Once a week, almost one in ten Swedish children moves between two homes, replacing the routines and practices of one household with those of another. They are children in dual residence arrangements, dividing their time equally between two households after parental separation. Being on the move physically, as well as emotionally and relationally, is a part of their everyday lives. In this chapter, the author addresses children’s perspectives on living their everyday lives in two households and belonging to two homes and how they make sense of regularly shifting between different locations and (perhaps) contrasting family practices, rules and routines. Children’s accounts reveal how moving becomes a routine everyday practice, yet the regular change is perceived differently by different children. While highly valued by some, others find it difficult to handle the emotional stress of constantly leaving one parent behind, or the practical juggling of packing and moving. In the children’s accounts, they reveal how they take part in shaping their dual family lives, post-separation. The chapter draws on qualitative interviews with 20 children and young people living in dual residence arrangements. By using family practices as the analytical focus when analysing children’s accounts, the aim is to understand how everyday life is shaped by mobility. It is argued that the practices associated with dual residence are deeply embedded in physical, emotional and relational dimensions of mobility.

Keywords: Children; dual residence; family change; children’s mobility; family practices; emotion
Introduction

Ella (10): Well it is kind of varied to live every second week [in each home], I think it’s exciting and good. I kind of wonder what it would be like to live full-time!

Interviewer: Well, what do you think?
Ella: Weird!

Ella’s parents divorced six years before the interview quoted above. For almost as long as she can remember, Ella and her brother have travelled between their two homes, spending one week with their father and the next with their mother, step-father and two step siblings. Like many other children in Sweden, Ella practices dual residence, alternating her home life between the homes of her parents after separation or divorce. Her statement above illustrates how practicing mobility has become a routine experience and an ordinary part of her everyday life. It also illustrates family change and reveals how children’s everyday lives can be remodelled after parental separation.

Social change in family life takes place in time and space, but change is also apparent in the lives of individual children (Jensen & McKee, 2003). For example, the increased number of separations and divorces over the last 50 years in Western societies brings changes to the way we conceptualise family as well as to the ways real families are shaped and practice family life. Dual residence is one example of where family is ‘on the move’ both conceptually and in practice; these two aspects of family motion are the focus of this book.

Parental separation is no longer a rare experience and is becoming increasingly part of the ordinary experience of childhood in many societies (Smart, Neale, & Wade, 2001). In Sweden, the parents of about 50,000 children divorce or separate every year and a quarter of children up to the age of 18 have parents who do not live together (Statistics Sweden, 2018). In the aftermath of parental separation, dual residence is an increasingly popular way of arranging for children’s residence and care in several countries (Nielsen, 2018; Smyth, 2017; Steinbach, 2019). Dual residence is particularly common in Sweden, where between 35% and 40% of children with separated parents live alternately, and for about equal amounts of time, with each parent. This can be compared to 4% in the beginning of the 1990s. That equals about 200,000 or one in ten Swedish children (Fransson, Bergström, & Hjern, 2015; Fransson, Hjern, & Bergström, 2018; Statistics Sweden, 2014). Given the large number of ‘mobile children’ (Jensen, 2009) involved, the experiences of these children provide significant material for research.

1 From a Swedish perspective, it is not relevant to distinguish between divorced couples and those who have split up after cohabiting, as only about half of Swedish couples with children are married (Statistics Sweden, 2012). In this text, the term ‘separation’ is used, but the term also includes divorced couples.
The growing body of research studying the lives of children living in such arrangements has focussed particularly on their outcomes in terms of health and well-being, and adjustment (e.g. Bergström et al., 2013; Neoh & Mellor, 2010; Sodermans & Matthijs, 2014; Spruijt & Duindam, 2009). In addition, a small number of studies have explored the lived experiences of children (e.g. Haugen, 2010; Smart et al., 2001; Zartler & Grillenberger, 2017). However, research has not addressed the mobility aspects of dual residence nor the practical and emotional transitions involved when children live in two homes.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the experiences of children with dual residence as regards mobility, which will be discussed in relation to three aspects: the practicalities of alternating homes, the emotions built into these everyday mobility practices and the relational aspects that are central when children alternate between, and belong to, two separate family units. I will argue that these different aspects are intrinsically intertwined.

