

Categories of Co-parenting

When it comes to the types of co-parenting, the majority of parents can be put in one of five categories:

Perfect Pals

Perfect Pals are divorced parents who still travel together, maybe they own a business together, and they're still very close. They interact a lot and their lives are still very connected. This can give confusing messages to kids.

Cooperative Colleagues

Cooperative Colleagues are like Co-CEOs of a business. They communicate often and are invested in the outcome of their child's life. This is the sweet spot and *best category for parents to be in*. That cooperation is really really critical. From a kid's perspective, if moms and dads can show up and be neutral or somewhat cooperative in public, that turns the dial way down on their anxiety.

Angry Associates

Angry Associates is a common place for most parents when they're first divorced. Their anger hinders their communication. Sometimes the process of the legal side of divorce makes the anger and pain worse.

Fiery Foes

Fiery Foes are the people that really don't talk much, and when they do, they fight. They are constantly picking at the other person to hurt them and get back at them. They're really angry, but they take it a level deeper, in that they really want to put the other person down.

Dissolved Duos

Dissolved Duos have turned their back on one another. They don't speak, they don't have any method of communication. When dissolved duos don't speak, that puts the entire responsibility of communication on the kids. This is the worst thing you can do to a kid after divorce.

What's BEST for your Child?

The research shows, what helps kids adjust to life after divorce more than anything, is when moms and dads can get on the same page and find a way to be cooperative colleagues. Ask yourself these questions, Where am I today? Am I angry? Am I firing the darts at the other person? Am I just done, a brick wall parent? And then what can I do to begin to adjust moving myself towards a cooperative colleague? This may be a hard journey, but keep in mind what your kids need most is for mom and dad to cooperate, to not put them in the middle of the war.

Indicators of Healthy Co-parenting - An Assessment Tool for Co-parents

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This assessment tool will help give insight to co-parents and share outcomes that are true for the children.

Participant: This statement is representative of my current co-parenting experience. I rate myself from 1-5 on my current co-parenting experience.

1 = Not at all 2 = Rarely 3 = Occasionally 4 = Often 5 = Always

- I give my children the freedom to love both parents.
- I believe my child’s well-being is directly affected by the quality of relationship I have with their other parent.
- The transition between our homes is smooth and positive.
- I discuss and deal with financial matters in a rational way with my co-parent.
- I intentionally plan out the details of Christmas and other holidays to minimize the stress for my children.
- I make it possible for my children to love and maintain ties with both extended families.
- I enjoy being at my children’s functions and I am there to enhance my children’s happiness.
- I think the more functional my relationship is with the other parent, the less likely it is that our children will engage in high risk behaviors.
- I recognize the developmental stages of my children and let them enjoy their childhood.
- I take care of responsibilities as an adult and do not put pressure on the children to do my job.
- I allow and encourage my children to take specific clothing, toys and electronic devices between their homes.
- I encourage my children to have photos of their other parent (and family) in their bedroom.
- I tell my children it is okay to talk about how much they miss the other parent.
- I discuss specific parenting strategies with my co-parent with the goal of raising healthy kids.
- I speak highly of the other parent to our children, with at least three specific compliments.

- I prioritize my time with the children and am fully engaged and focus on them when we're together.
- I communicate regularly with my co-parent at pre-designated meetings or telephone calls.
- I do not get upset when our child seeks out the other parent after a game or event. I don't take it personal.
- I do not allow or utilize the children to act as a messenger or "go-between" on anything.
- I incorporate other friends and activities into our lives to enhance my self-care and happiness.
- When we are both present at the same event we do not use the opportunity to discuss family business.
- I am working with my co-parent (and stepparents) to raise healthy and well-adjusted children.
- I can see a positive difference in my children as a result of our co-parenting efforts.
- I know why co-parenting is so vitally important to the well-being of my children (and step children).
- It makes sense to me that the well-being of my children/stepchildren is dependent on the relationship with the other parent(s) involved.

DATE: TOTAL POINTS

THRIVING CHILD (96-120 points)

Understanding is maximized which is leading to intentional application of healthy communication and co-parenting strategies. The parental functioning is high and parental conflict is low. The children are becoming happier and more well-adjusted every day. Their behavior and challenges are typical of other children of similar age, race and socio-economic background. These children are thriving in their developmental stages emotionally and physically and the parents are doing the hard work of co-parenting without putting them in the middle.

STRUGGLING CHILD (71 - 95 points)

Understanding and application are minimal but co-parenting function is being enhanced by regular communication. Increasing the quality of communication will have a significant effect in reducing the children's anxiety. There is still a high level of "parentification" taking place as well as noticeable conflict in the ongoing co-parenting efforts. The children are hurting due to exposure to and involvement in adult matters that they are not developmentally prepared to deal with. Put simply, they need the adults to do the "parent stuff" so they can just be kids.

DISTRESSED CHILD (0 - 71 points)

Lack of communication, lack of understanding and lack of application is leading to high levels of stress in both households and high levels of anxiety in the children. Quite often these conditions lead to emotional distress and produce unwanted and unhealthy behaviors in the children. These "acting out" or withdrawal responses are not simple ploys for attention but cries for help from fearful anxious hearts who don't know how to process or express what they are going through. These kids are deeply hurting due to the lack of co-parenting.

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