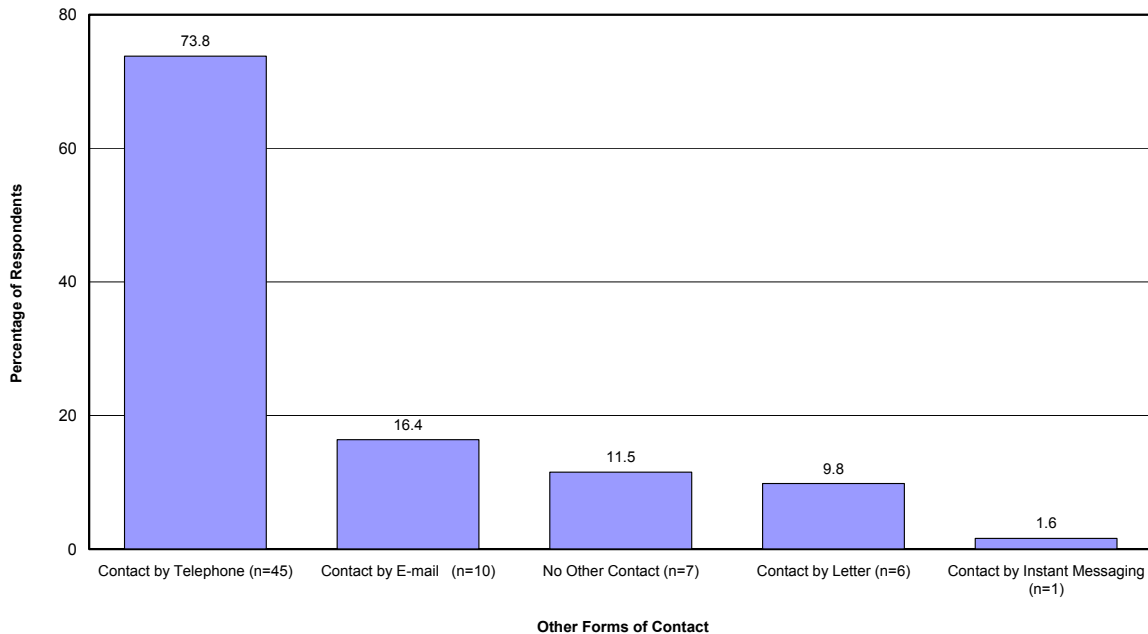
Extended family members were asked where they live in relation to Child 1. The majority of the 61 respondents stated that they live in the same city/town as the child (50.8%) or in the same province (36.1%). Fewer respondents reported that they live in the same country (11.5%) or in a different country (1.6%). No respondents stated that they did not know where the child lives.

When asked if they have contact with the child, a substantial majority of the 61 respondents stated that they do (91.8%). Extended family members who stated that they do have contact with the child were asked how many visits they have with the child

in an average month. For the 50 respondents who answered this question, the average number of visits per month was 5.5 and ranged from less than 1 to 30.

Extended family members were asked if they have other kinds of contact with Child 1. Findings are presented in Figure 4.13. Few respondents reported that there were no other forms of contact (11.5%). The most common form of other contact reported was by telephone (73.8%), followed by e-mail (16.4%).

**Figure 4.13**  
**Percentage of Extended Family Members Reporting**  
**Other Forms of Contact with Child 1, 2006**



Source of data: Extended Family Member Survey  
 Total N = 61

#### 4.3.4 Suitability of Access/Visitation

Extended family members were asked if the current amount of contact and visitation time they have with Child 1 is adequate. The majority of the 57 respondents indicated that the amount of contact time with the child is reasonable/appropriate (73.7%). Fewer respondents stated that the amount of contact is less than desired (19.3%) or more than desired (7%). The 11 respondents who indicated that the amount of visitation with the child was less than desired were asked to provide the reason(s) for this. The most common reason provided by four extended family members was that the family lives too far away. Three respondents stated that the parent refuses to allow them to visit and two respondents said that the parent prefers that they do not visit.

#### 4.3.5 Strategies and Solutions

Extended family members were asked if they had ever had any difficulties visiting and maintaining contact with their grandchildren or nieces/nephews. Of the 58

individuals who responded to this question, the substantial majority (82.8%) stated that they had not experienced difficulties. The 10 respondents who indicated that they had experienced difficulties regarding visits with Child 1 were asked what they have done to resolve them. Four respondents indicated that they have talked to friends or relatives in an attempt to resolve the issue. Three respondents each stated that they have talked to the child's parent about the difficulties or that they have talked to a lawyer. Two respondents reported that they have gone to court.

#### 4.4 Comparative Analysis: Follow-Up Surveys 1991

##### 4.4.1 Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys

The data collected from the 2006 follow-up surveys also allowed for a comparison with the study in 1991. Overall, the return rate for the 2006 follow-up surveys was similar to the return rate in 1991; 48.8% and 44%, respectively. Table 4.5 presents the return rate by respondent type for both years. The return rates for custodial parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles were higher in 2006 than in 1991, and all three groups had a greater number of surveys in 2006. Unfortunately, the return rate for non-custodial parents was substantially lower in 2006 (31.8%), compared to 1991 (57.8%), resulting in a lower number of useable surveys for this group (N=17). Low numbers in each of the groups overall is a limitation considered at the beginning of this report (Section 2.6).

**Table 4.5**  
**Follow-Up Survey Return Rates by Respondent Type:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

	Custodial Parents		Non-custodial Parents		Grand-parents		Aunts/Uncles		Total	
	1991	2006	1991	2006	1991	2006	1991	2006	1991	2006
Sent	90	162	45	44	34	68	13	23	182	297
Returned	38	72	30	17	22	47	5	14	95	150
Useable	30	67	26	17	19	47	5	14	80	145
Return Rate	33.3%	41.3%	57.8%	31.8%	55.9%	69.1%	38.5%	60.9%	44.0%	48.8%

Source of data: Follow-Up Surveys, 2006 and 1991.

The custodial and non-custodial follow-up surveys in 2006 indicated that more time had passed since the respondents' separation and filling out the survey than in 1991. Table 4.6 presents the years since separation for both types of parents in 2006 and 1991. In 1991, almost one-third of custodial parents had a relatively recent experience with custody and access (28.6% reported that 3 years or less had passed since their separation). Only 16.7% of the custodial parents in 2006 reported being separated for 3 years or less. Rather, over half of the custodial parents in 2006 had

been separated for 10 years or more (57.5%), compared to 35.7% of custodial parents in 1991.

**Table 4.6**  
**Number Of Years Since Separation for Custodial**  
**and Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

Number of Years	Custodial Parents				Non-custodial Parents			
	1991		2006		1991		2006	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Never lived together*	-	-	1	1.5	-	-	1	5.9
≤ 3 years	8	28.6	11	16.7	2	8.7	4	23.5
4 - 6 years	6	21.4	7	10.6	4	17.4	1	5.9
7 - 9 years	4	14.3	9	13.6	2	8.7	4	23.5
10 - 12 years	5	17.9	14	21.2	8	34.8	0	0
13 - 15 years	2	7.1	9	13.6	2	8.7	0	0
16 - 19 years	2	7.1	7	10.6	2	8.7	2	11.8
≥ 20 years	1	3.6	8	12.1	3	13.0	5	29.4
Total	28	100.0	66	100.0	23	100.0	17	100.0

Sources of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 and 1991.

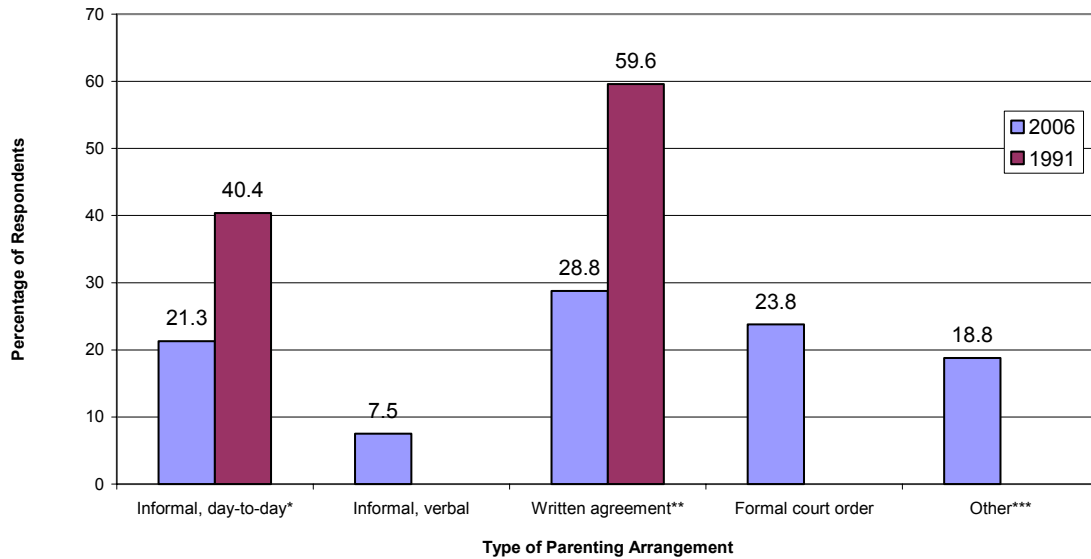
\* Never lived together was not provided as an option in the 1991 surveys.

In 2006, almost a quarter of non-custodial parents had been separated for 3 years or less, compared to only 8.7% of non-custodial parents in 1991. However, because the sample size for non-custodial parents is so small (2006 (N=17) being even smaller than 1991 (N=23)), this only results in 2 more respondents having a relatively recent experience in 2006. The greatest portion of non-custodial parents in 1991 had been separated for 10-12 years (34.8%). Comparatively, the greatest portion of non-custodial parents in 2006 had been separated for over 16 years (41.2%).



Respondents were then asked what type of parenting arrangement they currently have with the other parent (see Figure 4.14). Similar to 1991, just over half of custodial and non-custodial parents in 2006 had a written agreement, which may have been approved through a court process (28.8%) or a formal court order (23.8%). However, slightly fewer parents in 2006 reported having an informal agreement (28.8%), compared to parents in 1991 (40.4%). Fifteen respondents in 2006 listed other parenting arrangements; for the most part, these were situations where the child was now an adult and the previous parenting arrangement was currently void.