**Children’s Dual Residence Arrangements**

Dual residence (illustrated by Ella in the introduction) is a relatively recent way of arranging children’s residence and care after their parents’ separation or divorce. Smart and Neale (1999) have described shared care models, that is, dual residence, as post-divorce parenting in which children move between their parents’ homes in order to preserve routine and everyday interaction with both their parents. There is no internationally established term or definition of these arrangements, and terms adopted include (among others) joint or shared physical custody, shared residence, shared parenting, co-parenting and dual residence. This study uses the term ‘dual residence’ (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992) because it places the child at the centre and reflects her/his perspective. Even the definition differs across countries, the term ‘dual residence’ including children whose time spent in the care of each parent ranges from 25% to 50% (Smyth, 2017). The term and definition used in this chapter refers to the specific arrangement in Sweden, where children live (approximately) equally with each parent (Statistics Sweden, 2014; Swedish Social Insurance Services, 2018).

Dual residence arrangements have come about in line with changes in society; these include developing ideas regarding equality of the sexes, mothers increasingly being part of the labour force and changing ideals of fatherhood (Johansson & Andreasson, 2017; Melli & Brown, 2008). While dual residence is a rapidly growing phenomenon in many countries in Western Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia, these arrangements are relatively rare in most countries (Smyth, 2017). The consequences for children of such arrangements have attracted much interest, resulting in a growing (but still limited) field of research across the globe. So far, research has focussed mainly on the potential benefits or risks for children on a group level (Smyth, 2017). There is largely consensus that dual residence

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2 Other patterns where children live with both parents, but not to the same extent, for example, 70% with one parent and 30% with the other, are not referred to as ‘dual residence’ but as ‘extended visitation’.
benefits most children if there are low levels of parental conflict, parents are able to cooperate and children are above the age of four, even if research is not unanimous (Steinbach, 2019). The ways dual residence is practiced and experienced by its practitioners – the children – has received far less attention. Only a few studies have explored the perspectives of children, but they identify several factors as being important in making shared residence arrangements work in the best interests of the child. They are parental cooperation, low levels of conflict, flexibility of the arrangement, the location of both parents in the same community and children having a say over the arrangement. (Berman, 2018; Haugen, 2010; Ottosen, Stage, & Jensen, 2011; Sadowski & McIntosh, 2016; Skjørt, Barlindhaug, & Lidén, 2007; Smart et al., 2001). This study adds to the understanding of children's experiences of dual residence by focussing on dual residence as a mobile practice, involving the practical, emotional and relational dimensions of regular shifts between different homes and family members.

One way of looking at families ‘in motion’ is to use Morgan's (1996, 2011) concept of family practices, which provides the focus in the analysis of children's accounts. Family practices include all those activities related to family matters; the routines, rituals and events that constitute everyday life. These are often ordinary and mundane, but also include special life events that are experienced by a large section of the population (such as partnering, parenthood, divorce and bereavement). Adopting a family practices approach means focussing on what families do rather than their structure, allowing for a more inclusive definition of families. Furthermore, the focus on activities reflects a fluidity and an openness to change; doing family involves negotiations as well as co-construction of family life (Morgan, 2011). The focus on how family is done is particularly relevant for families that are re-shaped after separation. By focussing on the practices performed by dual residence families and the variety of ways in which family life is lived and experienced, it is possible to grasp how children's families are changing and adapting to new circumstances as the children are growing up. Moreover, family practices in dual residence households often involve motion, for example, the regular move between households, packing the bag before the changeover or texting a message to say good night to the absent parent. In this chapter, the concept of family practices is applied to analyse how children participate in and make sense of everyday life and its practical and emotional transitions, in the context of dual residence. The starting point is the sociology of childhood, in which there is a long tradition of listening to children (James & Prout, 1990; Mayall, 1994; Qvortrup, 1993). Accordingly, in the context of separation and divorce children can be understood as active agents in the process of family change (Smart et al., 2001).

The experiences of mobile children and young people in post-separation families challenge some normative expectations about children's mobility. Children are not expected to commute between different places of residence, but rather to move between home and school, and perhaps after-school activities (Holdsworth, 2013). However, moving between homes is an increasingly common experience and an important aspect of children's mobility in Sweden today (even though school is often used as the place of transition).
Methodology

This chapter draws on semi-structured interviews with 20 children and young people, providing a space for them to express their views and reflections on living in dual residence arrangements (see Berman, 2015, 2018, for details on methods). Talking with children about family life and close relationships in relation to separation is a private and sensitive issue and research is subject to specific ethical requirements (Ahlberg, 2008; Swedish Research Council, 2012).

