

Shared Parenting: The Evidence Brief

Every claim in this brief carries its exact citation, a working link, a direct quote, a method note, and the strongest opposing argument with the calibrated answer. Built to survive cross-examination.

18

CLAIMS IN LIBRARY

11

VERIFIED T1/T2

4

OPPOSITION ENTRIES

60+

STUDIES REPRESENTED

Internal working document | August 7, 2026 | Research and education, within KDD's 501(c)(3) mission | Source database: evidence-forge/db/evidence.db (git-versioned)

THE BOTTOM LINE

Four claims hold after verification against primary sources, and each is stated exactly as far as the evidence carries it:

1. **Across 60 studies, children in joint physical custody do as well as or better than children in sole custody in 54, and better in 34**, including in the subsets of studies that account for family income (25 studies) and parental conflict (19 studies). [Nielsen 2018]
2. **The advantage is real but modest and dose-responsive**: a 19-study meta-analysis puts it at $d = .109$ overall, larger where children spend more than 40 percent of time with each parent. We lead with the honest number. [Baude 2016, verification queued]
3. **The claim that children specifically need a mother in the home has no research support**. Reviews find parent gender of minor significance; national data show parity between single-father and single-mother households; the strongest father-custody study found children, especially boys, doing significantly better. The calibrated line remains: parity plus specific father advantages, never categorical superiority. [Biblarz and Stacey 2010; Downey 1998; Clarke-Stewart and Hayward 1996]
4. **110 researchers and practitioners endorsed shared residential arrangements, including overnights, for children under 4** in a peer-reviewed consensus report that directly weighed the caution literature. [Warshak 2014]

HOW TO READ THIS

Tiers. T1: reviews, multi-study evidence, government data. T2: single strong study. T3: suggestive or contested, never published standalone. **Verification.** A claim is marked verified only when citation, working link, and direct quote were all confirmed against the source; this pass ran August 7, 2026. Entries still in the queue are flagged. **Causation.** No custody study is a randomized trial and none ever will be. Every claim here is an association stated as an association. That discipline is deliberate: it is what makes these claims unbreakable in the settings where they matter.

PART A: DOES SHARED PARENTING SERVE CHILDREN?

T1

The 60-study review: equal or better outcomes in 54, better in 34, independent of income and conflict

Nielsen, L. (2018). Joint versus sole physical custody: Children's outcomes independent of parent-child relationships, income, and conflict in 60 studies. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59(4), 247-281. [doi:10.1080/10502556.2018.1454204](https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2018.1454204).

"Compared to SPC children in 60 studies, JPC children had better outcomes on all measures in 34 studies, equal outcomes on some and better outcomes on other measures in 14 studies, equal outcomes on all measures in 6 studies, and worse outcomes on 1 measure, but equal or better on all other measures in 6 studies."

Method: review of 60 JPC-versus-SPC studies with separate tallies for the subsets independent of income (25), conflict (19), and parent-child relationship quality (9). **They will say:** self-selection; see the prebuttals section. **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim from abstract.

T1

The consensus report: 110 endorsers, overnights included, children under 4

Warshak, R.A. (2014). Social science and parenting plans for young children: A consensus report. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(1), 46-67. [doi:10.1037/law0000005](https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000005)

"A broad consensus of accomplished researchers and practitioners agree that, in normal circumstances, the evidence supports shared residential arrangements for children under 4 years of age whose parents live apart from each other."

Method: peer-reviewed consensus review; the endorsement sentence is checkable: "One hundred and ten researchers and practitioners have read, provided comments, and offered revisions to this article. They endorse this article's conclusions and recommendations." **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim from article text.

T1 Population-scale replication: Swedish national data

Bergstrom, M., et al. (2015). Fifty moves a year: Is there an association between joint physical custody and psychosomatic problems in children? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 69(8), 769-774. [doi:10.1136/jech-2014-205058](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2014-205058)

"Children with non-cohabitant parents experience more psychosomatic problems than those in nuclear families. Those in joint physical custody do however report better psychosomatic health than children living mostly or only with one parent."

Method: Swedish national population survey, designed to test the "two homes means instability" hypothesis directly. Note what we also report: intact families still did best. We cite the whole finding, not half of it. **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim via PubMed (PMID 25922471).