**Figure 4.14**  
**Type of Parenting Arrangement for Custodial and Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=80) and 1991 (N=52)

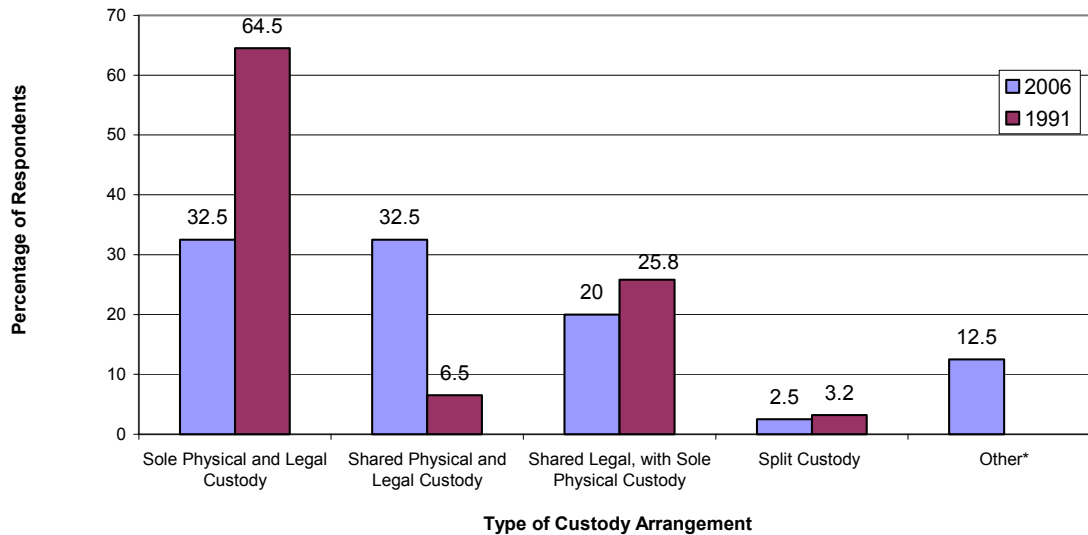
\* This portion of the 1991 sample also includes informal, verbal arrangements.

\*\* This portion of the 1991 sample also includes formal court orders.

\*\*\* Other was not an option provided in the 1991 survey.

Respondents who had a written agreement or a formal court order were then asked what type of arrangement was in place for both custody and access. In terms of custody, the proportion of parents with an arrangement involving sole physical and legal custody to one parent dropped considerably from 64.5% in 1991 to 32.5% in 2006 (Figure 4.15). In the same light, the portion of parents with shared custody arrangements (physical and legal) increased from 6.5% in 1991 to 32.5% in 2006. A fifth of the 2006 sample and a quarter of the 1991 sample reported arrangements of shared legal custody, with sole physical custody to one parent. Split custody was least common arrangement in both samples.

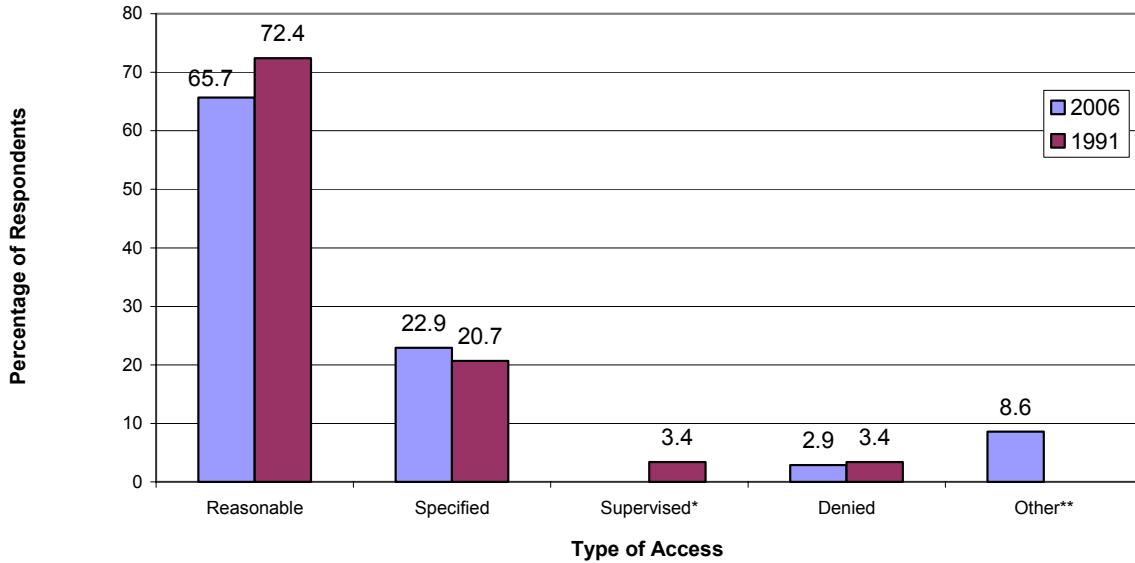
**Figure 4.15**  
**Type of Formal Written Custody for Custodial and Non-custodial Parents: Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=40) and 1991 (N=31)  
 \* Other was not provided as an option in the 1991 survey.

Access arrangements appeared quite similar in the two samples (Figure 4.16). The majority of respondents in both samples reported that reasonable access was allowed by the non-custodial parent; 72.4% in 1991 and 65.7% in 2006. Access was specified for the non-custodial parent in 22.9% of situations in 1991 and in 20.7% of situations in 2006. Only one respondent in 1991 reported supervised access by the non-custodial parent (this was not an option for this question in the 2006 survey), and only one respondent in 1991 and one in 2006 reported that access by the non-custodial parent was denied.

**Figure 4.16**  
**Type of Formal Access Arrangements for Custodial and Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=35) and 1991 (N=29)

\* Supervised access was not provided as an option in the 2006 survey.

\*\* Other was not provided as an option in the 1991 survey.

In terms of child support arrangements, approximately 10% more of the sample in 1991 (valid n=37) had a formal, written agreement in place than the sample in 2006 (valid n=66); 86.5% compared to 75.8%. Table 4.7 presents how those financial arrangements were followed in 1991 and 2006. The majority of respondents in both years reported that child support payments were made, that they were on time, and that they were made in full. A similar proportion of respondents in both years reported that payments were not made, were not on time, and were not paid in full.

**Table 4.7**  
**Financial Arrangements for Custodial and Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

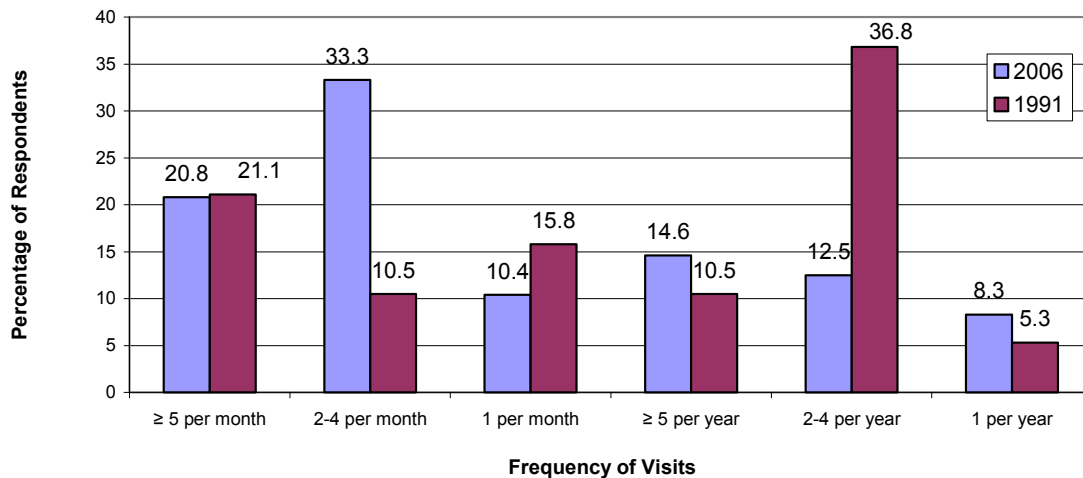
	Yes				Sometimes				No				Total			
	1991		2006		1991		2006		1991		2006		1991		2006	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Made	28	77.8	41	74.5	3	8.3	8	14.5	5	13.9	6	10.9	36	100	55	100
On Time	23	67.6	34	69.4	6	17.6	7	14.3	5	14.7	8	16.3	34	100	49	100
In Full	27	77.1	36	73.5	2	5.7	4	8.2	6	17.1	9	18.4	35	100	49	100

Sources of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 and 1991.

The surveys then went into further detail regarding access arrangements. Custodial parents were asked to report on the frequency of visits between their children and the non-custodial parent. There appears to be a slight increase in visitation from 1991 to 2006, according to custodial parents in these samples (Figure 4.17). In 1991, 36.8% of custodial parents reported that non-custodial parents had 2-4 visits per year; almost the same proportion of custodial parents in 2006 (33.3%) reported that non-custodial parents had 2-4 visits per month. Approximately one-fifth of each sample reported that non-custodial parents had 5 or more visits per month.<sup>6</sup>

Non-custodial parents were also asked to report on the frequency of visits between the children and themselves (Figure 4.18). In 1991, only 15.8% of non-custodial parents said that they visited their children 5 or more times per month; this increased to 27.3% in 2006. The majority of the sample in both years visited their children 2-4 times per month.