The sample reflected a wide age range (ages 9–17) to allow for an exploration of a range of experiences. The age group was selected because school-aged children were considered to have the cognitive abilities to verbalise their views in an interview. (See, e.g., Christensen & James, 2008, for a discussion of children’s ages in the interview context.)

Participants were consulted concerning the conditions for the interviews (location, timing and whether they wished to be interviewed individually or bring a sibling or friend) and the interviews took place in their homes, in their schools, or at the research office. The interview guide covered broad themes (family, friendships, leisure, school, everyday routines, influence and decision-making, etc.) and the questions were open-ended to encourage participants to bring up their own reflections and relate the topics to whatever other themes they found important. Furthermore, open-ended questions served to adapt the interview to the age and skills of each child (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, & Esplin, 2003).

In the sample, 17 out of 20 children lived every second week in each parent’s home (which is the dominant pattern in Sweden) and almost all families had adapted a system where children took turns in spending Christmas, New Year’s Eve and other important dates with each parent. Residence arrangements were not static; most children made changes to the set-up of the residence arrangement over time, often trying out different days of the week to shift houses or spending different periods of time in each household. A few of them had also tried arrangements where they spent most time with one of the parents. In terms of socio-economic background, the sample was somewhat skewed towards a middle-class background, reflecting the overall composition of the group of Swedish children in dual residence arrangements (Statistics Sweden, 2014). However, a few children from less well-resourced backgrounds also took part. Participants’ experiences of sharing their time between parents ranged from periods of one to fourteen years. As the chapter will show, their experiences were highly diverse, reflecting their varied family circumstances, family constellations and family cultures.

Children on the Move – Physically, Emotionally and Relationally

Let us now turn to children’s everyday experiences of dual residence. This section takes as starting point the transition from nuclear family to separated family.
After that, I will explore different ways in which dual residence children are on the move – physically, emotionally and relationally.

**Family Transitions**

The experience of parental separation is, despite its ordinariness, often a life-changing event for children (Jamieson & Highet, 2013). Many participants had a very detailed recollection of the moment they got to know about their parents’ separation, even if it was many years ago. This is often the case with events that are closely associated with emotions. Smart (2007) reminds us that we remember very happy or very sad occasions best, because we have invested emotional capital in them.

For Mira, the memory of when she first got to know about her parents’ break-up is coloured by emotion:

Interviewer: Do you remember when they told you they were going to divorce?

Mira (9): Yes. I was really sad, I just ran away … I had two rooms at the time, so I didn’t know which one to take, so I thought: ‘Shall I go upstairs? Or that way? Upstairs? Or that way?’ Then I chose that way, because it was quicker, I thought for about ten seconds while mom and dad went searching for me, and … because I was so sad … I just sat there, in my bed … We had like … you know, these big closets? We had made like a little cabin inside and they had put a little lamp there and I had a little cosy corner with lots of cushions inside. There were no clothes, it was my ‘cosy corner’. So I locked myself in there and I sat there, and I was so sad, so sad, and I just cried and cried. But Inez [little sister], she didn’t understand anything, she just ‘what does divorce mean?’ [imitates childish voice]

Interviewer: She was so little?

Mira: Mm, she doesn’t remember anything. She was like three years old. Then when dad didn’t come for my birthday party, then she understood. And I was so very sad … [very quiet and tiny little voice]

Despite her dramatic story, laden with strong feelings, Mira does not talk about the separation only in negative terms, but also as an end to infinite quarrels, and an event that made subsequent positive changes feasible. For example, her account is also filled with the joy of getting a new stepmother and a baby brother. Looking back, she does not regret her parents’ separation.

The separation marks a life course transition, a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ (Zartler, Heintz-Martin, & Arráñz Becker, 2015). Although there is a disruption to family life in the sense it was hitherto practiced, the family transforms itself and moves on in another shape as family life continues within a new configuration of household arrangements. The family does not dissolve but is reorganised as the separation divides the family when parents are no longer a couple. Yet, even if parents do not regard each other as belonging to the same family, the children might still do (Smart et al., 2001). Some participants in this study conceptualised their
family as one, while others regarded them as two separate families (although the children belonged to both). Ahrons (1980) referred to dual residence families as bi-nuclear families, highlighting their two ‘cores’ after separation, one located in the mother’s and one in the father’s household. These families are no longer held together by the bond between the parents, but rather by the children’s relationship with each parent (Skjørten et al., 2007; Smart et al., 2001).