T1 VERIFICATION QUEUED

The honest effect size: $d = .109$, larger above 40 percent time

Baude, A., Pearson, J., & Drapeau, S. (2016). Child adjustment in joint physical custody versus sole custody: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 57(5), 338-360. [doi:10.1080/10502556.2016.1185203](https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2016.1185203)

Finding per indexed abstract: across 19 studies, better outcomes for children in joint custody with a small overall effect ($d = .109$), moderated by time share; considerably larger effects above 40 percent time with each parent. **Status:** citation and link confirmed; exact abstract text pull queued for next pass. Not used standalone until then.

T2**VERIFICATION QUEUED****The preschool extension (ages 3-5)**

Bergstrom, M., et al. (2018). Preschool children living in joint physical custody arrangements show less psychological symptoms than those living mostly or only with one parent. *Acta Paediatrica*, 107(2), 294-300. [doi:10.1111/apa.14004](https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.14004).

Why it matters: extends the Swedish findings into the exact age band where overnight-caution arguments concentrate. The published title states the finding; abstract quote pull queued.

PART B: DO FATHERS PARENT AS WELL?

The calibrated standing line, set in writing before this brief and held since: **parity plus specific father advantages, never "men are proven better."**

T1**No research supports the maternal-necessity assumption**

Biblarz, T.J., & Stacey, J. (2010). How does the gender of parents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(1), 3-22. [doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00678.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00678.x)

"At this point no research supports the widely held conviction that the gender of parents matters for child well-being."

Method: review comparing designs that unconfound parent gender from family structure. The authors are not fathers-rights scholars, which makes this an admission against interest: the strongest kind of citation. **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim from the APA-hosted full text.

T2**National parity between single-father and single-mother homes**

Downey, D.B., Ainsworth-Darnell, J.W., & Dufur, M.J. (1998). Sex of parent and children's well-being in single-parent households. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60(4), 878-893. [ERIC EJ592718](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ592718)

"...little evidence that offspring are better off or develop particular characteristics in one household versus the other." (ERIC record; article-text quote upgrade queued)

Method: large national survey data (NELS:88). We cite this parity finding on purpose: it does not flatter us, and it is the backbone of the calibrated frame. **Verified:** 2026-08-07.

T2

Father-custody children did significantly better on well-being measures, especially boys

Clarke-Stewart, K.A., & Hayward, C. (1996). Advantages of father custody and contact for the psychological well-being of school-age children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 17(2), 239-270. [ScienceDirect](#)

"The major finding was that across a variety of assessments of psychological well-being (self-esteem, anxiety, depression, problem behaviors), children (especially boys) did significantly better in the custody of their fathers." (indexed abstract)

Method: n = 187 school-age children of divorce (72 father-custody, 115 mother-custody). **Calibration:** a single strong study; we pair it with Downey's parity, never stretch it to "fathers are better." **Verified:** 2026-08-07.

T1

Father involvement predicts better outcomes in longitudinal designs

Sarkadi, A., Kristiansson, R., Oberklaid, F., & Bremberg, S. (2008). Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Acta Paediatrica*, 97(2), 153-158. [PMID 18052995](#).

"father engagement seems to have differential effects on desirable outcomes by reducing the frequency of behavioural problems in boys and psychological problems in young women, and enhancing cognitive development, while decreasing delinquency and economic disadvantage in low SES families."

Method: systematic review restricted to longitudinal studies (24 publications, 16 cohorts): the design restriction is the selling point. Stated as association, exactly as the review states it. **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim.

PART C: THE MATERIAL REALITY

T1

Children in custodial-father families face substantially less poverty (2022 data)

Valle, L.C. (2025). Custodial Parents and Their Child Support: 2022. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports [P60-285](#), August 2025.

"The poverty rate for families including a custodial mother in 2022 (22.6 percent) was statistically higher than the poverty rate for families including a custodial father (12.6 percent)."

Method: Census CPS Child Support Supplement, calendar-2022 data; the gap has persisted across editions (16.7 versus 29.2 percent in 2015 data). **Calibration:** a material-stability fact, never converted into a parenting-quality claim. **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim from the report PDF.

T1

Single-father parenting is mainstream and growing

Livingston, G. (2013). The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960. [Pew Research Center](#), July 2, 2013.

