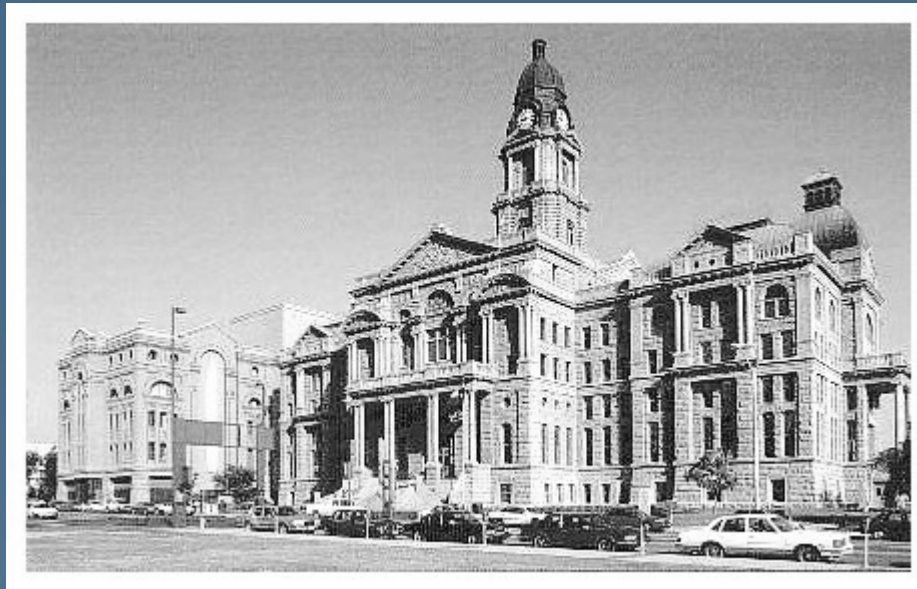


Tarrant County Family Court Services Orientation

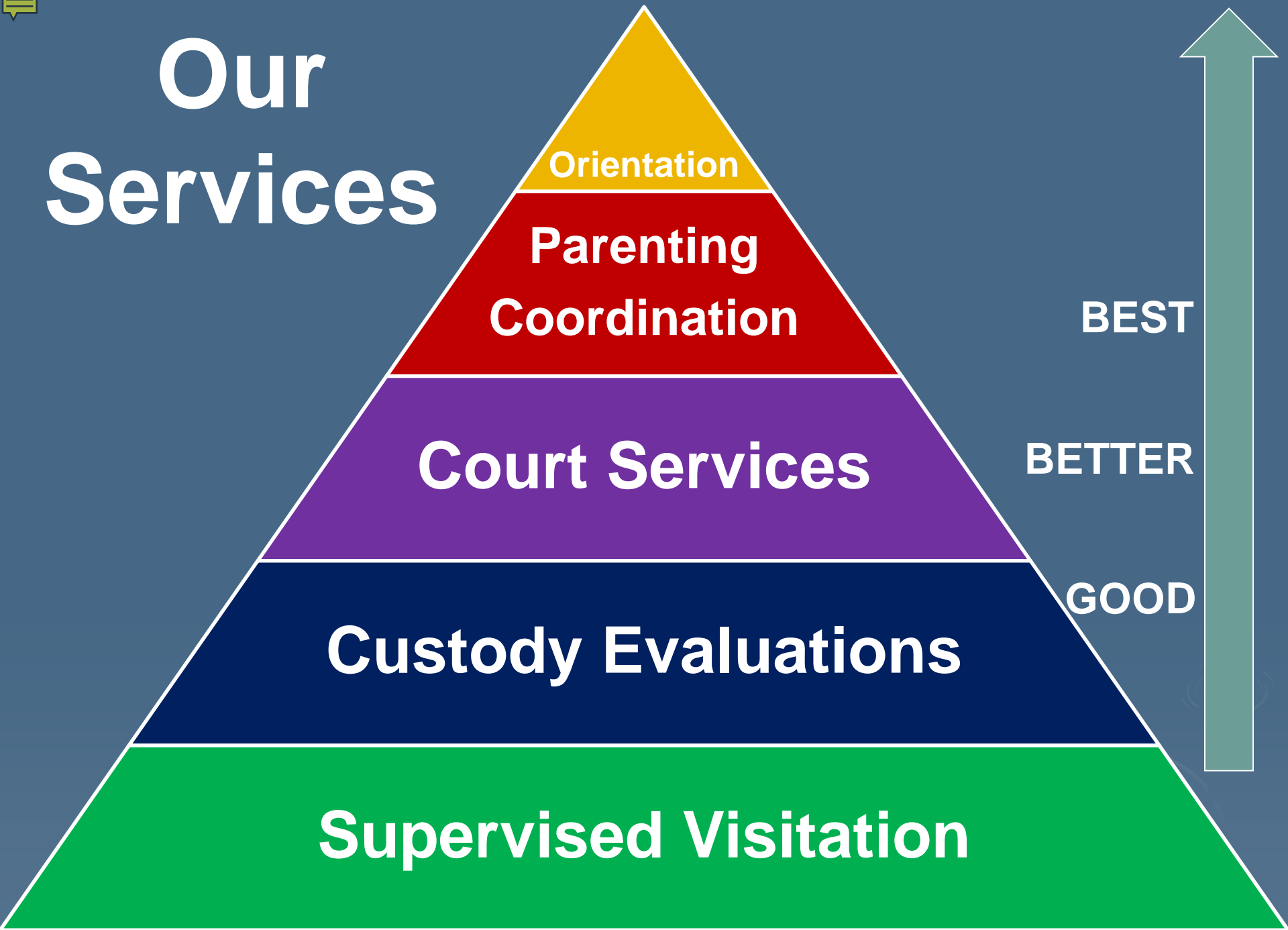


Who We Are

- Family Court Services is made up of:
 - Licensed Social Service Professionals who are knowledgeable and trained in areas surrounding issues found within the Family Court System (divorce, custody disputes, etc)



Our Services



Orientation

Orientation is a 2-hour class to learn:

- What your children need from you**
- What to expect in the Family Court System**
- How to Co-Parent now and through your child's life**

Parenting Coordination

Parenting coordination is:

- confidential
- alternative dispute resolution process
- parents meet together with a professional

You have nothing to lose in trying this process; but, your children have a lot to lose in contested litigation.

Parenting Coordination

➤ Purpose:

- To help parents communicate effectively and resolve issues of access on their own

➤ How:

- With the help of a trained Parenting Coordinator, parents learn ways to work together for the sake of their children

➤ Cost:

- Free!



Success of Parenting Coordination

- Parents who use Parenting Coordination:
 - Increase the potential to make their own decisions without intervention from the Court
 - Have fewer contacts with the legal system
 - Are more likely to follow the parenting plan
 - Are more satisfied than parents who chose to litigate

Court Services

- limited investigation**
- designed to focus on specific issues**
- quicker turn around time**

Custody Evaluations

- intensive, invasive investigation**
- utilized in cases with severe or complex issues or as a “last resort” when other services have not worked**

Custody Evaluations and Court Services

➤ Purpose:

- To gather information to aid the Court in its decision making process.

➤ Components:

- Interviews of all parties involved/relevant
- Interviews of children
- Home visits
- Collaterals/references

➤ Costs: All fees MUST be paid in order for a Custody Evaluation or Court Service to begin.

➤ Important: Personal Data Form to be completed and brought to interview.