Cornelia (12) captures the double nature of her family neatly when she defines her dual residence family:

Interviewer: So, when you think about your parents and your brother, do you think of them as one family or two families?
Cornelia: I think of [them] like … two in one!

But family mobility in the case of dual residence is not only about family transition. Children in dual residence arrangements are on the move in a very tangible way as they move physically between their two homes on a regular basis.

Physically on the Move

Children’s experiences of moving between households are examples of concrete family practices; physical movements that take place in space (Morgan, 2011). Perhaps the most obvious aspect of living a mobile life is precisely this logistical aspect – the actual relocations from one home to another. Once a week, or once every other week for some, the participants of this study packed their belongings and travelled to their other parent. Some of them travelled alone, others with sisters or brothers, and some of them were escorted by parents. The distance between their homes determined the mode of transport. While Ylva walked a few blocks, Eyla took her kick bike, and Philip went by tram. Adamo caught the bus or got a ride with his parents. Saga had to be picked up by her father, because her homes were far from each other. Some had a lot to carry, others travelled light. For children who changed houses at weekends, or had very heavy bags, parents might give them a lift or drop the bags off at the other parent’s house.

For all participating children, their daily lives were intertwined with the practicalities of moving; planning, packing, travelling, unpacking, etc. These routines can be regarded as family and mobility practices closely associated with dual residence (Morgan, 2011). Packing and unpacking, specifically, seemed to evoke many feelings among the participants and this was a recurrent theme in the interviews:

Ella (10): Talking about changeovers, I must say I hate packing! It’s the worst thing I know! Clothes are to be packed, those clothes are not washed, and … and you have to plan the whole week ahead, and you don’t even know which clothes you have at which place, and you just: Waah!!! It’s really annoying! That’s what I think.

Many of the children mentioned packing and unpacking as an annoying and time-consuming duty. What strategies they used to deal with it differed. One could be to negotiate the time cycles, like Sofia and Emilia did. The two sisters (interviewed
together) lived every other week in each of their homes but had recently made an agreement with their parents to try out a new model; Sofia was going to stay two weeks at each place and Emilia was to keep on with the alternate-weeks model:

Sofia (13): Because I’ve had enough of moving around and unpacking and stuff. You don’t bother unpacking for such a short time and if bags are just standing there it doesn’t feel like you are at home.

Emilia (11): That’s the worst thing – packing and unpacking.

Sofia: [sighing] Yeah, the worst is packing and unpacking.

Emilia: I never unpack; I just poke about in the bag.

Even if Emilia too disliked packing and unpacking her belongings (mostly clothes), she found two weeks too long to be away from a parent. For her, the emotional cost was higher than the benefit of less packing, and she couldn’t bear to be away from her parents for more than a week. Sofia, on the other hand, preferred being able to settle down properly in one place before she moved on. For her, the recurrent packing and unpacking was also a symbol of a hectic life with little time to get settled into the habits and atmosphere of each household. As we can see, practical and emotional issues are intertwined to a high degree. The solutions of these sisters remind us that siblings may respond differently to the same situation and highlight the different needs and opinions of individual children, also identified by Skjørten et al. (2007) and Smart et al. (2001). It also raises the subject of age. Younger children may need more frequent contact with parents while older ones opt for proximity to friends (Ottosen et al., 2011).

Emotionally on the Move

Let us move on to address emotional aspects linked to life on the move. Emotion is a key element within everyday family life, often involved in the social interactions that take place within families (Morgan, 2011). Emotion covers a full range of feelings, for example, love, hate, happiness, sadness, enthusiasm, curiosity, concern, frustration, anger, disappointment, jealousy, pride, shame and many others (Davies, 2015; Smart, 2007). Wrapped up in the responses to other questions, emotions were shown to be closely linked to the practices of dual residence, especially feelings of love and affection, missing parents and showing consideration.

Feelings of love and affection were apparent in nearly every account. Many thought the same way Samuel (16) did:

Interviewer: What do you think it would be like to have another residence arrangement?

Samuel: I couldn’t be away from any of my parents that long. That’s why I couldn’t live otherwise, because I love both of my parents so much, I just couldn’t stand seeing them less. I guess I’d manage like once in a while, but not all the time.
Describing family in terms of close and affectionate relationships, however, is not unique to children growing up in dual residence arrangements. The value children place on close relationships is in line with findings from other studies of children (Brannen & O’Brien, 1996; Davies, 2015; Smart et al., 2001). Nevertheless, the experience of family change might open up children's minds to new ways of reflecting about family and thinking more explicitly about their family relationships and what they mean to them (Berman, 2015; Smart et al., 2001). Wade and Smart (2003) highlight how separation alters the taken-for-grantedness of everyday family life, and may thereby bring about re-evaluation of relationships.

