



Divorce | *Tip sheet*

Co-Parenting and Joint Custody

Co-parenting after a separation or divorce is rarely easy. Help give your child/ren the stability, security and close relationships with both parents.

Set hurt and anger aside. Successful co-parenting means that your own emotions — any anger, resentment or hurt — must take a back seat to the needs of your child/ren. Co-parenting is not about your feelings, or those of your ex-spouse, but about your child’s happiness, stability and future well-being. You may never completely lose all your resentment or bitterness about your breakup, but what you can do is put aside those feelings and remind yourself that they are your issues, not your child/ren’s. Resolve to keep your issues with your ex away from your child/ren.

Improve communication with your co-parent. Think about communication with your ex as having the highest purpose: your child/ren’s well-being. It is not always necessary to meet your ex in person — speaking over the phone or exchanging texts or emails is fine for the majority of conversations. The goal is to establish conflict-free communication, so see which type of contact works best for you.

If you are truly ready to rebuild trust after a breakup, be sincere about your efforts. Remember your child/ren’s best interests as you move forward to improve your relationship. It is best to present a united front as parents and keep the child/ren’s best interest in mind.

Co-parent as a team. It is healthy for child/ren to be exposed to different perspectives and learn to be flexible, but they also need to know they are living under the same basic set of expectations at each home. Aiming for consistency between your home and your ex-partner’s avoids confusion for your child/ren. Major decisions need to be made by both you and your ex. Being open, honest and straightforward about important issues is crucial to both your relationship with your ex and your child/ren’s well-being. Have open communication about appointments, medication changes, school-related events, etc.

Make transitions and visitation easier. As kids prepare to leave your house for your ex-partner’s, try to stay positive and deliver them on time. Help children anticipate change. Remind kids they will be leaving for the other parent’s house a day or two before the visit.

Pack in advance. Depending on their age, help children pack their bags well before they leave so that they do not forget anything they will miss. Encourage packing familiar reminders like a special stuffed toy or photograph.

Always drop off—never pick up the child. It is a good idea to avoid “taking” your child from the other parent so that you do not risk interrupting or curtailing a special moment. Drop off your child at the other parent’s house instead.

Access more information at helpguide.org/family/parenting.

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