******PERSONAL DATA FORM MUST BE FILLED OUT COMPLETELY******

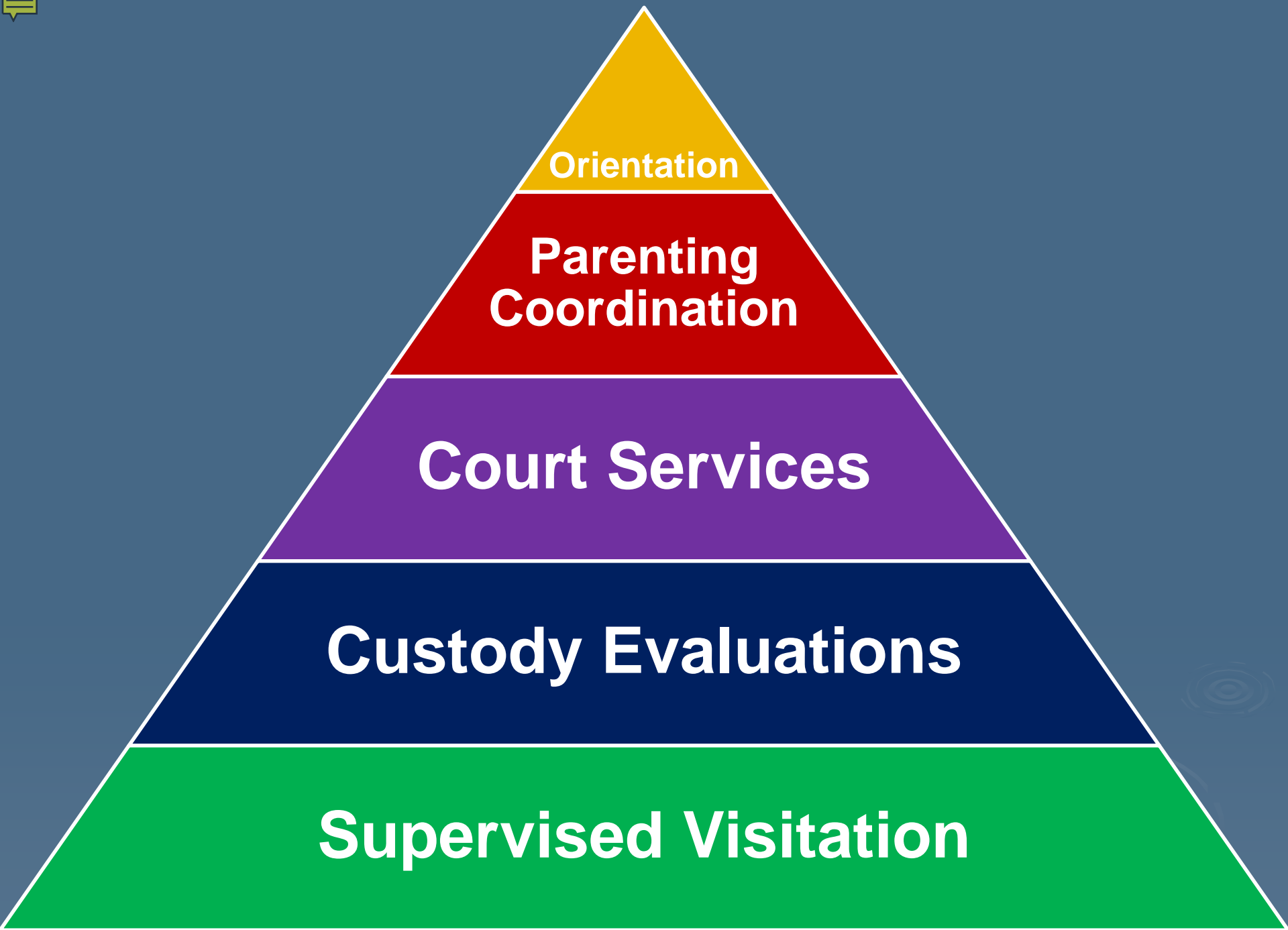
Reasons for a Custody Evaluation



- Child Abuse
- Drugs and/or Alcohol Abuse
- Family Violence
- Alienation
- Child's Choice
- Moving Away
- Child Support
- Supervised Visitation

Supervised Visitation Exchanges-Visitation Ctr- Community Supervision

Supervised Exchanges and Visitation provides a safe and comfortable environment so parents and children can continue to maintain healthy relationships.



Orientation

**Parenting
Coordination**

Court Services

Custody Evaluations

Supervised Visitation

True or False

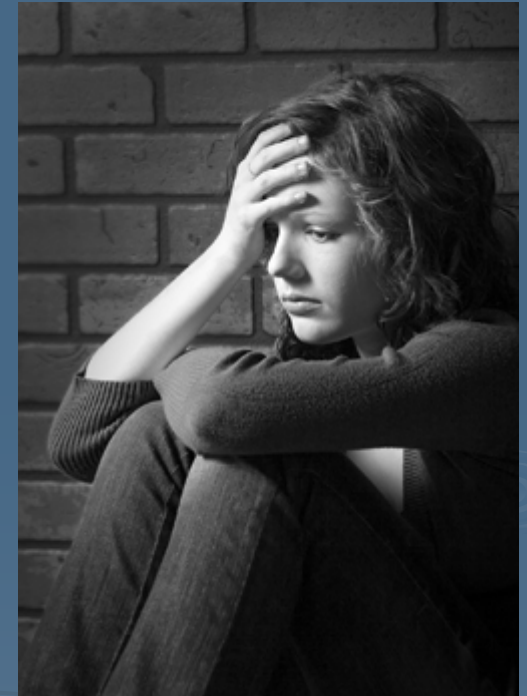
Custody litigation does not effect the future lives of the children involved beyond a change in custody or the visitation schedule



FALSE

Fact

- Studies show that children whose parents participate in litigation are more likely to:
 - Use illegal drugs
 - Enter the juvenile justice system
 - Become teen parents
 - Drop out of school
 - Run away from home
 - Become divorced themselves
 - Have a harder time maintaining jobs
 - Have emotional/behavioral problems



Stages of Grief

Kubler-Ross cites 5 stages of grief that are applicable to any loss (including divorce/separation)

➤ Denial

- Fantasy thinking, believing nothing has changed

➤ Anger

- Blaming opposite parent for everything that is wrong

➤ Bargaining

- If I _____, will you _____?

