

Why Co-Parenting

When both parents are involved in a healthy, caring way, children do better in life. All the research points to it. The good news is you do not have to like your child's other parent to make it work.

What it Takes

- Your focus should be on your kids' needs rather than the failed relationship.
- It may help to communicate through email or text if the other parent doesn't act appropriately.
- Spending time with you both is critical to their emotional health.
- And remember, compromise can happen over time. ²

Some "DOs" and Don'ts for Successful Co-Parenting

Let's look at the things you should do first.

1. Give your kids the freedom to love the other parent, stepparents, and extended family. This means keeping your relationship struggles out of their sight and hearing.
2. Make the transition between homes a positive one. This may mean joining in their excitement to see the other parent, so they don't feel guilty about leaving you. Always speak respectfully about the other parent to the kids or when they can hear you, no matter how you feel. We'll talk more about this later.
3. Plan and keep to the shared parenting agreement so the kids have routines to look forward to. Try not to deviate from your scheduled time with them very often. It causes big emotions and disappointment when you do.
4. Be empathetic to their feelings. Understand that they will miss their other parent. Allow and encourage them to talk about mom or dad, keep pictures in their room, or call and text them. They need that connection.

Now for some things to avoid:

1. Don't make your child the go-between for communication. You work out the problems, scheduling changes, or financial issues. Don't put the stress of that responsibility on them.
2. Try not to express hurt or jealousy of your children's relationship with the other parent. This will make your kids feel guilty about loving or wanting them. There will be times they'll want more of the other parent's time. But there will be times they'll want more of yours too. Try to be okay with that.
3. Rather than bringing up problems or issues at a shared event with the kids, talk with the other parent privately, away from the kids and others.
4. While you might really want to get back at the other parent, using your kids as pawns hurts them as much as it hurts the other parent.
5. And finally, while tempting, don't justify or criticize the other parent's lack of follow-through. You can listen, be empathic, and love your child through their disappointment, but it's really the other parent's responsibility to account for their own actions.

Talking About the Other Parent to Your Child

Painful feelings can cause you to behave in a way that affects your child's relationship with the other parent. This behavior creates loyalty conflict. It happens when one or both parents turn a child against the other parent, such as when a parent :

- Speaks badly about mom or dad within earshot of the child
- Fights with or treats them badly around the kids
- Sends the kids mean texts about the other parent
- Doesn't allow the child to call or text them
- Minimizes or erases the other parent's role or presence in the child's life
- Encourages the child to betray trust or keep secrets, or
- Undermines their authority

Try very hard to avoid doing these things. It also helps to remember that your children did not break up with either of you. They need you both equally in their lives.

How to Start Co-Parenting

Here are some practical ways to get started with co-parenting. First, you need to work out three important things with the other parent.

- Finances
- Logistics, and
- Parenting style and rules

Your efforts to create two emotionally safe homes for them will set your kids up for success. And that is the challenge, but it's also an opportunity. It takes commitment, communication, and a willingness to work through disagreements and uncertainties for effective co-parenting. It also takes cooperation, compromise, and valuing your child's relationship with the other parent despite your feelings.

Resources:

1. Co-parenting International Tammy Daughtry
2. Maione, Ph.D., Paul, "Children & Divorce, A Positive Parenting Approach, Page 9, copyright 2016, <http://www.positiveparentingthroughdivorce.com/index.htm>, accessed 10/19/21
3. Barker, Ph.D., Amy J, Fine, LCSW, Paul R, "Co-Parenting with a Toxic Ex—What to Do When Your Ex-Spouse Tries to Turn the Kids Against You, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 5674 Shattuck Ave., Oakland, CA 94609, Copyright 2014, Pages 6 - 21
4. Barker, Ph.D., Amy J, Fine, LCSW, Paul R, "Co-Parenting with a Toxic Ex—What to Do When Your Ex-Spouse Tries to Turn the Kids Against You, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 5674 Shattuck Ave., Oakland, CA 94609, Copyright 2014, Pages 23 - 25
5. Parental Denigration: A Form of Conflict That Typically Backfires,
6. file:///Users/tg4jc/Downloads/Rowen_et_al-2018-Family_Court_Review.pdf, Jenna Rowen, Ph.D., Robert Emery, Ph.D. 2018