

## Long distance parenting: ideas for staying in touch

*By Kathleen Robertson (excerpted from Family Law News)*

Here are some ideas for parents who live far from their children to stay in regular touch with their children and keep current with their children's interests and activities.

**Write to your child:** You do not need to write long letters. Just a simple "I love you and I am thinking about you" is enough. Send a postcard weekly. Select scenic cards from the area in which you live, scenic cards from where you visit or take business trips, humorous cards, or cards of a particular interest to your child.

**Collections:** Start a collection that is unique to you and your child. It can be something your child is interested in, such as Star Wars cards, stuffed animals, or baseball cards. Send something from places you visit, for special occasions and "just because".

**Read to your child:** Read a story or a book in your own voice onto a tape. Buy your child a tape player that is age-appropriate (consider earphones), teach your child how to operate the player, and send the tapes. Read from age-appropriate literature. It is an easy way for your child to hear your voice every day. You may also want to send the stories or books so your child can read along.

**Subscribe to a magazine for your child:** Kids love getting mail addressed to them. There are many age-appropriate magazines that are reasonably priced and often contain activities you can discuss with your child. When the magazine arrives, your child thinks of you.

**Send E-mails to your child:** Many households now have computers and the kids are more computer literate than the parents! You can set up an Internet account so that you and your child can write every day, every week, or at some regular interval. It can just be "hi" to celebrate a special event, or just to report about a normal day. It is an easy way to stay in touch.

**Start a photo album or scrap album for your child:** Buy an album and send pictures of you doing routine daily things as well as trips and special events. Take pictures when your child is with you and send them. When with your child, take time to update the album or scrapbook with pictures and memorabilia related to the memories you and your children are creating.

**Watch TV shows "with your child:** find a TV show that your child enjoys and "watch it together". You may be miles apart but you each know you are "sharing" the show.

When you talk on the phone, you have something in common to discuss. It may be a great ice-breaker.

**Give your child a phone card or establish a 1-800 number:** you can purchase phone cards for your child that have a determined number of long-distance minutes to call you without any help. 1-800 numbers are not very expensive. This will enable your child to call you whenever he or she wants to tell you something or just hear your voice.

**Communicate with your child's teacher:** Make arrangements with your child's teacher to send copies of your child's work regularly. Provide stamped, addressed envelopes. Most teachers are happy to oblige. Also arrange a regular time to talk to your child's teacher. You'll feel much closer.

**Telephone your child:** this is the easiest of all forms of communication. When talking to your child, remember to talk about what he or she is interested in. Refrain from using this time to berate the child for a less than stellar report card or a behavior problem. Use this time for positive communication and praise--talk about the stories you have sent or the fun thing that you and your child recently did together. Remind them of the memories you are saving in scrapbooks or photo albums and tell them about your life. Most importantly, take every opportunity to tell your child how much you love him/her!