For children in time-sharing arrangements, one parent will always be physically absent. Yet at the same time, this parent is often continuously present, perhaps not in time and space, but in the mind of the child.

Particularly among the children in the youngest age group (aged 9–11), many talked about missing the absent parent and had strong feelings in relation to the changeover:

Mira (9): Well, now, now I am longing for Anna [stepmom], dad and Elliot [(half)brother], because I know I’ll see mom [tonight]. But I won’t meet them until tomorrow and I haven’t seen them for two weeks now. I miss them the most.

Interviewer: But then when you’re at your dad’s place, do you miss your mom?

Mira: Well, not in a week really, I hardly have time to start longing for them. Cause I hardly have time to feel that feeling. But in two weeks I do feel that feeling. It’s like happening in my body, it’s like: ‘Now, now I start to feel it, I want to see them now!’

Interviewer: What does it feel like?

Mira: I kind of … I kind of get tears and … I get all red in my face and then … when I get that feeling … Sometimes I just miss them but there are no tears, it’s just like, you know, you are longing for them, but you don’t really start crying, it’s just ordinary longing. Yeah, it’s like that sometimes.

The narrative of Mira illustrates the embodied feelings of missing and longing for family members. Mira and others were accustomed to the feelings of missing a parent and used different strategies to cope with it. Some of them phoned or texted the parent they were missing, while a few participants (who had very short distances between homes) went over to see them if they were missing them very much, and many just tried to occupy themselves or think about something else. For some participants, this meant hard emotional work. Smart et al. (2001) suggest that dual residence can be described as a series of mini-bereavements for some children:

Frida (15): I missed them quite a lot. I’ve always been very tied to my mom, and I still am [smiles]. So, there was always kind of a problem.
I always brought my mother’s t-shirt, and she had to wear it before I left. [short laughter] so that I could smell it ... yeah it was rather ... But I always brought things from my dad too, I had photos of them that I could look at, and things like that ...

Interviewer: But would you rather have stayed with your mother when you left, or was it ...

Frida: [interrupts] No. I always longed for them as soon as they left, but I didn’t necessarily want to go back, cause I wanted to be with my mom or dad ...

Interviewer: What’s it like now then?

Frida: It’s the same. But I don’t bring anything now ... [smiles]

In contrast, almost half of the participating children never or very seldom missed their parents:

Philip (17): I don’t see any reason to feel sad. I don’t miss my parents really, it’s nice to see them, ‘hello, hello’ – that’s nice, but I’ve seen them my whole damn life, sometimes it’s nice not to see them too ... [smiles]

Yet children showed great consideration to their parents. They articulated many ways of paying attention to others’, particularly parents’, needs. Some children expressed feelings of concern and some adjusted their lives in order to make parents feel better. In the following quote, Emilia, whom we met earlier, gave an additional explanation as to why the solution of her sister staying two weeks at each place and herself keeping on with the alternate-weeks model was such a good idea:

Interviewer: Ok, so you are going to stay two weeks [in each place] and you every other week? [turning to each one of them]

Sofia (13) and Emilia (11): Yes.

Emilia: And then we solved it so that nobody has to be on their own.

Interviewer: Sorry?

Emilia: Nobody has to be on their own.

Interviewer: No.

Emilia: Everybody ... has somebody.

Interviewer: Have you been thinking about that? That you kind of feel sorry for the one who is on his own?

Sofia and Emilia: Yes [at the same time]
Emilia: I have.
Sofia: Sometimes.
Interviewer: Could you explain to me?
Emilia: Like when I go to dad to fetch something I have left behind, and he is at home. And then when I go, I don’t like to leave him all alone and then I get sad sometimes.

I suggest that Emilia’s consideration and concern about her father, revealing her emotional engagement, is a way of caring for him. According to Brannen and Heptinstall (2003), the ways children engage in feeling, thinking and emotionally caring can be conceptualised as distinctive caring activities. As Emilia illustrated, emotionally engaging in caring practices, that is, worrying about parents who might feel lonely, sometimes leads to concrete family practices like negotiating the set-up of the living arrangement. Children’s efforts to protect their parents from feeling sad or being upset has previously been highlighted by Haugen (2008) and could be regarded as ‘emotional work’ (Hochschild, 2003).