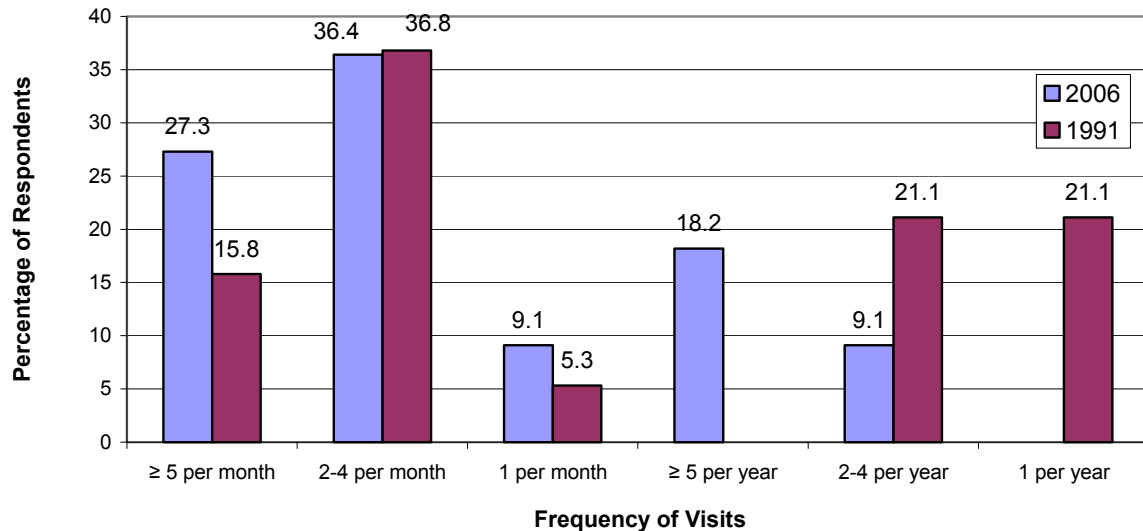
**Figure 4.17**  
**Frequency of Visits Between Children and Non-custodial Parents,**  
**as Reported by Custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=48) and 1991 (N=19)

<sup>6</sup> Due to the small sample sizes, these findings cannot be considered representative of the greater population.

**Figure 4.18**  
**Frequency of Visits Between Children and Non-custodial Parents,**  
**as Reported by Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



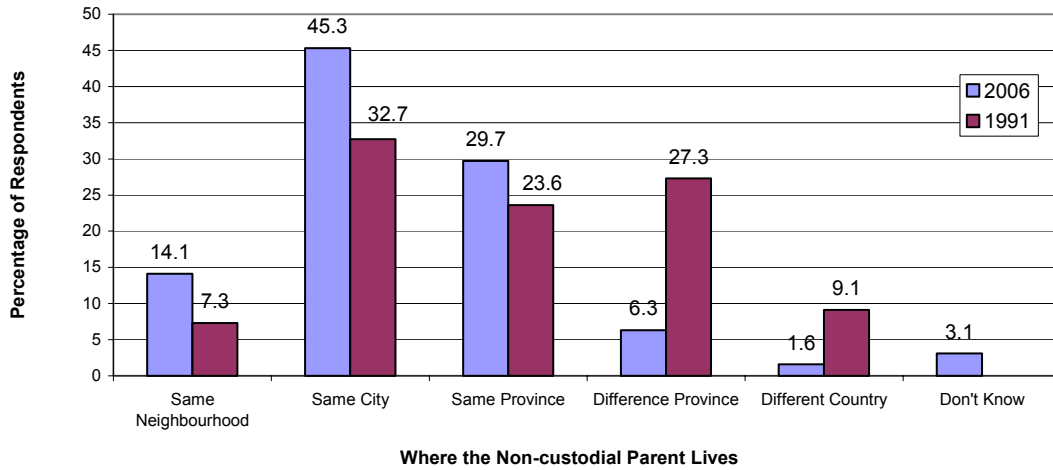
Source of data: Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=11) and 1991 (N=19)

The length of the visits between children and their non-custodial parent varied from under 4 hours to over 72 hours. Custodial parents in 2006 (valid n=47) reported that non-custodial visits were most commonly under 4 hours (36.2%), whereas in 1991, custodial parents (valid n=18) reported that non-custodial visits were most commonly over 8 hours or 48 hours. Non-custodial parents in 2006 (valid n=10) echoed custodial parents, reporting that their most common length of visit was under 4 hours (40%). However, in 1991, non-custodial parents (valid n=20) reported that their most common length of visit was over 72 hours (35%).

Other forms of contact between the non-custodial parent and the children in 1991 (valid n=56) included writing letters (52.9%) and making telephone calls (79.8%). Things have changed slightly in 2006 (valid n=64); telephone calls were still reported as the most common type of contact (82.8%), but respondents more commonly reported writing e-mails (34.4%), as opposed to writing letters (4.7%).

For the most part, non-custodial parents lived in the same city as their children in both 1991 (32.7%) and 2006 (45.3%), or in the same province (23.6% and 29.7%, respectively) (Figure 4.19). However, non-custodial parents in 2006 appear to be living a bit closer to their children overall; a greater proportion of the 1991 sample lived in a different province (27.3% compared to 6.3% in 2006), and a greater proportion of the 2006 sample lived in the same neighbourhood (14.1% compared to 7.3% in 1991).

**Figure 4.19**  
**Where the Non-custodial Parent Lives in Relation to the Children: Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**

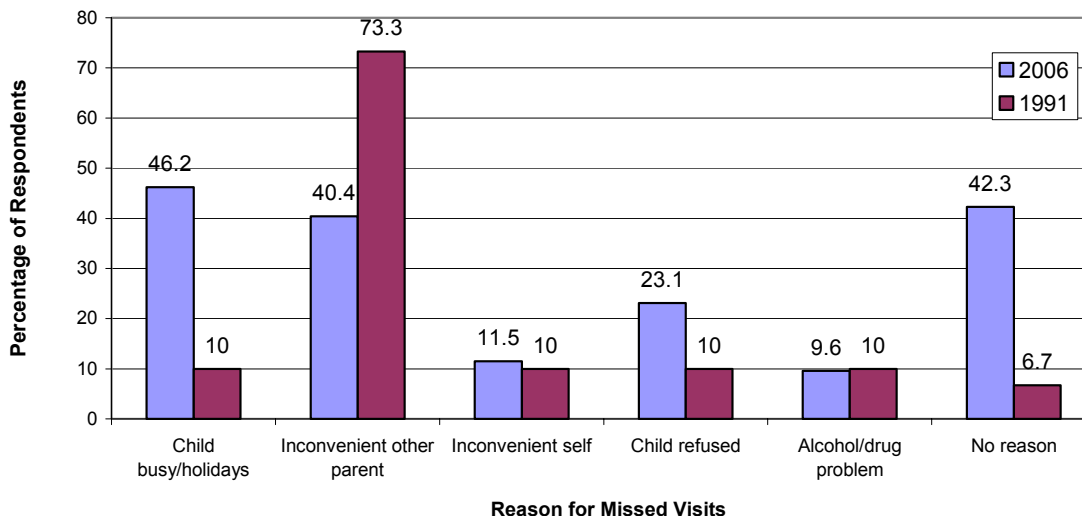


Source of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=64) and 1991 (N=55)

Little seems to have changed in terms of visitation between children and extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles) over the past 15 years, as reported by parents in these samples. The majority of custodial parents in 2006 (valid n=52) and in 1991 (valid n=30) reported that their children had visits with extended family members (88.5% and 86.2%, respectively). A large proportion of non-custodial parents in 2006 (valid n=12) and 1991 (valid n=26), although slightly lower than custodial parents, also reported that their children had visits with extended family members (72% and 75%, respectively).

If visits between the non-custodial parent and the children were missed, respondents were asked the reason why. The most common reasons reported by custodial parents differed slightly between 1991 and 2006 (Figure 4.20). In 1991, 73.3% of custodial parents said that visits were missed because it was inconvenient for the non-custodial parent. However, in 2006, only 40.4% of custodial parents gave this reason. Other reasons for missed visits with the non-custodial parent in 2006 were that the child was too busy/on holidays (46.2%), or that there was no reason/always a different reason (42.3%).

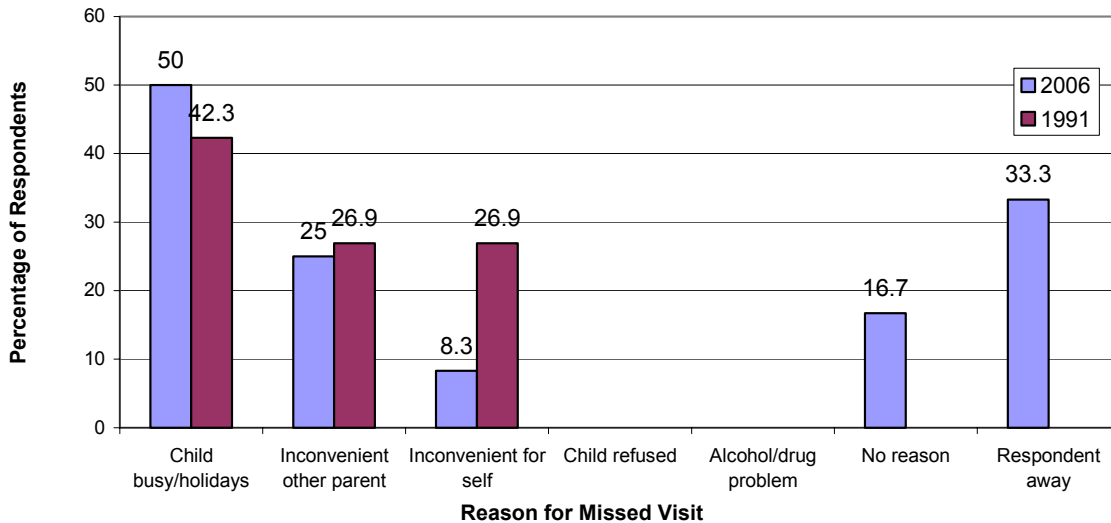
**Figure 4.20**  
**Reasons for Missed Visits Between Children and Non-custodial Parents, as**  
**Reported by Custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=52) and 1991 (N=30)

Figure 4.21 presents non-custodial parents' reasons for missing visits with their children in 1991 and 2006. The reason given by almost half of the non-custodial parents in 1991 was that the child was busy/on holidays (42.3%); the other half said visits were missed because it was inconvenient for the other parent (26.9%) or it was inconvenient for themselves (26.9%). Similarly, in 2006, one-half of non-custodial parents missed visits because the child was too busy/on holidays (50%), and 25% missed because it was inconvenient for the other parent. A number of respondents in 2006 said that they missed for no reason/always a different reason; no one in 1991 gave this as a reason. Non-custodial parents in 2006 also said that sometimes they were away and could not make the visit (33.3%); this was not an option provided for this question in the 1991 survey.

**Figure 4.21**  
**Reasons for Missed Visits Between Children and Non-custodial Parents, as Reported**  
**by Non-custodial Parents:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=12) and 1991 (N=26)

Respondents were asked to describe the current amount of access time between the non-custodial parent and the children. In 1991, just over half of custodial parents (54.5%) thought that the access time was reasonable/appropriate; this is similar to custodial parents in 2006 (48%). However, differences are seen in the remaining respondents. In 1991, 45.5% of custodial parents described the access time as less than they would like; this decreased to 28% in 2006. Fourteen percent of custodial parents in 2006 described access time as more than they would like; no one in 1991 described access time this way. In fact, 19.6% of custodial respondents in 2006 reported that they would prefer that the non-custodial parent not have access to the children; this is up from 8% in 1991.

