



WINTER 2006

## VIRTUAL VISITATION

New technology is changing the way divorced fathers  
**Can Connect With Their Kids**

by Michael Gough



The reality of divorce for most men means that they will have less time to spend with their children. The average divorced father has only four days of visitation a month. For fathers who live in cities distant from their children, it can be months between visits. But, because a child's world is always changing, unless you keep in touch regularly and consistently, you risk falling behind. Until recently, the only real option was to talk over the telephone, which many fathers say is insufficient to build or maintain meaningful bonds with their children, especially if they are young.

But currently there is a new movement underway throughout the country to utilize advances in electronic communication technology to supplement non-custodial parents' visitation time called "Virtual Visitation."

Virtual Visitation has been referred to by many names: electronic communication, virtual parent-time, Internet visitation, computer visitation, video calls and others. The common legal term is 'Virtual Visitation,' though it may vary from state to state or individual preference. Virtual Visitation involves using tools such as personal video conferencing, a webcam, email, instant messaging (IM) and other wired or wireless technologies over the Internet or other communication media to supplement in-person visits and telephone contacts between children and their parents.

Virtual visitation has many applications, such as:

- For divorced parents to communicate with their children
- For parents traveling on business or vacation to keep in touch with their family
- For grandparents to keep in touch with their distant family members and grandchildren
- For Families seeking a better way to communicate other than the telephone
- For children whose parents are overseas on military duty
- For elderly care facilities so family members can keep in touch
- For counseling centers for a way their patients can communicate with their children
- For supervised visits for parents and their children
- For domestic violence and high conflict situations
- Remote education

What Virtual Visitation is not is a replacement or substitute for in-person contact with your children. The most important contact you can have with your children is face-to-face. Virtual Visitation is not intended to support or justify relocation or move-away cases by a custodial parent.

Virtual Visitation is an additional way to improve your communication with your children when you can not physically be with them and should never be used to replace or substitute in-person or face-to-face visits with your children.

After my daughter was relocated from Utah to Wisconsin I had not seen her for about three months when I flew to Wisconsin to be with her for the weekend. She did not immediately run up and greet me, but hesitated. She was only four years old. Her father was now distant and it showed after only three months. A few weeks after I started using video calls with her I visited again and this time when she saw me, she ran up and hugged me. The difference: she had just seen me days earlier on the computer via a video call. I was able to read her stories, show her that I was there for her, which helped us to build lasting memories and the security that children need to have with their parents.

If your children are young, you can read them stories, or they can read to you. You can teach them how to type, use Instant Messaging to send you greetings, play games, show them their favorite stuffed animals, their pets, pictures or any other personal affects. They can show you their teeth that they lose with incredible clarity. Another major benefit is that other extended family members can participate. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and family friends can all communicate over a video call to keep the sense of family fresh in their minds and reinforce we are there for them.

As children get older, you can help them with their homework, help with spelling lessons, language lessons, play

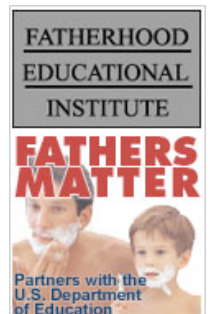
---

*For fathers who live in cities distant from their children it can be months between visits. But, because a child's world is always changing, unless you keep in touch regularly and consistently, you risk falling behind.*

---



ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!



musical instruments and provide feedback on written assignments. The custodial parent can even ask the non-custodial parent for help reinforcing a parental decision over a video call.

Many psychologists support the use of Virtual Visitation because it is visual and therefore is a far better tool for connecting with children than the telephone.

Virtual Visitation can help reduce the impact of a divorce that involves a move-away, which affects roughly 25 percent of all divorces with children. A move-away situation can be very traumatic on children, as their fathers (or mothers) are removed from their lives and left to only a few in-person visits per year. Children change so rapidly, seeing them often helps you to stay close and reduce the adjustment that occurs when you first get together after a separation. The last time I saw my daughter when she left Utah, she had long hair. The first time I saw her on a video call three months later she had given herself a haircut and had very short hair. I was able to adjust to the change long before I saw her in-person again. So when we saw each other we were able to focus on each other and the child and parent bond, not on the impact of the changes that occur so rapidly with children. It reduced that adjustment to a few minutes, not hours or days. It was a remedy that helped reduce the impact of divorce for both of us.

During these extended visits with the non-custodial parent, the custodial parent can benefit by using Virtual Visitation to stay in touch with the children when they are away. But, a video call can never replace the real thing – the in-person contact that each of you need to build and sustain a lasting bond. Fathering cannot be replaced with a computer. Virtual Visitation is only a tool, a remedy, to help reduce the impact of divorce and father absence on children.

Some critics have suggested that Virtual Visitation legislation could make it easier for judges to allow move-aways. But the authors of Virtual Visitation bills have been careful to craft language that specifically protects against this type of misuse. However, if the courts do allow a move-away, Virtual Visitation can be a great benefit to both parent and child and help them remain connected between in-person visits. Most importantly, it helps children understand that their non-custodial parent has not abandoned them.

But Virtual Visitation is not just for move-away situations. There is no reason you can not use it even if you live around the corner from your children. The goal is to be there for you children, to let them know you are always available and to build long lasting relationships with your children that will last a lifetime.

*Michael Gough is the founder of [InternetVisitation.org](http://InternetVisitation.org). *

 [printer friendly version](#)

[Back To Contents >>](#)

[CURRENT ISSUE](#) | [SUBSCRIBE](#) | [OUR MISSION](#) | [ARCHIVE](#) | [RESOURCES](#) | [CONTACT US](#)

Copyright 2005 Levings Divorce Magazine. All rights reserved. | Designed by EnvisionIT Media.