Other examples of ‘emotional work’ were when participants, out of consideration for their parents, kept the feelings of missing the other parent to themselves or avoided talking about the other parent in cases of parental conflict. The accounts of Emilia and other participants in this study demonstrated how children were often active co-participants in care within their families (see also Haugen, 2008; Marschall, 2017; Smart et al., 2001). Children’s emotional support of parents may be used to challenge the traditional western view of adults as care-givers and children as care-receivers (Eldén, 2016; Haugen, 2007b).

Another significant aspect of the emotional content in everyday life had to do with the emotional transitions when shifting between households and different family members. Alternating between two family settings meant being with and away from close others, and involved adapting to family cultures which may have differed in their particular habits, rules, routines and rituals. As pointed out by Wentzel Winther (2015), children with two places of residence must orient and re-orient themselves in relation to different ways of being a family as they move from one household and family culture to another. Marschall’s (2017) term ‘double looped family life’ is illuminating, clarifying how life in two homes has a certain ‘looped’ regularity and undoubtedly has a more structured, week-bound set of routines and practices than those of families located in one home. As in other research, participants talked about different regimes in each home (Marschall, 2017; Smart et al., 2001). For example, parents had different rules about screen time, bedtimes and what time children should come home at night. The shifts required emotional transitions, to which children responded differently. Ylva (13) was always in a bad mood the days of changeover (i.e. the move signifying the shift between mother’s and father’s week). Linnea (11) had difficulties concentrating at school on Fridays. She just wanted time to pass quickly so that she could meet the parent she hadn’t seen for a week. For Saga (11), it took a couple of days to adapt and re-adapt to different ways of living family life:
Interviewer: Do they have the same parenting style, your mom and dad?
Saga (11): No!
Interviewer: Not at all?
Saga: No!
Interviewer: Ok, what’s it like then?
Saga: Dad is more like … In the morning, on a Monday, if I ask him ‘Can I have a candy?’ he just goes ‘ok.’ At mom’s place, that is strictly forbidden. Only Saturdays. Maybe Fridays or Sundays … It’s very different.
Interviewer: Are there more rules at your mom’s in general?
Saga: Yes.
Interviewer: Or is she stricter?
Saga: Yes she is.
Interviewer: Is that good or bad, them having different rules?
Saga: I wish mom would have the same rules as dad. But it’s quite bad really, cause you have to get used all the time. One second, all of a sudden on Sunday night, there are new rules and you just ‘uh oh’ … [laughing]
Interviewer: Are you able to acclimatise?
Saga: It takes like two days. Or three.
Interviewer: Ok. What do you do to acclimatise?
Saga: I just try to remember. It’s getting better and better actually.

Apart from different rules and routines at each place, family configurations may differ (see also Lidén & Skjørten, 2007). Consequently, many children alternated between families of different types. Saga’s father was single while her mother had re-partnered and had another two children, resulting in different lifestyles in Saga’s two homes. The peace and quiet and undivided one-to-one attention she got from her father, was in sharp contrast to the hustle and bustle at her mother’s place:

Saga (11): At dad’s it’s more of a place for rest, because I don’t have my younger brothers, that I feel I have to take care of all the time. It’s more like … it’s just me and dad! /…/ I feel like I can relax and … stay up a bit longer … It’s like dad is the weekend and mom is the weekday.

Even though it took a lot of energy for Saga to adapt, she also enjoyed the contrasts between her two lifestyles. Coping with emotional transitions seemed to require a great effort for some children but not others. While a few never got used to the constant change, others seemed to move effortlessly in and out of
households, appreciating the variation. Sarah (16) expressed how boring she would find it to live in one single place all the time:

Sarah (16): Sometimes you get too much of living in only one place … It’s nice to kind of change environments.

Eyla (10) further pointed out how she got access to different kinds of everyday life in each home:

Eyla (10): You get different lives, kind of. At mom’s place, I can’t just go to a pool in the summer if I feel like it, but I can at dad’s. And we are doing more things at dad’s, it’s just different you know, it’s very different and it’s nice to live two lives.