Just over half of the non-custodial parents in both years felt that their access time was reasonable/appropriate. The remaining non-custodial parents in 1991 described their access time as less than they would prefer (36.8%); in 2006, remaining responses were split between less than they prefer (18.2%) and other (27.3%).

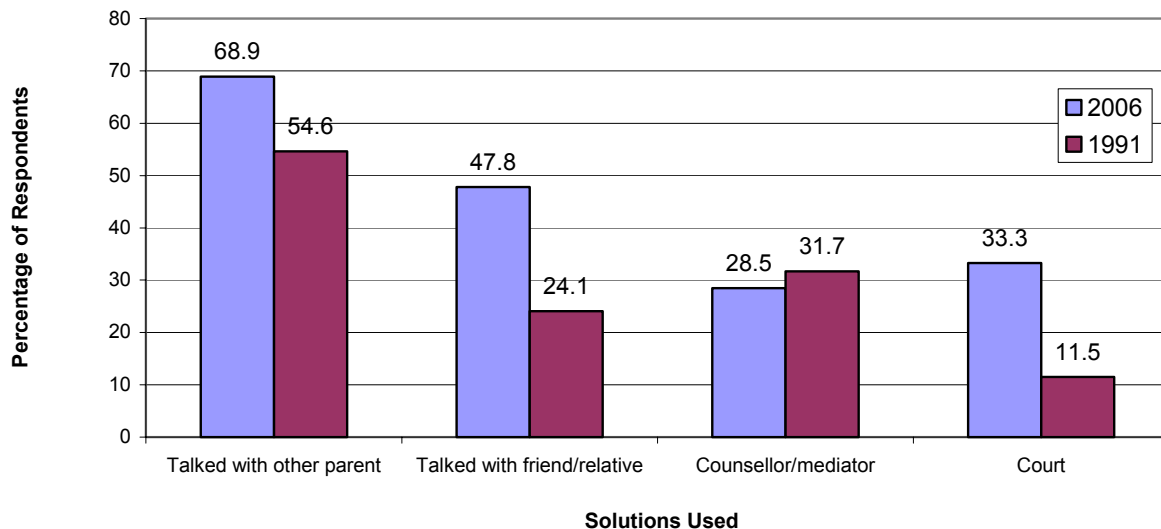
Both sets of parents were asked if access to their child had ever been denied. In 1991 (valid n=30), 38.5% of custodial parents said that they had denied access to the other parent on some occasions; this dropped to 30.8% in 2006 (valid n=52). Most custodial parents in 1991 reported that this seldom occurred (70%); this occurred even less in 2006 (81.3%). A similar pattern is seen with non-custodial parents. In 1991 (valid n=26), 57.1% reported that they had been denied access to their children; only 33.3% had been denied access in 2006 (valid n=12). When asked how often this occurred, 63.5% of non-custodial parents in 1991 and 50% of non-custodial parents in 2006 reported that it seldom occurred.



In 1991, the most common reasons given by custodial parents for denying access were that the child was too busy or sick (23.3%) and that the other parent had an alcohol or drug problem (13.3%). These were also the most common reasons given by custodial parents in 2006 (37.5% each). Similarly, non-custodial parents in both years said that they were most commonly denied access because it was inconvenient for the custodial parent or they were on holidays (31.8% in 1991 and 75% in 2006), the child was too busy or sick (23.1% in 1991 and 75% in 2006), and the custodial parent wanted to end the relationship with them (19.2% in 1991 and 50% in 2006).

Custodial and non-custodial parents in 1991 and in 2006 used the same types of solutions to work out problems with parental responsibility (Figure 4.22). In 1991, 54.6% of parents talked things out with the other parent, 31.7% went to a counselor or a mediator, and 24.1% talked with a friend or relative. In 2006, slightly more respondents talked things out with the other parent (68.9%), almost double the proportion of respondents talked with a friend or relative (47.8%), and approximately the same proportion of respondents went to a counselor or a mediator (28.5%). Only 11.5% of parents reported going to court to work things out in 1991; 33.3% of parents in 2006 reported going to court.

**Figure 4.22**  
**Solutions Used to Solve Difficulties with Other Parent:**  
**Comparison of the 2006 and 1991 Samples**



Source of data: Custodial and Non-custodial Surveys, 2006 (N=90) and 1991 (N=56)

#### 4.4.2 Extended Family Member Surveys

Some comparisons can also be made between extended family members in 1991 and in 2006. The majority of extended family members who filled out the survey in 1991 (valid n=24) were related to the custodial parent (64.8%); the same is true of the

extended family members in 2006 (73.7%; valid n=57).<sup>7</sup> Most of the extended family members reported living quite close to the children. In 1991, 37.7% lived in the same city and 34.6% lived in the same province. In 2006, 50.8% lived in the same city and 36.1% lived in the same province.

As in 1991, the majority of extended family members in 2006 had visits with their grandchildren, nieces, or nephews (91.8%). Respondents in 1991 most commonly visited once or twice a month (42.1%), or once or twice a year (34.1%). In 2006, only 18% of respondents visited once or twice a month, 18% visited three to four times per month, and 16% visited four to five times per year. Phone calls in 2006, as in 1991, were reported as the most common method of contact with children, other than visiting.

When extended family members were asked to describe their access time with the children, a far greater proportion of the sample in 2006 was satisfied with their access time (73.7%), compared to the sample in 1991 (42.6%). Conversely, a greater proportion of the sample in 1991 described their access time as less than desirable (53.7% in 1991 and 19.3% in 2006).

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<sup>7</sup> Custodial parents include those parents who have shared custody.

## 5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Screening Survey

#### 5.1.1 Demographics: 2006 and 1991

- In 2006, more women than men completed the screening survey — 63.1% and 36.9%, respectively — compared to a fairly even distribution in 1991.
- In 2006, ages of respondents ranged from 18 to 92 years; the mean age was 51 years. Over a quarter of the sample in 2006 was over 55 years old.
- The level of education of respondents in 2006 is slightly higher than in 1991; 35.4% had completed a university degree (compared to 26.7% in 1991) and 30.9% had completed a non-university diploma or certificate (compared to 23.9% in 1991).
- The 1991 sample had slightly more respondents employed than the 2006 sample (67.8% and 63.3%, respectively). The 2006 sample had slightly more respondents retired than the 1991 sample (22.4% and 16.9%, respectively).
- Almost 60% of the respondents in 2006 reported that they were currently married.

#### 5.1.2 Findings 2006

- Most respondents reported being aware of parental responsibility following family breakdown over the past few years (81.3%). The news media, radio, television, and newspapers were the most common avenues through which knowledge was gained about the issue (48.3%).
- Following the breakdown of a family, most respondents thought a child should normally live with the mother or father, whoever is the better care provider (39.8%), or with both the mother and father through shared parenting (35.3%). Very few respondents felt that a child should live with the mother alone or the father alone.
- In terms of contact, most respondents thought a child maintaining contact with both parents following a separation or divorce would depend on the circumstances (57.3%). Most respondents thought a child should maintain contact with extended family members (59.1%).
- Respondents were mixed as to whether a non-custodial parent should be required to maintain contact with their child. Most of them thought it would depend on the circumstances (64.2%), some thought yes (19.9%), and some thought no (14.9%).

- If a custodial parent disobeys a parenting order, most respondents thought this behaviour should be reviewed by the court (96.2%). A review of the parenting plan was thought of as the most appropriate consequence in such situations (80%). Many respondents emphasized the need to determine the reason why access to the child was denied before deciding on a consequence.
- Almost all of the respondents felt mediation and counseling should be available to parents dealing with parental responsibility problems; 53.7% thought that individual parents should pay for such services with government subsidy. Some respondents suggested that health care plans and employment benefits cover these costs.
- Only 26.6% of respondents reported being aware of the Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop in Alberta; 36.2% became aware through personal experience with their own children, and 31.4% became aware through experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances. The majority of respondents thought PAS was beneficial (62.4%) and 32.5% did not have an opinion on this topic.
- About half of the respondents were aware of the Federal Child Support Guidelines (47.3%); 36.2% became aware through the media, 32.8% became aware through personal experience with their own children, and 31.2% became aware through experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances. Only 24.3% of respondents thought the guidelines had resulted in a better system of determining child support; 58.6% had no opinion.
- Most respondents felt the legal system does not effectively deal with parental responsibility following family breakdown (57%).

### 5.1.3 Personal Experience 2006

- Just over half of the respondents reported having personal experience with parental responsibility following family breakdown (52.7%). Of those, 86.5% had experiences occurring in Alberta.
- Half of those experiences began prior to 1998. Of those respondents, only 23.1% were aware of PAS, and 55.7% were aware of the Federal Child Support Guidelines at the time they completed the survey.
- Of those respondents whose experience occurred since 1998, 52% were aware of PAS and 66.2% were aware of the Federal Child Support Guidelines.
- Custodial parents made up 40.5% of those with personal experience, non-custodial parents made up 9.1%, and extended family members made up 29.2%.

- Only 15.3% of respondents described their experience as relaxed, informal, and uncomplicated; 37.6% said their experience was somewhat difficult, but manageable, and 41.3% said their experience was very difficult, strained, and complicated. Difficulties were most commonly encountered with the respondent's ex-spouse/common-law partner (44.5%), or with the children's parents (21.1%), if the respondent was an extended family member or was a child of divorce him/herself.

#### 5.1.4 Additional Comments 2006

- A majority of respondents felt the legal system is biased in custody and access cases, favouring the mother and penalizing the father, regardless of either parent's conduct.
- Child support was consistently commented on in the surveys. Respondents felt that child support payments are often unfair — the non-custodial parent has to pay too much and suffer financially themselves — and that there is no accountability for spending by the custodial parent.
- Generally, respondents did not feel the system is doing a good job addressing custody and access issues.
- Respondents had mixed feelings about joint/shared custody. Those who supported it thought it relieved tension and made it easier to figure out child support (possibly eliminating it). Those who did not support it identified problems with sharing of information between parents, appropriate and adequate access to children, and fair child support payments.
- Some respondents had questions about common-law relationships involving children, specifically around child support payments and visitation.
- Many respondents highlighted the importance of keeping the extended family involved in children's lives following a separation or divorce.
- Many respondents were critical of the Federal Child Support Guidelines, saying they were biased, inflexible, complicated, and unfair to fathers. Maintenance enforcement was also criticized; respondents did not feel enough was being done to ensure payments were made and strategies that were being used were inappropriate and ineffective.
- Dealing with custody and access issues across provinces was also an issue respondents struggled with.
- Generally, respondents found the legal system complicated, intimidating, and expensive.

