



Co-Parenting in Divorce

Divorce is tough on kids. Studies show that the most important thing you can do for your kids to make things easier for them is to co-parent with their best interest in mind. It is obviously easier to do if your ex is also willing to cooperate; harder if it is only you. You must put your marital problems aside and focus on being a parent. This is how you do that:

Don't use your kids as spies, bargaining chips, cohorts, messengers, or therapists.

Make your kids part of the decisions that affect them. Kids already have to deal with all kinds of changes. Get their input on the ones you can—especially with older children.

Be flexible if you can with your custody and visitation. Get your kids' input on custody and visitation. Make adjustments and flex the schedule for their needs and wants. The only reason you shouldn't do this is if your spouse is hostile to you and will use this against you.

Agree on discipline and house rules so both homes are similar if possible. If not, keep your rules consistent and don't back down because your spouse doesn't discipline. You can't condone unacceptable behavior—that is enabling and isn't love.

Share important information about the kids with your spouse. Include him/her in meetings and events and decisions.

Detach so you can act dignified and attend occasions where both mother and father need to be present. Don't be obviously uncomfortable, rude, angry, or refuse to attend. Be cordial to your ex and his/her new partner.

Don't make your child choose between you and the other parent or be hurt or offended when the child chooses to be with the other parent. Let your child know it is okay to love him/her. It is good for your children to have a relationship with both parents.

Make your child respect the other parent and don't undermine him/her or the relationship.

Accept your ex's new partner. Don't try to make your kids hate him/her. Don't treat him/her rudely when you are around. Don't be hurt if the kids like him/her.

Encourage honesty and openness in your relationship with your children. Let them tell you when you are doing something they don't like; allow them to express emotions; respect their boundaries and give them the facts without the emotion when they need to know answers.

Difficult Situations: Obviously, you can only control yourself and there are situations where an ex is addicted, dysfunctional, mentally ill, irresponsible, emotionally manipulative, abusive, unreliable, hostile, dangerous, or blaming that will require you to act differently. In these situations, you have to have boundaries that protect yourself and your kids in whatever ways are legal and reasonable. You may need to talk with your kids truthfully about your ex and explain behavior, choices, boundaries, or problems. You will not be able to co-parent well if your ex uses every situation to undermine and hurt you; instead you will need to detach, react differently, and be on your guard to protect yourself but still do this in a way that considers your kids' best interest as much as possible.