Child Custody Tool #4: Understanding Patterns of Coercive or Concerning Behavior in Custody Cases

For Survivor-Parents Navigating Custody, Child Welfare, or Protective Orders



NATIONAL CENTER TO ADVANCE PEACE
for Children, Youth, and Families

The National Center to Advance Peace for Children, Youth, and Families (NCAP) is a coalition led by Caminar Latino and includes Ujima: National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, the Alaska Native Women's Resource Center, the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, and Futures Without Violence.

AKNWRC ALASKA NATIVE WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

Caminar Latino

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

Ujima
The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community

What This Tool Is

This tool helps you summarize patterns over time. Sometimes individual incidents may seem small on their own. However, repeated behavior can show:

- Escalation
- Ongoing coercive control (a pattern of behavior used to control, scare, isolate, or dominate you, such as threats, constant monitoring, financial control, manipulation though the children or attempts to interfere with your parenting)
- Retaliation
- Emotional harm to children
- Violations of court orders

Courts and agencies often need help seeing patterns clearly.

This resource is part of a set of child custody resources designed to be used together.

- **Resource 3: Documenting Visitation and Safety Concerns Log** helps you record specific incidents and concerns as they happen.
- **Resource 4: Understanding Patterns of Coercive or Concerning Behavior** helps you step back and identify patterns across those incidents over time.

This tool builds on that work by helping you organize and prepare your information for conversations with attorneys, advocates, or for court.

Using these tools together can help you clearly explain not just what happened, but how behaviors are repeated, how they impact your child, and why they matter for safety and custody decisions.

Why Patterns Matter

A single missed drop-off may not seem significant. But repeated late returns, threats during exchanges, or interference with schooling can demonstrate a larger concern. This section helps you step back and describe:

- What keeps happening
- How often it happens
- Whether it is escalating
- How it impacts your child

Preparing Documentation for Court

If you are involved in a custody case, or may return to court in the future, describing patterns clearly can be important. Courts often look at repeated behavior over time when deciding issues related to parenting plans, visitation, supervision, or safety. This section helps you organize information in a way that may support:

- Requests to modify custody or visitation
- Enforcement of court orders
- Conversations with your attorney
- Preparation for hearings or mediation

Judges typically respond best to specific examples, time frames, and observable facts rather than general statements. Instead of saying, “This keeps happening,” try describing how often something occurs and how it affects your child.

If Child Protective Services (CPS) becomes involved, this information may also help explain patterns that affect your child’s safety or well-being. However, this tool is primarily designed to support preparation in family court custody matters. As you complete this section, focus on clarity, consistency, and concrete details.

How to Use This Tool

Use this tool:

- After several incidents have occurred
- Before meeting with your attorney
- When requesting a modification
- When preparing for court
- When talking with a caseworker

Be specific about time frames:

- “Over the past three months”
- “Since the new visitation order”
- “Every other weekend since January”

Reminder

Patterns can include:

- Emotional manipulation
- Undermining parenting
- Using children to pass messages
- Failure to follow court-ordered supervision
- Financial pressure connected to custody
-

For definitions of legal terms (e.g., “modification,” “supervised visitation,” “reasonable suspicion”), refer to the Child Custody Glossary.

Time Period Covered (*days, months, years)*:

_____
_____
_____

Behavior or Concerns that keep coming up:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

How often does this behavior or concern occur or come up:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Describe any escalation, retaliation, or changes:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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