- Many respondents who participated in PAS found it to be helpful and thought it provided useful information. Others supported mediation and counseling as solutions to dealing with custody and access issues.
- Respondents emphasized the need for preventative measures against family breakdown. They suggested: counseling and financial support to keep marriages together; marriage preparation courses; courses offered in high school on marriage and having children; education on raising children prior to having children; and initiatives to prevent teenage pregnancy.
- Many respondents suggested mediation to deal with custody and access issues, rather than going through court.
- Respondents suggested that all services, from counseling to court costs, be provided free of charge. Many believed that cost hinders people from accessing support.

#### 5.1.5 Comparative Analysis: Screening Survey 1991

- General awareness of the issue is relatively the same among respondents in both samples: 81.3% in 2006 and 83% in 1991. Knowledge was more commonly gained through the media in 1991 (57.8%) than in 2006 (48.3%).
- In 1991, half of the respondents thought that a child should live with their mother or father, whoever is a better care provider (51.3%) and 24.8% thought that a child should live with both mother and father through shared parenting. In 2006, only 39.8% thought a child should live with their mother or father whoever is a better care provider, and 35.3% thought a child should live with both mother and father through shared parenting.
- Almost all of the respondents in both samples agreed that the behaviour of the custodial parent should be reviewed by the court if he/she disobeys a parenting order (96.2% in 2006 and 92.9% in 1991). Respondents in both samples also agreed on which consequences are most appropriate.
- The majority of respondents in 2006 (96%) and in 1991 (91.4%) thought mediation and counseling should be made available to parents resolving parental responsibility problems. About half of each sample thought that individual parents should pay for such services with government subsidy. However, 27.9% of the 1991 sample thought parents should pay on their own, while only 14.9% of the 2006 sample agreed.
- Unhappiness with the legal system seems to have increased over the last 15 years. In 1991, 50.3% of the respondents thought the legal system was not effective in dealing with parental responsibility following family breakdown; this increased to 57% in 2006.

- The 2006 sample contained far more respondents with personal experience (52.7%) than the 1991 sample (28%). Seventeen percent of the 1991 sample were non-custodial parents, compared to only 9.1% of the 2006 sample, and 19.7% were extended family members, compared to 29.2% in the 2006 sample.
- The gender breakdown of custodial and non-custodial parents in both samples may be reflective of current trends in custody and access decisions by the court. In 1991, 68.7% of custodial parents were female; this increased to 75.9% in 2006. Similarly, in 1991, 79.1% of non-custodial parents were male; this increased to 83.1% in 2006.
- The overall level of education for custodial and non-custodial parents seems to have increased over the past 15 years, with a greater percentage of respondents in 2006 reporting high school and a non-university certificate or diploma as their highest level of education.
- The experience of custodial parents in 2006, overall, seems to be a little worse than for custodial parents in 1991. Whereas 55.6% of custodial parents in 1991 described their experience as somewhat difficult and 19.2% described their experience as very difficult, only 38.5% of custodial parents in 2006 described their experience as somewhat difficult and 36.8% described their experience as very difficult.
- In contrast, more non-custodial parents in 2006 described their experience as somewhat difficult (39.4%) than those in 1991 (33.3%), and less non-custodial parents in 2006 described their experience as very difficult (42.4%) than those in 1991 (45.2%).

## 5.2 Follow-Up Surveys

### 5.2.1 Custodial Parents 2006

#### General

- Of the 62 custodial parents who completed the question, 68.8% indicated they were custodial parents and 31.2% said they shared custody with the other parent.
- Almost one-third (30.6%) of the custodial parents reported that they are also a non-custodial parent to some of their children. Those children lived with the other parent (30.8%) or lived on their own, presumably now as adults (69.2%).

#### Parenting Arrangements

- On average, custodial parents reported being separated from the other parent for 11.3 years (range of less than 1 year to 41 years).
- The most common types of parenting arrangements reported by custodial parents was a written agreement, which may have been decided through a court process (29.2%) and a formal order decided through a court process (24.6%).

- The most common custody arrangement reported by custodial parents was sole physical and legal custody to one parent. The most common access arrangement reported by custodial parents was reasonable access by the non-custodial parent.
- Only 10.6% of custodial parents indicated that the non-custodial parent does not have access visits with the children. The most common reason given for this was that the other parent is not interested in visiting the children.
- The majority of custodial parents reported that they have a formal child support agreement in place that outlines financial arrangements between themselves and the other parent. Seventy percent of these respondents said that the payments are made, 64.3% said that they payments are made on-time, and 68.3% said that the payments are made in full.
- Approximately half of the custodial parents reported that their child support agreement was decided upon before 1997. Most of those respondents indicated that the Federal Child Support Guidelines had not affected their agreement (45.8%). For those who had been affected, five out of seven said that the payments have increased and that the arrangement is fairer.
- All of the custodial parents reported that the current financial arrangement for child support did not affect the amount of access time between the child and the other parent.
- With the exception of health and medical issues, less than one-half of custodial parents indicated that they frequently discuss other aspects of their children's lives with the other parent.

#### Access Activities

- The majority of custodial parents indicated that the non-custodial parents of their children had unsupervised visits. The average number of visits per month was 3.2. The average length of a visit was 24.3 hours, suggesting that overnight visits are relatively common among this sample.
- The most common forms of other contact between non-custodial parents and children, as reported by custodial parents, were telephone (82.7%) and e-mail (36.5%).
- Most custodial parents (88.5%) reported that there are visits or contact between the children and extended family members.

#### Suitability of Parenting Arrangements

- Custodial parents reported having the most difficulty arranging when a visit is to take place with the non-custodial parent (24.5% reported that this is always or often difficult).



- If visits with the non-custodial parent were missed, custodial parents said the most common reasons were no reason or always a different reason (42.3%) and that the visit was inconvenient for the non-custodial parent (40.4%).
- Half of the custodial parents felt that access time was reasonable or appropriate. Only 10 out of 51 custodial parents would prefer that the non-custodial parent not have access. This was because the custodial parent wanted to end the relationship with the other parent, the child did not want to visit, or there were concerns of physical abuse by the other parent.
- Fifteen out of 52 custodial parents had denied the non-custodial parent access to the children; they reported that this happened very seldom. The most common reasons for this were that the other parent had an alcohol or drug problem, that the child was sick, or that the child refused to go on the visit.

### Strategies and Solutions

- The most common strategies used by custodial parents to deal with difficulties was to talk with the other parent (71.6%), to talk with friends or relatives (53.7%), and to go to an individual counselor (49.3%).
- Approximately one-third of custodial parents had attended a Parenting After Separation workshop. Of those, 69.6% thought that it was beneficial in dealing with their parenting issues.
- The custodial parents in this sample did not report using other services very frequently. Mediation was the most commonly used service, with only 19.4% of custodial parents accessing this support.
- Twenty-seven percent of custodial parents had taken legal steps to solve access problems. The most common reason for going to court was to obtain a divorce, including a custody decision.

### 5.2.2 Non-custodial Parents 2006

#### General

- Seventeen non-custodial parents completed the survey. When asked who their child lives with, 43.8% reported that the child lives with the other parent, 37.5% reported that the child lives on their own, and 12.5% reported that the child lives with the grandparents.

#### Parenting Arrangements

- The average length of time non-custodial parents reported being separated from the other parent was 14.8 years.

- The most common type of parenting arrangements for non-custodial parents in this sample was a formal order decided through a court process (26.7%), a written agreement, which may have been approved through a court process (20%), and an informal arrangement with no specific agreement (20%).
- The most common custody arrangement was shared physical and legal custody, and the most common access arrangement was reasonable access by the non-custodial parent.
- All non-custodial parents reported that they had some kind of access arrangement in place, but only 73.3% said they had access visits with the children.
- Sixty percent of non-custodial parents had a child support order in place, outlining the financial arrangements between themselves and the other parent. Almost all of the non-custodial parents said that the payments are made, on time, and in full.
- Of the non-custodial parents who had a formal child support agreement, 55.6% said the agreement was decided upon before 1997. For 40% of those respondents, the Federal Child Support Guidelines had affected their arrangement (the payments had increased).
- For all but one of the non-custodial parents who had a child support agreement in place, child support did not affect the amount of access time they have with the children.
- Various aspects of the children's lives, such as religion/moral development, sports, and lessons, were not frequently discussed with non-custodial parents.

#### Access Activities

- The majority of non-custodial parents in the sample had unsupervised visits with their children. The average number of visits per month was 4.9. The average length of a visit was 24.8 hours, suggesting that overnights visits were common.
- Seventy-five percent of non-custodial parents reported that there are visits or contact between the children and extended family members.

#### Suitability of Parenting Arrangements

- Non-custodial parents reported that the most common problem they had to deal with was missed visits.
- The most common reasons for non-custodial parents missing visits with the children were the non-custodial parent was away (33.3%), the visit was inconvenient for the other parent (25%), the child was away (25%), and the child was too busy (25%).
- Approximately half of the non-custodial parents were satisfied with their amount of access time; 18.2% said it was less than they would like.

- Four non-custodial parents reported that they had been denied access to their children by the custodial parent. Two said this seldom happened, one said it often happened, and one said it always happened.
- Non-custodial parents said the reasons for access denial were that the child was away, the child was too busy, and the other parent wanted to end the relationship with them.

### Strategies and Solutions

- The strategy most frequently used by non-custodial parents to work out difficulties with parental responsibility was to talk with the other parent (82.4%). Other strategies used were talking to friends or relatives (41.2%), going to an individual counselor (35.3%), and going to court (35.3%).
- Approximately one-third of the non-custodial parents had attended a Parenting After Separation (PAS) workshop. Of those, 66.7% thought PAS was beneficial in dealing with their parenting issues.
- Non-custodial parents reported using few other services to assist them in working out difficulties.
- Five out of 13 respondents reported taking legal steps to solve access problems. The most common reasons for going to court were to obtain a divorce, including a custody decision, and to obtain a divorce, including an access decision.

