

perspectives

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula

Life coach writing book on raising children in joint-custody arrangements

Positive parenting after divorce

Hannah Sutherland
Staff Reporter

While Karen Kristjanson was raising her children in a joint-custody arrangement with her ex-husband, she didn't know of anyone else doing the same.

"That was a pretty rare thing to do," she said. "Especially at that time, the norm was the (mother) would be the sole caregiver."

But Kristjanson took the road less travelled after divorcing 18 years ago and splitting the care of her sons – then five and eight years old – equally with their father.

She said the choice, as noted in research, can have positive impacts on a child, in terms of self confidence, education and maintaining good relationships with both parents. "Fathers and mothers bring different things to parenting – it's very hard for one person to do both those things," she said. Wanting to help others who are practising or considering shared parenting,

Kristjanson – who became a certified life and leadership coach two years ago – is researching for a book she plans to write on the topic. The South Surrey resident aims to interview at least 60 parents whose children spend equal time between two households, drawing on themes and anecdotes from their experiences. She would also like to speak to youth 15 and older who have lived in shared parenting situations, to learn about their thoughts and feelings on the arrangement.

Kristjanson, who has already completed a handful of interviews, said she anticipates gaining various viewpoints on what makes shared parenting work and what some of the difficulties are.

"The thing I found so far is you have to be prepared to be a big person – put aside some of your own feelings and quarrels."

The book won't be a how-to on shared parenting so much as a resource that explains how it feels for those going through it, Kristjanson said. She hopes it offers parents a support she didn't have nearly 20 years ago.

"When I was doing this, I didn't know anyone else doing shared parenting. There still aren't that many people doing this."

Aside from her book, Kristjanson said she has also developed a half-day workshop to help people understand shared parenting. While it hasn't been finalized, she hopes to have it running in the fall. Despite some of the apparent benefits of shared parenting, Kristjanson is quick to note that it's not for everyone, especially in cases that involve abuse, addictions or other threats to safety.

"Parenting is a very personal thing," she said. "It's so individual."

Parents interested in being interviewed for Kristjanson's book can contact her at coachkaren.beyondlimits@gmail.com

The interviews tend to be one to two hours, and held at a location convenient for the participants, who will remain anonymous in the publication.



Karen Kristjanson, a South Surrey life coach, is gathering research for a book about being a parent after divorce.

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