➤ Depression

- Withdrawal from friends, family and activities. No thoughts about the future.

➤ Acceptance

- Moving away from the past, being able to plan for the future.

Emotion vs. Process (Progress)

- More conflict between parents generally leads to an increase in child behavioral problems
- Parents are often functioning at two different Stages of Grief, and this may cause conflict
 - The stages people spend the most time in are Anger and Depression
- It is important to recognize your own feelings and to not let them negatively interfere with your process of moving forward.

True or False

Attending or seeking out Therapy or Counseling in regard to any issue you may be having is recognized as a weakness within the Family Court System.

FALSE

Fact

Going to Therapy or Counseling is a step toward **bettering** oneself and could therefore be looked upon as positive within the context of the Family Court System.



True or False

My child is too young to realize/know what is going on

FALSE



Fact

Studies have shown that children as young as **6 WEEKS** old are able to recognize tensions between their parents.

While children may not be able to describe what is going on, they are able to understand the situation and feel emotional about it. *

*Hughes, R. (2011). *Divorce and children: An interview with Robert Hughes, Jr., PhD*. Retrieved from <http://www.athealth.com/consumer/disorders/childrendivorce.html>

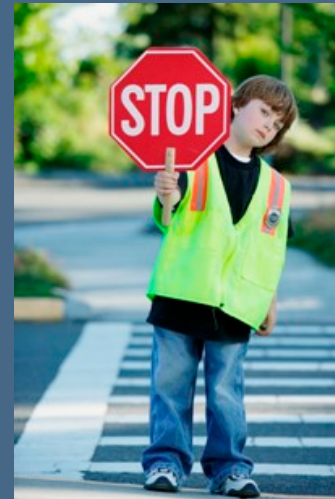
The Family Court System

- This court house serves Tarrant County and its 1.8 MILLION population.
- There are 6 District Courts in this building
- If you are going to be a part of this system, you need to have a guide (i.e., a lawyer) to help you not only get through the system, but also prevent you from falling through the cracks.
- **Remember:** Your lawyer works FOR YOU.

Time Spent

- **Do not expect** your encounter with the Family Court System to be **brief**.
- Remember a Custody Evaluation will take an average of three months to complete

How to Fail



- Talk negatively about the other parent
- Question your child about the other parent
- Ask your children where they want to live
- Make your child feel guilty for the time that they spend with the other parent
- Ask your child to deliver messages
- Withhold child support and/or visitation
- Allow your child to manipulate you because you feel guilty
- Ask your child to keep secrets

How to Succeed

- Control your own actions
 - Do not push the other parents' buttons
- Do not make false accusations
- Support your child's relationship with the other parent
- Learn to successfully co-parent
- Communicate with the other parent, share information with them
- Provide structure, stability and consistency
- Help your child cope with their feelings



True or False

A child over the age of 12 can sign an Affidavit of Preference to indicate to the Court which parent they would like to live with.

FALSE

Fact

- Affidavits of Preference were once a part of the Texas Family Code, however they were removed on September 1st, 2009. *
- Remember: If you cannot choose between your two children, you cannot expect your child to choose between you and the other parent.



* Rucker, H.D., Naylor, S.J., & Sheridan, J.C. (2010). *Life after the child preference: Where do we go from here*. Retrieved from <http://utcle.org/eLibrary/preview.php.?asset.file.id=23614>

Remember

- Your children will spend more time as adults than as kids and your relationship with them now will dictate the relationship that you have with them in the future when they **HAVE** a choice.
- If you are not co-parenting well, things will get more difficult. You **DO NOT** want to **CO-PARENT** with a **JUDGE!**

**For a copy of this slide show,
videos, additional Information,
resources and MORE:**

Visit our mobile-friendly Web Page at

www.tarrantcounty.com

**Scroll down to Departments and click on
Family Court Services**