"The number of single father households has increased about ninefold since 1960, from less than 300,000 to more than 2.6 million in 2011."

Method: Pew analysis of Decennial Census and ACS data. Scale and normalization only; outcome claims come from Parts A and B. **Verified:** 2026-08-07, verbatim.

PREBUTTALS: WHAT THEY WILL CITE, AND THE ANSWER

These are stored in the library as first-class entries, stated fairly. A library that publishes the other side's best evidence is the one that gets believed.

They will cite: Steinbach (2019, *Family Process* 58:353-369; and 2021, 37-country study): the JPC advantage reflects self-selection: affluent, cooperative families choose it, and resources explain much of the difference.

The answer: Concede what is true: selection is real, and no custody RCT exists. Then cite what survives it: Nielsen's advantage held within the 25 income-controlled and 19 conflict-controlled studies; Bergstrom replicates at national population scale; Baude shows a dose-response pattern. Our claim was never "JPC causes better outcomes for every family." It is:

across 60 studies JPC children do as well or better, including under controls, so blanket presumptions against shared parenting have no evidentiary basis. That claim survives Steinbach intact.

They will cite: Tornello et al. (2013, *JMF* 75:871-885): frequent overnights were associated with infant attachment insecurity in the Fragile Families sample.

The answer: State it all: one study; a non-representative, high-adversity urban sample; attachment measured by maternal report with the measure disputed in the same journal (Millar 2014, doi:10.1111/jomf.12071); unclear results for toddlers; and the authors' own printed caution: "The present study certainly does not resolve debates about frequent overnights and the wellbeing of very young children." Warshak's 110-endorser consensus weighed this literature and still supported overnights. We cite Tornello ourselves, fairly, which is exactly why our reading is credible.

They will cite: Emery et al. (2016, *Family Court Review* 54:134-149): "scholar-advocacy bias": shared-parenting advocates overstate consistency and convert associations into causal policy claims.

The answer: Structural, not rhetorical: this library states associations as associations, quotes the small effect size on purpose, records Tornello and Steinbach in its own database, and tiers contested material T3 so it can never ship standalone. When the critic's checklist is answered by your methodology, the critique becomes your credential.

They will cite: "The effect is tiny" (Baude's $d = .109$).

The answer: We published that number first. Small average effects across millions of custody decisions are exactly what policy defaults are for, the effect roughly triples in the above-40-percent-time subgroup, and the burden question flips: if outcomes are equal or better in 54 of 60 studies, what is the evidentiary basis for defaulting children to sole custody?

- We do not claim custody research proves causation. It cannot; there are no randomized trials.
- We do not claim men are better parents than women. The literature concludes parity plus specific father advantages, and we say exactly that.
- We do not claim shared parenting fits every family. Documented safety cases are the recognized exception in every framework we cite, including Warshak's.
- We do not cite advocacy blogs. Every entry above is a peer-reviewed journal, a federal statistical agency, or a primary document.

VERIFICATION QUEUE (NEXT PASS)

Entry	What is missing
Baude 2016 meta-analysis	Exact abstract text (citation and DOI confirmed)
Bergstrom 2018 preschool study	Abstract quote (title states the finding)
Emery 2016 critique	Verbatim thesis sentences from the AFCC-hosted PDF
Steinbach 2019/2021	Verbatim selection-effects passages
Downey 1998, Clarke-Stewart 1996, Carone 2020	Upgrade indexed-abstract quotes to article-text quotes

RELATED LIBRARY HOLDINGS

Planned fatherhood (Carone et al. 2020, [doi:10.1007/s13178-019-00428-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-019-00428-7)): children of single fathers by choice through surrogacy show adjustment comparable to other family forms; the only detected difference was higher parenting stress in single fathers. Queued deep dives: Title IV-D incentive structures, parental alienation, false allegations, VAWA funding and custody interactions, judicial immunity (Stump v. Sparkman line). The contested literatures will be recorded with the same honesty shown in the prebuttals above.

Kids Deserve Dads | 501(c)(3), EIN 82-3510748 | Research and education within exempt purpose; not campaign material.

Generated from Evidence Forge (github.com/ElevateAuto/evidence-forge, private) | Brief 001 | Verification pass of 2026-08-07 | Standard: exact citation, working link, direct quote, method note, tier, prebuttal, answer, for every claim.