

WHERE'S MY STUFF?

WHEN YOU LIVE IN TWO DIFFERENT PLACES

Evan: Basically, kids need a place for everything at both houses and you need to learn how to keep track of your stuff. Otherwise, you end up incredibly frustrated. Last year when I came home from camp, my trunk ended up at Mom's and I still haven't found my favorite shorts. This can be a big problem. Of course, there's a good part, too. When you live in two different places, you learn to be more responsible, which you'll need later when you're grown up.

Zoe: Yeah, but meanwhile, it's a hassle. Sometimes I forget my backpack at Mom's house and then Dad has to drive over there at 10 o'clock at night and he gets really mad. But it's not my fault. I don't drive! I think every set of divorced parents should have a special tube with a button where a little green man delivers the stuff that's left from one house to another.

Sometimes you just end up buying duplicates so you have two of everything. When my parents first got divorced, I used to take my stuff in this blue suitcase from one house to the other and it was a pain in the butt. I felt like I was going on a trip. Now we've worked it out so that I have most of what I need at both houses. But the good part is it's fun to live at two different houses, 'cause you get to have different lifestyles.

Evan: I agree. Half the time I live in this 100-year-old house with hissing radiators, Jamaican pictures on the walls, and about 29 different

chairs. The rest of the time I live in a new apartment with an indoor garage and a pop machine. Luckily, I like both places, but sometimes it would be easier to have one bedroom so I'd know exactly where I live and not have to go back and forth. I feel safer and more secure when most of my stuff is all in one place where I know how to find it.

Zoe: I really feel like I have two homes. When I'm sick, I like to be at Dad's. He always knows where the thermometer is and there's a TV in my bedroom. But I like having my friends come over to Mom's 'cause she hangs out with us and they think she's really cool.

What it really comes down to is getting used to two different homes and making sure you know where you're going to be so you have what you need. You have to work together with your parents so that they tell you exactly what the schedule is, but then you need to remember where you're going and be as responsible as possible.

Dear Zoe,

I have one bike. I like to bike at Mom's house 'cause it's close to the lake, and I like to bike at Dad's house 'cause I have lots of friends in the neighborhood. When Mom picks me up at Dad's, we have to get my bike in and out of Mom's car, which is really a pain. Then, if it ends up at her house and it's my night at Dad's, I either have to ask Dad to go get it or call Mom and ask her to bring it over.

I've told my parents I need a bike at both houses, but they say we can't afford another one right now. I don't want to pressure my parents about getting another bike but I'm really getting frustrated. Any ideas?

Jamie, age 10

Dear Jamie,

Boy, that's rough. Since you're only 10, you're stuck with depending on your parents to schlep your stuff back and forth, which isn't so great. But it isn't the worst thing in the world. You can help by thinking ahead about when you'll really need your bike and asking them nicely to help you bring it back and forth. Obviously, the best solution would be a bike at both houses, but you shouldn't pressure your parents too much. Divorce causes a lot of money problems and they may not be able to afford one.

Here are a few other ideas: You could ask to do some chores around the house so that you can buy a used bike—they can be real cheap at garage sales. You can put a bike at the top of your birthday or Christmas list, so that you know that eventually you'll have one at both places. You could also look around for a used skateboard because it's easier to transport from one house to the other. Another way to solve the problem is to ask your friends to come to your house on the days you don't have your bike. And if all else fails, you might just have to walk.

Yours truly,

Zoe

EVAN'S QUICK TIPS

1. **Get organized. Make sure you know what you need whenever you switch places.**
2. **Ask for a weekly written schedule of where you'll be when. This is perfectly reasonable.**
3. **Put up a checklist of your important things. Before you leave, put a mark next to what you're taking so you won't be caught off guard.**
4. **Find a central place in your room where you can put all the things that you normally take back and forth—your backpack, jacket, or iPod—so that it's easy to find them.**
5. **Ask your parents to help you get the basic stuff you need at both houses.**

TEN YEARS LATER, (ZOE) ✧

Now that I'm older I only live in one place and I *still* don't know where all my stuff is! When I think back on my parents' divorce, apart from the frustration of losing and forgetting stuff it was actually fun to have two different houses to do different things. For example, my dad's house was a little calmer and I got more reading done there, but I really enjoyed having my friends over to my mom's house to hang out, where we had a pond to go skating. In some ways, having stuff at two different houses actually gave me more possibilities of what I could do. And if you still don't know where your stuff is, don't feel too bad, because even people who only live in one place don't know where all their stuff is either!

What Their Mom Has to Say

As Zoe and Evan point out, there are both pros and cons to living in two different places. On the one hand, you're forced to keep better track of your belongings, and at times you may forget something you need—the book you're in the middle of or your stuffed animal—and have to go without it. You have to be extra organized. You may or may not like the living arrangements your parents have made, which is always worth trying to talk with them about.

Although we still struggle at times—Evan ends up at his Dad’s without his basketball or Zoe needs her new jeans for a party and they’re at the wrong house—we’ve instituted a few rules that make it easier. Before the kids leave my house, we talk about the plans for the next few days and decide what they will need to bring. If they forget something, they don’t have it. But if I forget to remind them, then it’s up to me to deliver it, especially if it’s something important like a homework assignment that’s due the next day. The older Zoe and Evan get, the more responsibility they have for making sure they have what they need.

On the positive side, there are some real advantages to living in two different homes. You might get to have two sets of neighborhood friends. Or you might enjoy having each of your parents’ undivided attention when you’re with them.

YOUR TURN *

- What DON’T you like about living in two different places?
- What DO you like about living in two different places?
- Have you talked to your parents about how you feel about your living arrangements?
- Is there anything you can do to make things run more smoothly when it’s time for you to make the switch?

I am responsible.

I can keep track of my stuff.

* Chapter 5 *

IT’S NOT YOUR FAULT

IF YOU FEEL GUILTY OR RESPONSIBLE

Evan: This is something grown-ups think is a big deal and worry about, but I seriously don’t think most kids have this issue. But if you actually think it’s your fault that your parents got divorced, take it from me: it’s not. It never was. It never will be. They would have gotten divorced anyway, so quit worrying that it’s something you did.

Zoe: You know, that’s good advice. But I can see how you might wonder if you had something to do with the divorce, especially if some of your parents’ fights had to do with them arguing about stuff like how to raise you or whose turn it is to drive the car pool or whether or not you’re old enough to get your ears pierced.

Evan: Yeah, but all parents fight about that stuff. It’s really really bad if you feel guilty. You’ll always think there’s something you could have done, but you have to keep telling yourself that you had nothing to do with it. Of course, you’re part of the family and your parents may have argued about things that involve you, but that still doesn’t make it your fault. Your parents got divorced because of their differences, not because of anything you did.

Zoe: But even if you know that, you might worry that you could have helped by being better behaved or more cooperative. Still, you have to try to not take this on. Just keep telling yourself, “I didn’t cause it. There’s nothing I can do to fix it.”