### 5.2.3 Extended Family Members

#### General

- The majority of the extended family member surveys were filled out by grandparents (77%); 23% were filled out by aunts or uncles.
- Sixty-six percent of the extended family members reported that the child (Child 1) lived with the mother. Only 8.5% reported that the child lived with the father.

#### Parenting Arrangements

- Approximately half of the extended family members indicated that their relative (child, sister, or brother) is the custodial parent of the child.

#### Access Activities

- Half of the extended family members lived in the same city as the child (50.8%) and 36.1% lived in the same province.

- The majority of respondents had contact or visits with the child (91.8%). The average number of visits per month was 5.5. Other kinds of contact included telephone calls and e-mails.

#### Suitability of Access/Visitation

- Most of the extended family members were satisfied with their access time (73.7%). Those who thought that access time was less than desired (19.3%) most commonly said that the family lives too far away. Three respondents said that the parent refuses to allow them to visit and two respondents said that the parent prefers that they do not visit.

#### Strategies and Solutions

- Most extended family members did not have trouble visiting and maintaining contact with the child. Ten respondents had experienced some difficulties. Strategies used to deal with these situations included talking to friends or relatives, talking to the child's parents, and talking to a lawyer.

#### 5.2.4 Comparative Analysis: Follow-Up Surveys 1991

#### Custodial and Non-custodial Parent Surveys

- The custodial and non-custodial parent surveys in 2006 indicated that more time had passed since the respondents' separation and filling out the survey than in 1991.
- In 1991, almost one-third of custodial parents had a relatively recent experience with custody and access; only 16.7% of custodial parents in 2006 reported the same.
- The greatest proportion of non-custodial parents in 1991 had been separated for 10-12 years (34.8%). Comparatively, the greatest proportion of non-custodial parents in 2006 had been separated for over 16 years (41.2%).
- In 2006, as in 1991, just over half of custodial and non-custodial parents had a written parenting agreement, which may have been approved through a court process, or a formal court order. However, fewer parents in 2006 reported having an informal agreement outlining parenting responsibility.
- In terms of custody arrangements, the proportion of respondents with an arrangement involving sole physical and legal custody to one parent dropped considerably from 64.5% in 1991 to 32.5% in 2006. In the same light, the proportion of parents with a shared custody arrangement (physical and legal) increased from 6.5% in 1991 to 32.5% in 2006.

- In terms of access arrangements, both samples appeared quite similar. The majority of respondents reported that reasonable access was allowed by the non-custodial parent; 72.4% in 1991 and 65.7% in 2006.
- Approximately 10% more of the sample in 1991 had a formal, written agreement in place for child support payments than the sample in 2006; 86.5% compared to 75.8%. The majority of respondents in both samples reported that child support payments were made, on time, and in full.
- There appears to be a slight increase in visitation between non-custodial parents and children from 1991 to 2006, according to custodial parents. In 1991, 36.8% of custodial parents reported that non-custodial parents had 2-4 visits per year; almost the same proportion of custodial parents in 2006 (33.3%) reported that non-custodial parents had 2-4 visits per month.
- In 1991, 15.8% of non-custodial parents reported that they visited their children 5 or more times per month; this increased to 27.3% in 2006. The majority of non-custodial parents in both samples visited their children 2-4 times per month.
- Other forms of contact between the non-custodial parents and the children in 1991 most commonly included telephone calls and letters. In 2006, other forms of contact included telephone calls and e-mails.
- Non-custodial parents in the 2006 sample appeared to be living a bit closer to their children than those in the 1991 sample. A greater proportion of respondents in 1991 lived in a different province (27.3% compared to 6.3% in 2006), and a greater proportion of respondents in 2006 lived in the same neighbourhood (14.1% compared to 7.3% in 1991).
- Minimal differences were seen in terms of visitation between children and extended family members, as reported by parents in the two samples. The majority of parents in 2006 and in 1991 reported that their children had visits with extended family members.
- If visits with the children were missed by non-custodial parents, custodial parents in 1991 said it was most commonly because it was inconvenient for the non-custodial parent (73.3%). Only 40.4% of custodial parents in 2006 gave this as a reason. Other reasons were that the child was too busy/on holidays, and that there was no reason/always a different reason.
- Non-custodial parents also provided reasons for missing visits with their child. In 1991, the most common reason was that the child was busy/on holidays. This was also the case in 2006.

- Approximately half of the custodial parents in 1991 and in 2006 felt that the current amount of access time between the non-custodial parent and the child was reasonable/appropriate. However, in 1991, the other half of custodial parents thought that access time was less than desirable; this decreased to 28% in 2006. Fourteen percent of custodial parents in 2006 described access time as more than they would like.
- Just over half of the non-custodial parents in both years felt that their access time was reasonable/appropriate. Like custodial parents, the remaining respondents in 1991 described their access time as less than desirable; in 2006, remaining responses were split between less than desirable and more than desirable.
- Twelve custodial parents in 1991 and 16 custodial parents in 2006 had denied the non-custodial parent access to the children at some point. Both groups reported that this was seldom done. The most common reasons for this in 1991 and in 2006 were that the child was too busy or sick and that the other parent had a drug or alcohol problem.
- Sixteen non-custodial parents in 1991 and 4 non-custodial parents in 2006 had been denied access to the children by the custodial parent. Again, both groups said this seldom occurred. The most common reasons provided were that it was inconvenient for the custodial parent or they were on holidays, and that the custodial parent wanted to end the relationship with the respondent.
- When working out problems with parental responsibility, custodial and non-custodial parents in 1991 most commonly talked things out with the other parent (54.6%), went to a counselor or mediator (31.7%), or talked with a friend or relative (24.1%). In 2006, slightly more respondents talked things out with the other parent (68.9%), almost double the proportion of respondents talked with a friend or relative (47.8%), and approximately the same proportion of respondents went to a counselor or mediator (28.5%). More parents reported going to court to work things out in 2006 than in 1991.

### Extended Family Member Surveys

- The majority of extended family members who filled out the survey in 1991 and in 2006 were related to the custodial parent. Most extended family members reported living quite close to the children. In 1991, 37.7% lived in the same city and 34.6% lived in the same province. In 2006, 50.8% lived in the same city and 36.1% lived in the same province.
- The majority of extended family members in both samples had visits with their grandchildren, nieces, or nephews. In 1991, respondents most commonly visited 1-2 times per month (42.1%), and 1-2 times per year (34.1%). In 2006, only 18% of respondents visited 1-2 times per month, 18% visited 3-4 times per month, and 16% visited 4-5 times per year.

- A far greater proportion of the sample in 2006 was satisfied with their access to the children (73.7%), compared to the sample in 1991 (42.6%).

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of Albertans' views and experiences with child custody and access, and to describe any changes that may have occurred over the past 15 years. As in the past, most people who participated in the study were aware of the issue of parental responsibility following family breakdown. While approximately half of the respondents had personal experience with custody and access, most general knowledge of the issue was gained through the media. Learning through the media is a precarious process. Information may be biased or delivered in such a way so as to influence individuals in a particular direction. This should be kept in mind when reviewing the findings of the study. Current public perceptions of the issue may be driven by media representation, which may or may not be reflective of what is really going on.

Overall, respondents were not happy with how the legal system is dealing with parental responsibility following family breakdown; this appears to have increased since the study in 1991. There was a strong perception in the 2006 sample that the system is biased in favour of mothers, and that it penalizes fathers, regardless of either parents' conduct. Many respondents reported problems with child support; lack of accountability for spending by the custodial parent and the financial strain on the non-custodial parent seemed to be the areas of greatest concern.

Awareness of the Federal Child Support Guidelines was relatively low; this may have been a result of many respondents' experiences occurring prior to 1997. Of those who were aware, many criticized the Guidelines, along with any maintenance enforcement strategies that were currently being used. A few respondents felt that the Guidelines affected their situations in a positive way. Interestingly, there was no connection found between the child support arrangement in place and the non-custodial parent's access to the child.

While keeping in mind the inability to generalize these findings to the greater population (due to the small sample sizes), some interesting patterns were found in terms of parenting arrangements. The gender breakdown of custodial and non-custodial parents in 1991 and 2006 may be reflective of a continuing trend in parenting roles after separation or divorce, where the mother most often assumes the role of custodial parent. In 1991, 68.7% of custodial parents were female; this increased to 75.9% in 2006. Similarly, in 1991, 79.1% of non-custodial parents were male; this increased to 83.1% in 2006.

In terms of custody arrangements, shared custody appears to be on the increase. The proportion of respondents with an arrangement involving sole physical and legal custody to one parent dropped considerably from 64.5% in 1991 to 32.5% in 2006. In the same light, the proportion of parents with a shared custody arrangement (physical and legal) increased from 6.5% in 1991 to 32.5% in 2006. The most common access arrangement remains reasonable access allowed by the non-custodial parent.

Visitation by non-custodial parents in the samples also seems to have increased. In 1991, 36.8% of custodial parents reported that non-custodial parents had 2-4 visits per year; almost the same proportion of custodial parents in 2006 (33.3%) reported that non-custodial parents had 2-4 visits per month. This may be a result of non-custodial parents in 2006 living closer to their children than in 1991.

Respondents with personal experience reported that their experiences are getting more difficult; for the most part, they experienced problems with their ex-spouse/common-law partner. Few used formal services or supports to help deal with their parental responsibility problems. Only one-third of parents attended the Parenting After Separation workshop; the majority of those who attended thought it was beneficial. More parents reported going to court to work things out in 2006 than in 1991.

While there are a number of variables to consider, differences found between the 1991 and 2006 samples may be attributed, in part, to the increase in shared custody arrangements. It is quite possible that parents involved in joint guardianship situations may have more difficulties trying to work out problems, assuming that they would have increased interaction with one another. This may also explain the increase in parent going to court to resolve problems. Changes in living arrangements (e.g., the other parent living in the same neighbourhood) may also be a result of the increase in shared custody arrangements.

Respondents provided some recommendations to improve the system and make the process of dealing with parental responsibility a little easier. Many highlighted the importance of keeping extended family members involved in children's lives following a separation or divorce; this did not appear to be a problem in the 2006 sample. Respondents emphasized the need for preventative measures against family breakdown. They suggested: counseling and financial support to keep marriages together; marriage preparation courses; courses offered in high school on marriage and having children; education on raising children prior to having them; and initiatives to prevent teenage pregnancy. Respondents also suggested that all services, from counseling to court costs, be provided free of charge.

