



Shared Parenting Through Divorce & Separation

SHARED PARENTING

Maintaining a positive co-parenting relationship with your child's other parent is an important investment in the health, happiness, and success of your child. Effective co-parenting provides your child with security and fosters a close relationship with both parents. However, co-parenting can be especially stressful for separated and divorced couples. It isn't easy, but the purpose of building a cooperative and productive partnership with your co-parent couldn't be more important. You both love your child/children and you don't want the challenges in your adult relationship to be an obstacle to your child's healthy development.

We hope these tips will help you to talk with each other about a co-parenting style that supports calm, consistent communication and a positive working structure that allows both parents to give a maximum amount of love and attention to your child, and avoids competition and conflict that can act as poison to sensitive young children who need both parents.

REINFORCE YOUR LOVE FOR YOUR CHILD

Your child should know that he/she is more important than the conflict that ended your marriage/relationship. Your child needs to know that your love will always remain strong and never change regardless of divorce or separation from the other parent.

Ideas for conversations with children about divorce/separation:

- "We will both always be there to love and care for you."
- "It's not your fault that Mommy and Daddy aren't together."
- "Sometimes parents don't stay together, but they are still partners when it comes to raising their children."
- "Sometimes adults get divorced, but parents and children never get divorced."
- "A family is a group of people who love and care for one another."
- "Your family can have two or more homes and you are loved the same in both places."

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS

Your child should know that you appreciate and understand the changes he/she is going through, and that it is OK to feel sad and upset. However, it is your responsibility to help your child cope in the healthiest ways possible. If your child is struggling with sad and angry feelings and his/her behavior has changed dramatically, then seek out the support of a counselor.

Ideas for talking about sad/angry feelings with your child:

- "It is OK to miss your Dad/Mom and it takes time to build a new type of life that will be happy, but together we can do it."
- "You can talk to Mom and Dad, and let's also think about other people you can talk to when you need someone to listen and help you." [Family, teachers, counsellors, spiritual leaders, and even friends can be a source of support but trust varies among the individuals in your life. You may want to direct your children to those people you think can offer kind and wise support.]
- "Lots of people go to counsellors for extra help in hard times. It's like exercising to get strong. We could try that for a while and see if it helps."

BUILDING A CO-PARENTING RELATIONSHIP

It is okay to be hurt and angry. If the idea of making decisions together, interacting at events and drop-offs, or just talking to your former partner makes you feel overwhelmed, then you are not alone. While these feelings do not disappear, co-parenting is not about your feelings, or those of your ex, but rather about your child's happiness, stability, and future wellbeing. The first step toward co-parenting is to talk about that together and try to define a shared vision that is worth striving for.

Ideas about things you can do to build a co-parenting partnership:

- Redefine your relationship with your child's other parent. Think of it as a "new" relationship. Keep your conversations kid-focused.
- Respect your ex's relationship with your child (as long as it is not abusive).
- Understand that you will have different styles and that can be a nice diversity for your child. Many co-parenting relationships fall

apart over small differences that are not harmful to the child.

- Before you take an action (or reaction) toward the other parent, ask yourself, “Is my action going to serve my child’s best interest?”
- Recognize that co-parenting does not always mean equal responsibilities. In considering who has what responsibility, remember to make choices based on your child’s best interest as well as your skills and interests.
- Work together to maintain critical structures, routines, and limits in both houses. As much as possible try to keep these the same to avoid giving your child mixed signals about what is important for their healthy body, feelings, and behaviors.
- Pick your battles wisely. When you have genuine concerns, discuss them with the other parent in a non-threatening manner. Challenge yourself to not overreact to your former partner.

Ideas for talking with your co-parent about important decisions:

- “Perhaps, you would consider....”
- “In case it is helpful....”
- “It may not work for you, but something that worked for me....”
- “Would you be willing to...?” or “Can we try....”

CONFLICT-PROOF YOUR CHILD

You may never lose all of your resentment or bitterness about the break up with your ex. Remind yourself that these are your feelings and not your child’s and then do all that you can to keep those issues separate from the partnership that supports your children. As hard as it may be, work with your ex and make a commitment to set new boundaries as co-parents.

Things to consider when co-parenting:

- Never use kids as messengers between you and your ex.
- Keep the business between you and your ex private.
- Always speak to your child about their other parent in a neutral and supportive manner.
- Explain to your child that you and your ex may have different styles and strengths and that this is okay. Learning to cope with some change can help your child to be more flexible.
- Never use your child to get information about or to manipulate and influence your ex.
- Never depend too much on your child for companionship and support if you are feeling hurt and lonely.
- Let your child remain a child. Don’t ask him/her to deal with adult issues before he/she can take these on.
- Stay focused on your child’s long-term wellbeing and happiness and don’t let the short-term challenges drive you away from your best parenting.

If you would like more information on this topic you can contact Family Centre and ask to speak with the Community Support Worker at 232-1116.