Whether or not children enjoyed the contrasts, the success of regular transitions appeared to depend both on contextual factors and on their personalities. In line with previous studies, the degree to which the children’s home lives were interconnected was important to make dual residence work well for them (Marschall, 2017; Ottosen et al., 2011). It seemed as if a certain amount of interconnection was required for children to be able to enjoy the contrasts. For children with parents who were on friendly terms and able to communicate, the transition was easier, because parents were likely to coordinate their lives to some extent (Berman, 2018). If parents did not communicate at all, children had to do the hard work of mediation, as in Karl’s case:

Karl (17): Mom and dad don’t fight at the moment, but they still don’t talk, so … I guess you could say that’s both good and bad. It’s good, because they used to fight all the time. Mom telephoned and just started shouting at dad, just kept screaming and started crying and dad shouted back … /…/ And they talked behind each other’s backs all the time and were really pissed. /…/ Then you are in the middle and you don’t want anyone to get mad at you.

It is well established that parental conflict is damaging (Broberg et al., 2011; Fabricius, Sokol, Diaz, & Braver, 2012; Spruijt & Duindam, 2009). For children who live in two homes, it may be particularly demanding when parents are not able to cooperate (Haugen, 2010; Ottosen et al., 2011; Skjøtten et al., 2007; Smart et al., 2001). If children are not permitted to talk about life in the other household (implicitly or explicitly), their everyday lives in each home become disconnected and take place side by side rather than being intertwined (Marschall, 2017). As shown in the quotes by Sarah and Eyla, children can manage (and even enjoy) differences even if regimes or family values are contrasting, as long as they are able to make sense of the variation (see Marschall, 2017). The implication is that parents are able to assist children who find transitions difficult, for example, by making sure they are allowed to talk with and about the other parent and life in the other home, so that children’s worlds are connected even if their lives are lived in different locations.
Relationally on the Move

The last theme that will be discussed in this chapter is the relational aspects of living across households. In this last section, I will focus on children’s relationships to stepparents.

When parents are separated, it is not unusual to acquire ‘new’ family members, such as stepparents and stepsiblings, during the course of childhood. Such a major change may be very positive and bring about additional close relationships (as well as material resources). Linnea (11) told me about her stepmother and stepsisters moving in with them a few months ago:

Interviewer:  So … what is it like?
Linnea (11):  It’s fun! [Lightens up] I never had siblings before, so … it’s a bit unfamiliar to have them. /…/ Sophie, [stepmother] she is really nice too. It’s really easy to talk to her about … like about the divorce and things. That’s nice.

To Linnea, getting a stepfamily was a very positive change. Her stepmother was a source of support when her parents argued, and someone she could talk to about sensitive matters. However, new people moving in may also involve serious problems if children and step kin do not get along well. Sarah was one of two participants whose everyday life was severely affected by the bad relationship to her mother’s new partner:

Sarah (16):  We don’t get along very well. Or … we only talk if we have to, kind of. I don’t like him [stepfather]. /…/ If he goes away for the weekend, oh, it’s so much nicer … I can walk around singing or dancing or whatever … And, it kind of makes me be nicer to my mom.

One important element of Sarah’s account was her unwillingness to put up with the bad relationship with her stepfather. At first, she hadn’t liked her stepmother either, but she described how her stepmother had really made an effort to get to know her and to make a good connection. Her stepfather, on the other hand, had never done anything to improve their relationship. She had talked to her mother about how she felt, but things hadn’t changed. Because the relationship to her stepfather drained her of energy and prevented her from feeling at home at her mother’s place, she had recently reduced her time there in favour of her father’s place.

The extension of the family often has a major impact on the everyday lives of children, in positive or negative ways (Ottosen et al., 2011). Linnea and Sarah represent two ends of a continuum: In Linnea’s case, her stepmother provided social support that her parents were not able to offer and this added to her appreciation of her dual residence life. For Sarah, it was quite the opposite. These two cases illustrate one aspect of navigating new social relationships and point to the great emotional significance of new relationships.
This chapter has discussed three key aspects of dual residence children’s everyday mobility: the practical issues of alternating homes, the emotions built into these everyday mobility practices, and the relational aspects that are central when children alternate homes while belonging to two separate family units. Findings showed that these three aspects are all closely intertwined, and distinct features of children’s everyday lives. The accounts of the participating children and young people illustrated the practicalities of moving, like packing their belongings and taking them on the tram and bus when they travelled to their other place of residence. But they also showed how the children were affected emotionally and relationally as they moved between social relationships as they shifted houses, saying goodbye to one parent to go and see the other parent, and possibly stepparents and stepsiblings. These farewells and reunions were often charged with emotions, despite their regularity. The practicalities – the actual relocations, the packing and unpacking – were also embodied and emotional practices as they carried meanings beyond the act itself.