As Albertans continue to deal with parental responsibility following family breakdown, it is important to modify the provincial response to the issue. The context of family continues to change, as do the issues of custody and access; this requires attention in order to effectively meet the needs of the individuals involved. Legislative and policy change, along with the introduction of new initiatives and supports, are crucial in addressing the issue. However, evaluation is necessary to realize the true impact of such changes. From the sample in this study, recent changes appear to have had little effect on those involved in custody and access situations; many struggles still remain. The most significant finding is the increase in shared custody arrangements. Further investigation in this area is suggested to determine the impact of such an arrangement on children and families.



**APPENDIX A**  
**Screening Survey**



**PART E: Comments**

This section is for any additional comments you may wish to make.

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**Thank you for completing this survey.**

**REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN A FOLLOW-UP SURVEY:**

In order to more fully understand people's experiences with parental responsibility after family breakdown, we have developed a follow-up survey which asks about the topic in greater detail.

If you have personal experience with parental responsibility, as a custodial parent, a non-custodial parent, or a relative (grandparent, aunt, uncle), and would be willing to participate in a follow-up survey, please print your name and mailing address below.

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAILING ADDRESS:**

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**ALL INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL**



**Parental Responsibility Following Family Breakdown**

The Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family is conducting a study of Albertans' views and experiences of parental responsibility following family breakdown. A similar study was done in 1991; at that time, it was estimated that, province wide, over 500,000 Albertans had some experience with child access issues. Since then, Alberta has made significant changes to its legislation and any experiences you have had are important in understanding how people move through the justice system.

We would like to ask you some questions about your general knowledge of issues around parental responsibility after family breakdown, as well as your attitudes and opinions on the topic. We would then like to know about any personal experiences you have had with child custody and access.

Once you have completed the survey, please seal it in the addressed envelope provided and send it back to us (the postage has been paid). All of your answers will be kept strictly confidential.

**Parental Responsibility Following Family Breakdown:**

By PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY, we mean all the duties, powers, responsibilities, and authority that a parent of a child has in relation to the child. The practical exercise of this responsibility would need to be described through an agreement (e.g., parenting plan) or a court order.

**Access (Contact with Children):**

By ACCESS, we mean the ability to maintain direct contact with a child.

**Custody (Care and Control of Children):**

By CUSTODY, we mean with whom the child lives.

For each question, mark an **X** in the box beside the response that best matches your experience. You will be given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the survey.

This study is completely voluntary. If there is any question that you would prefer not to answer, just leave it blank.

### PART A: General Knowledge

1. In the last few years, have you been aware of the issue of parental responsibility (i.e., custody and access) following separation and divorce?

Yes  No

If YES, under which of the following circumstances did you gain this knowledge? (Check all that apply)

- Personal experience with my own child(ren)
  - Personal experience with children in my extended family
  - Personal experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances
  - Through the news media, radio, television, newspapers
  - Other (please specify)
- 

### PART B: Attitudes and Opinions

1. In your opinion, is determining parental responsibility following separation or divorce a problem in our society?

Yes  No  
 Sometimes  No opinion

2. Following the breakdown of a marriage or a relationship, with whom should the child(ren) normally live?

- Mother
  - Father
  - Both mother and father through shared parenting
  - Mother or father, whoever is a better care provider
  - Whoever has been the child's primary care provider
  - No opinion
  - Other (please specify)
- 

8. If you experienced any difficulties with parental responsibility, who were the difficulties with? (Check all that apply)

- Your ex-spouse/common-law partner
  - Your child(ren)
  - Other relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles)
  - The child(ren)'s parents (if you are a grandparent, aunt, uncle)
  - Mediators/counsellors
  - Lawyers
  - Other (please specify)
- 

### PART D: Personal Information

1. Are you male or female?

Male  Female

2. What year were you born?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (year)

3. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

- Grade 9 or less
- Some high school
- Completed high school
- Non-university certificate or diploma
- Partial university degree
- Completed university degree

4. Which of the following employment categories best describes you?

- Employed (full-time or part-time)
  - Temporarily unemployed
  - Retired
  - Full-time homemaker
  - Student
  - Other (please specify)
- 

5. What is your present marital status?

- Married  Remarried
- Divorced  Separated
- Never Married  Common Law
- Widowed

**PART C: Personal Experience**

1. Have you had experience in situations involving parental responsibility following a family breakdown?

- Yes
- No

If NO, please go to PART D.

2. If YES, how long ago did this situation begin? (If you have been involved in more than one situation, please think of the most recent one)

<input type="checkbox"/> Within the last year	<input type="checkbox"/> Before 1998	<input type="checkbox"/> Since 1998
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3. Did this happen in Alberta?

- Yes
- No      If NO, where? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How many children were involved?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 or more

5. How old was each child at the time?

_____ (child 1)	_____ (child 3)
_____ (child 2)	_____ (child 4)

6. What relationship do you have with the child(ren) now?

- Parent living with the child(ren)
- Parent not living with the child(ren)
- Aunt or uncle of child(ren)
- Grandparent of child(ren)
- Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How would you describe your specific experience with parental responsibility and child access arrangements?

- Relaxed, informal, uncomplicated
- Somewhat difficult, but manageable
- Very difficult, strained, complicated
- Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you think it is best for a child to have contact with both parents following a separation or divorce?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> It depends on the circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion

4. Should relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles) be allowed to visit children whose parents are separated or divorced?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> It depends on the circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion

5. Do you think a child's wishes should be an important consideration when parental responsibility, parenting orders, or parenting plans (i.e., a written agreement made between the parents and anyone else significant in a child(ren)'s life about the arrangements for the child(ren)) are decided in court?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> It depends on the circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion

6. If the parent who has custody of a child disobeys the parenting order and does not allow the other parent to visit the child, should the behaviour of the custodial parent be reviewed by the court?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

If YES, what consequence do you believe is appropriate?

- A fine
- Extra visits to make-up for the ones missed
- A review of the parenting plan
- Imprisonment
- No opinion
- Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Should parents who do not have custody of their children be required to maintain contact or visit with their children?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> It depends on the circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion

8. Should parents who do not have custody of their children be allowed to make decisions about their children (e.g., health care, education, social activities, etc.)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> It depends on the circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/> No opinion

9. Should there be mediation or counselling services to assist parents in resolving parental responsibility problems?

Yes  
 No  
 No opinion

If YES, who should pay for this service?

Provincial government  
 Individual parents, with government subsidy  
 Individual parents  
 Other (please specify)

---

10. Do you think the current legal system deals effectively with parental responsibility following family breakdown?

Yes  
 No  
 No opinion

**Parenting After Separation Seminars:**

In Alberta, a couple with children in the process of divorce, legal separation, or any other process involving custody, access, or child support must attend the Parenting After

11. Are you aware of the mandatory Parenting After Separation Seminars in Alberta?

Yes  
 No

If YES, under which of the following circumstances did you gain this knowledge?

Personal experience with my own child(ren)  
 Personal experience with children in my extended family  
 Personal experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances  
 Through the news media, radio, television, newspapers  
 Other (please specify)

---

12. Do you think Parenting After Separation Seminars are beneficial to parents dealing with custody, access, or child support issues?

Yes  
 No  
 No opinion

**Federal Child Support Guidelines:**

Child Support Guidelines came into force in Canada in 1997, The Child Support

13. Are you aware of the Federal Child Support Guidelines?

Yes  
 No

If YES, under which of the following circumstances did you gain this knowledge?

Personal experience with my own child(ren)  
 Personal experience with children in my extended family  
 Personal experience with friends, co-workers, or other acquaintances  
 Through the news media, radio, television, newspapers  
 Other (please specify)

---

14. Do you think the Federal Child Support Guidelines have resulted in a better system of determining child support?

Yes  
 No  
 No opinion

**APPENDIX B**  
**Follow-Up Survey: Custodial Parent**







Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family

## Parental Responsibility Following Family Breakdown Follow-up Survey:

### CUSTODIAL PARENT

This survey is a follow-up to the survey you previously completed on parental responsibility following family breakdown. You indicated that you are willing to provide more in-depth information on your personal experience with parental responsibility. From the previous survey, we understand that you are the **CUSTODIAL PARENT**.

By **CUSTODIAL PARENT** we mean the parent a child lives with on a day-to-day basis. In legal terms, this includes parents who have **SOLE** custody or **SHARED** custody as defined through a formal court process.

This questionnaire is designed specifically for the parent who has the day-to-day care and control of the child and supervises the child's daily activities the majority of the time, or an equal amount of time as the other parent.

For each question, mark an **X** in the box beside the response that best matches your experience. You will be given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the survey.

Your participation in this study is **completely voluntary** and you are free to withdraw from the research project at any time. If there is any question that you would prefer not to answer, just leave it blank.

This survey is being conducted in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Responses to the survey questions will be aggregated for analysis, therefore, your identity will not be revealed in any way. The findings from this study will be compared to findings of a similar study done in 1991. The responses you provide will be kept **strictly anonymous**.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please telephone CRILF (216-0340 in Calgary; or toll-free 1-888-881-4273).

Once you have completed the survey, please mail it back to us in the pre-paid, addressed envelope provided. We would appreciate it if you could return the survey to us within a week of receiving it.

Sincerely,

Joseph P. Hornick, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

*An Independent Institute Affiliated with the University of Calgary*

*\*Funding for this project is provided by the Alberta Law Foundation*

Please complete the following questions based on your current or most recent experience with parental responsibility following family breakdown (i.e., child custody and access arrangements).

**PART A: General Information**

1. How many natural (biological) and/or adoptive children do you have?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 or more

2. How many of these children live with you?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 or more

3. How old are the children who live with you and are they male or female? (If you have more than 4 children, please answer for the OLDEST four.)

<u>AGE</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	
_____ (child 1)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 2)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 3)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 4)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F

4. Are you the CUSTODIAL PARENT of the child(ren) (see definition on first page) or do you SHARE CUSTODY with the other parent as defined through a formal court process?

