



Anyone who has ever shared a bedroom or a bathroom knows that family living arrangements are complex and often require creativity, flexibility and a leap of faith from everyone involved. This is particularly true of families rebuilding after separation or divorce.

When families with children separate, critical questions arise around who will make decisions on behalf of the children (legal custody), where those children will live (physical custody) and how they will split their time with their parents (physical custody and access). Most families work out these details without actively engaging the family court system.

In Canada, nearly 1.2 million kids live with divorced or separated parents. Almost three-quarters (70%) of these children spend most of their time living with their mothers, 1 in 6 live primarily with their fathers and less than 1 in 10 divide their time equally between the two homes.<sup>1</sup>

From a gender perspective, these arrangements appear out of step with modern family dynamics. The majority of today's parents, regardless of marital status, blend paid work with raising children. More than two-thirds (69%) of mothers with children under the age of 2 and 84% of those with kids over 6 are in the paid labour market.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, women in dual-earner families are outearning their male partners (29%).<sup>3</sup>

Fathers are more involved than ever before in housework, caregiving and raising kids. More men are taking advantage of parental leave benefits (9% in 2004 vs. 13% in 2009), particularly in Quebec, where uptake of the Parental Insurance Program (five weeks of leave just for fathers) rose from 22% in 2004 to 79% in 2009.

Many families aren't waiting for the law to catch up with these new realities, especially in the wake of

separation and divorce. Some are turning convention on its head and adapting new and creative living arrangements in the face of change. In her book *Reconcilable Differences: Marriages End. Families Don't*, Cate Cochran explores life when couples call it quits, reminding us that there is no one family model.<sup>4</sup>

Among the arrangements families are making, "living together apart" (LTA) is growing in popularity. Being part of an LTA household means that parents and children continue to live together under the same roof (maybe even with new partners) with some combination of shared and discrete space. This could mean Mom and the kids living downstairs and Dad living upstairs, with the kids moving freely in between. In others, it means building or adapting a house so that each parent has a self-contained "home within a home," connected by common space (such as the children's bedrooms) to facilitate the children's movement between each "home," according to a set schedule.

Whether by necessity or design, living in an LTA family offers parents and children a means of balancing the desire for proximity, connectivity and financial security with the privacy and space needed to move forward in a new and supportive way.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada (2012), *Distribution of Separated or Divorced Parents, by Primary Residence of Their Children, Canada, 2011*, <http://bit.ly/17vVieg>.

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Battams (2013), *The Economic Well-Being of Women in Canada*, Ottawa: Vanier Institute of the Family, <http://bit.ly/1dyWgyD>.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada (2012), *Economic Well-Being* by Cara Williams, <http://bit.ly/RkznTv>.

<sup>4</sup> Cate Cochran (2007), *Reconcilable Differences: Marriages End. Families Don't*, Toronto: Second Story Press.