The discussion of children’s mobility in dual residences in this chapter has had a practices approach, focussing on specific practices related to dual residence (Morgan, 2011). The main point is its emphasis on ‘doing’ and practices. The accounts of children and young people in this study made it quite clear that children were active and reflective when it came to doing family life across homes.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have provided children’s accounts of regularly moving between their two homes after parental separation, and their two separate, yet connected, family lives. The perspectives of children in dual residence arrangements illuminate the ways in which family motion may unfold in children’s everyday lives in two significant ways; both in terms of family transitions and in terms of the mobilities of children moving between households.

Dual residence has first and foremost been discussed as a post-divorce living arrangement in which children’s housing and care are shared between parents (see Haugen, 2010; Ottosen et al., 2011; Sadowski & McIntosh, 2016; Skjørt et al., 2007; Smart et al., 2001). By also understanding dual residence as a mobile practice, this chapter offers new perspectives on children’s everyday mobility. With the analytical focus on children as actors and co-creators of family life, I have discussed how children actually do dual residence through practices of packing and unpacking their belongings, travelling between households, parting and reuniting with family members, etc. This chapter has addressed Haugen's (2010) appeal for further investigation of the emotional significance of children’s time-sharing in post-divorce families identified in previous studies (Haugen, 2010; Smart et al., 2001). The perspectives discussed here demonstrate that emotions are a key aspect when alternating between homes. This applies to transitions between homes and people but also to the specific characteristics of sharing time between parents. One example is the continuous absence of one of the parents that led to feelings of loss for many children. At the same time, living in dual residences also
contributed to children’s awareness and appreciation of their close relationships. This resonates with previous findings that family change may increase reflectiveness about family ties and lead to a new consciousness of the attachments to parents and close others (Berman, 2015; Smart et al., 2001).

These findings may help us to understand the everyday complexity of living across households. Children’s accounts revealed dynamics, ambiguity and contradictions in experiences of dual residence. Individual experiences most often contained both positive and negative elements and children’s emotions included everything from happiness and contentment to indifference, to discomfort or even distress. Children might love the continuous change and everyday flux but find the presence of a stepparent difficult to endure. They might welcome new family members but find the transitions between families very demanding. They might hate the feeling of being on a journey but love the undivided attention from one parent at a time. The findings illustrate what several scholars have emphasised, namely that dual residence involves both positive and negative aspects and can work as a source of emotional security under some circumstances, while not under others (Berman, 2018; Haugen, 2010; Ottosen et al., 2011; Sadowski & McIntosh, 2016; Skjørten et al., 2007; Smart et al., 2001).

An important point to be made here is the value of getting to learn about children’s positive and negative experiences of dual residence. While the intention of this chapter is not to focus on problems, neither does it avoid indicating difficulties articulated by the participating children. We need to acknowledge that moving between homes does require effort, even if many children happily made that effort to be able to live with both parents. As we have seen, dual residence sometimes requires hard emotional work by children, for example, when protecting parents from feeling lonely. Having said that, I argue that it is also important to shed light on the positive experiences of dual residence. These are less well documented, but the children participating in this study gave evidence of many positives associated with their living arrangements. Research examining children and divorce has often focussed on problems and risks associated with divorce. While difficult issues and challenges brought up in this chapter include the efforts of packing and spending extensive time on transportation, and emotional struggles like missing the absent parent, positive sides that have been highlighted are for instance the strong relational ties between children and their parents, and the additional close relationships with supportive adults that may be gained when parents re-partner. Children’s accounts offer insights into what kind of problems may be encountered in their everyday lives in two homes, but also the benefits and opportunities. Agreeing with Davies (2015), I believe children’s accounts may also provide a clue as to how their problems could be better responded to by those who live or work with them.

In this chapter, I have sought to present everyday mobility and life lived across households in all its complexity, including opportunities and demands, emotional ups and downs, and positive as well as challenging relationships. Routinely managing practical and emotional transitions requires effort, even if it becomes an ordinary part of life to which many children become acclimatised. For the
children continually in motion, everyday life was characterised by embodied and emotional practices. The dominating view of the impact of divorce or separation on children has been one associated with the notion of ‘breakdown’ and ‘decline’ in the family (Gillis, 1996; Haugen, 2007; Marschall, 2017). In this study, and in line with the argument of this book, parental separation and new family practices are not regarded as examples of family decline, but as the family in transition, changing and adapting to new circumstances.

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References