<u>CHILD</u>	<u>CUSTODY</u>	
child 1	<input type="checkbox"/> custodial parent	<input type="checkbox"/> share custody
child 2	<input type="checkbox"/> custodial parent	<input type="checkbox"/> share custody
child 3	<input type="checkbox"/> custodial parent	<input type="checkbox"/> share custody
child 4	<input type="checkbox"/> custodial parent	<input type="checkbox"/> share custody

If you SHARE CUSTODY with the other parent, what percent of the time is the child(ren) with you, and what percent of the time is the child(ren) with the other parent?

\_\_\_\_\_ % with me  
 \_\_\_\_\_ % with other parent

5. Are you a non-custodial parent of any of your children? (By non-custodial we mean a parent the child DOES NOT live with regularly or on a day-to-day basis.)

- Yes
- No

If YES, who do the children live with?

- The other parent
  - A grandparent
  - An aunt and/or uncle
  - They live on their own
  - Other (please specify)
- 

How old are the children who do not live with you and are they male or female?

<u>AGE</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	
_____ (child 1)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 2)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 3)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 4)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F

6. Do you have any step-children who live with you?

- Yes
- No

If YES, how old are these children and are they male or female?

<u>AGE</u>	<u>GENDER</u>	
_____ (child 1)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 2)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 3)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F
_____ (child 4)	<input type="checkbox"/> M	<input type="checkbox"/> F

### **PART B: Parenting Arrangements**

1. How long has it been since you and the child(ren)'s other parent lived together? (Please state the number of years OR if it has been less than one year, state the number of months.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years OR
- \_\_\_\_\_ Number of months
- \_\_\_\_\_ We have never lived together

2. What type of parenting arrangement is there currently between you and the other parent of the child(ren)?

- Informal, day-to-day arrangements, no specific agreement
  - Informal, verbal agreement
  - Written agreement, which may have been approved through a court process
  - Formal order decided through a court process
  - Other (please specify)
-

**IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A WRITTEN AGREEMENT OR FORMAL COURT ORDER,  
PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 5.**

3. If you do have a WRITTEN agreement or a formal court order for parental responsibility, what kind of arrangement did you agree to or did the court order?

CUSTODY

- Sole physical and legal custody to one parent (the child(ren) lives with one parent and all decisions are made by that parent)
  - Shared physical and legal custody (the child(ren) lives with each parent at different times throughout the year and both parents make decisions)
  - Shared legal custody with sole physical custody (both parents make decisions but the child(ren) lives with one parent most of the time)
  - Split custody (where there is more than one child, each parent has custody of one or more children)
  - Other (please specify)
- 

ACCESS

- Reasonable access by the non-custodial parent (visits with the child(ren) are agreed upon by both parents at convenient times)
  - Specified access by the non-custodial parent (a court order or agreement specifies how often visits should occur)
  - No access by the non-custodial parent
  - Other (please specify)
- 

4. How does the current/actual amount of shared custody or access time compare with what is outlined in the written agreement or court order?

- The current time is more than specified
  - The current time is less than specified
  - The current time is about the same as specified
  - The other parent does not have shared custody or access time
  - Other (please specify)
- 

5. Does the other parent have access or visits with the child(ren) (i.e., direct contact with the child)?

- Yes
- No
- Both parents share custody

If NO, what is the reason? (Check all that apply)

- The other parent is not interested in visiting the child(ren) at this time
  - The custody or access order does not allow the non-custodial parent to have contact
  - You are not willing to let the non-custodial parent visit
  - Other (please specify)
- 

6. Is there a child support order outlining financial arrangements between yourself and the other parent?

- Yes, a formal order
- No, but we have an informal arrangement
- No

**IF NO, PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 7.**

If YES, please answer the following questions in regard to your current financial arrangement.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>No</u>
Are the payments made?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are they paid on time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the full payment made?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When was the financial arrangement decided upon?

<input type="checkbox"/> Before 1997	<input type="checkbox"/> Since 1997
--------------------------------------	-------------------------------------

If the financial agreement was decided upon BEFORE 1997, have the Federal Child Support Guidelines affected or changed the financial arrangement you have?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If YES, how have the guidelines affected or changed the financial arrangement you have? (Check all that apply)

- The payments have increased
  - The payments have decreased
  - The arrangement is fairer
  - The arrangement is less fair
  - Other (please specify)
-

7. Does the current financial arrangement between you and the other parent influence the amount of access or visitation time the other parent has with the child(ren)?

- Yes
- No

If YES, how has the amount of access or visitation time been influenced?

- The amount of time has increased
  - The amount of time has decreased
  - Other (please specify)
- 

8. Listed below are several important aspects of life for children. Do you currently talk about these things with the other parent or tell the other parent what is happening with the child(ren) in these areas?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>No</u>
Health or medical issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion or moral development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School progress (if applicable)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lessons (e.g., piano, ballet)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child(ren)'s friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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**PART C: Access Activities**

**IF THE OTHER PARENT HAS ACCESS OR VISITS WITH THE CHILD(REN), PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN REGARD TO THE ACCESS ACTIVITIES.**

**IF THE OTHER PARENT CURRENTLY DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS OR VISITS WITH THE CHILD(REN), PLEASE GO TO PART E.**

1. Currently, are the visits or activities with the child(ren) and the other parent:

- Unsupervised?
- Sometimes supervised?
- Always supervised?

2. On average, how many visits per month does the other parent have with the child(ren) OR if the other parent does not visit monthly, how many times per year does he/she visit the child(ren)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Number per month OR  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number per year

3. On average, how long are the visits? (Please estimate in number of hours)

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of hours

4. Where does the other parent live in relation to you and the child(ren)?

- In the same neighbourhood
- In the same city/town
- In the same province
- In a different province
- In a different country
- I don't know where the other parent lives

5. Are there other forms of contact between the other parent and the child(ren)? (Check all that apply)

- No
  - Telephone calls
  - Letters
  - E-mails
  - Instant Messaging (e.g., MSN)
  - Other (please specify)
- 

6. Are there visits or contact between the child(ren) and the grandparents or other extended family members (aunts, uncles) from the other parent's family?

- Yes
- No

If YES, how often does the contact occur? (Please indicate the average number of times monthly OR if visits or contact do not occur that often, the average number of times yearly)

\_\_\_\_\_ Number per month OR  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number per year

#### **PART D: Suitability of Parenting Arrangements**

1. Do you have difficulty with the other parent in any of the following areas:

	<u>Always</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Seldom</u>	<u>Never</u>
Arranging when to visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arranging how long to visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being on time for a visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dealing with a missed visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rescheduling difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deciding activities for the visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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2. If the other parent missed a visit(s) with the child(ren), what was the reason(s) for not visiting? (Check all that apply)

- The child(ren) was too busy with other activities
  - The child(ren) refused to go on the visit
  - The child(ren) was sick
  - It was inconvenient for you
  - It was inconvenient for the other parent
  - You and the child(ren) were away (e.g., holidays)
  - The other parent was away
  - There was no reason, or there is always a different reason
  - An alcohol or drug problem of the other parent
  - Other (please specify)
- 

3. How would you describe the current amount of access or visitation time by the other parent?

- More than I would like
  - Reasonable/appropriate
  - Less than I would like
  - Other (please specify)
- 

4. Would you prefer the other parent NOT to have access to the child(ren)?

- Yes
- No

If YES, what is your reason for not wishing the other parent to have access to the child(ren)? (Check all that apply)

- You wish to end any form of relationship with this person, including parenting
  - The child(ren) does not wish to visit
  - The other parent has an alcohol or drug problem that would affect caring for the child(ren)
  - There are concerns of physical abuse of the child(ren) by the other parent
  - There are concerns of sexual abuse of the child(ren) by the other parent
  - Other (please specify)
- 

5. Have you ever denied the other parent access to the child(ren)?

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

If YES, how often have you denied the other parent access to the child(ren)?

- |                                 |                                    |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Always | <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Often  | <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom    |



What was your reason(s) for not allowing the other parent access to the child(ren)?  
(Check all that apply)

- The child(ren) was too busy with other activities
  - The child(ren) refused to go on the visit
  - The child(ren) was sick
  - It was inconvenient for you
  - You wish to end any form of relationship with this person, including parenting
  - You and the child(ren) were away (e.g., holidays)
  - There are concerns of physical abuse of the child(ren) by the other parent
  - There are concerns of sexual abuse of the child(ren) by the other parent
  - An alcohol or drug problem of the other parent
  - Other (please specify)
- 

### **PART E: Strategies and Solutions**

1. When working out parental responsibility following family breakdown, what have you done to solve difficulties with the other parent? (Check all that apply)

- Talked with the other parent
  - Talked to friends or relatives
  - Went to an individual counsellor
  - Went to a family counsellor with the other parent
  - Went to a mediator
  - Went to court
  - We have not had difficulties
  - Other (please specify)
- 

#### **Parenting After Separation workshops:**

In Alberta, a married or common law couple with children in the process of divorce, legal separation, or any other process involving custody, access, or child support may attend a Parenting After Separation workshop (PAS); this is mandatory in most cases. PAS provides parents with information about the divorce process and its impact on children, legal issues, and communication strategies.

2. Did you attend the Parenting After Separation workshop?

- Yes
- No

If YES, was it beneficial to you in dealing with custody, access, and child support issues?

- Yes
- No

Why or why not? (Please comment in the space below)

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3. Have you voluntarily participated in any other programs or utilized any other services to help you work out parental responsibility following family breakdown? (Check all that apply)

- Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS)
- Family Court Counsellors
- Mediation Services
- Brief Conflict Intervention
- Parental Conflict Intervention
- Open Assessments/Bilateral Custody Assessments
- Family Law Information Centre (FLIC)
- Other (please specify)

---

4. Have you taken any legal steps to solve access problems?

- Yes
- No

If NO, why haven't you?

- We do not have any access problems
- We have worked out problems on our own
- We were able to work out problems with the help of a mediator or counsellor
- Legal involvement would be too expensive
- I am not sure what alternatives or solutions the legal/court process could provide
- I would prefer not to get involved in the court process
- Other (please specify)

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5. If you have been involved in legal actions through the court system, what were you trying to do? (Check all that apply)

- Obtain a divorce, including a custody decision
- Obtain a divorce, including an access decision
- Obtain an access agreement or parenting plan
- Obtain an access order
- Enforce an access order
- Change the terms of an access agreement, order, or parenting plan
- Enforce a custody order
- Change the terms of a custody order
- Have the other parent found in contempt of court
- Changes in financial arrangements
- Other (please specify)

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