



Co-Parenting after Divorce

By Teri Claassen MSW, LCSW, LCAC

How to Co-Parent Effectively After Your Divorce

Parenting after a divorce can be a difficult task for parents to manage. It takes patience, good communication skills, and the ability for each parent to push their personal issues with their ex to the side. Many people say, “We divorced because we couldn’t communicate well or get along. How are we supposed to make it happen NOW after the divorce?” That is a great question and although true, there are ways to do it with the best interest of the kids as the focus. It is hard work, but can be done using the following guidelines on how to co-parent effectively:

Look at your relationship with your ex in a new way- Instead of being “ex-wife or ex-husband,” call your ex “your child’s mom or dad”. Labeling them another way can help you think of their role differently. If you embrace the concept of being “business partners” where your children are your “business,” this may help you focus more at the task at hand. Similar to situations where we don’t get along with co-workers, we can often times muster up enough willpower to get the job done in most circumstances. Remember, just because you are divorced doesn’t mean you don’t have a relationship with each other. You have years of graduations, weddings, and grandchildren ahead. Redefining the relationship now will help the future go smoother.

Beware of arguing around the kids- Even if it doesn’t seem like they are paying attention, THEY ARE. Be very careful to not expose them to the adult side of things (i.e. child support, being late for pick ups, etc.) Save your conflict for emails or private phone calls where your child has no chance of hearing what is going on. Walk away or hang up the phone if it is getting too heated, and come back to it later. Your child feels put in the middle if he/she knows the details of the fight. They oftentimes feel guilty or as if they are causing the fight because they are the main thing

that links you to your ex. Your child relives painful moments when he/she witnesses a fight between you and your ex. For the best interest of the child, address the issue with your “business partner” later.

Find a safe way to communicate with your ex- It is not an option to not communicate about your child with your ex, so finding a way that works is imperative. Email can be a useful tool because it is in writing and is easy to go back and look if a miscommunication has occurred. Keep it short, to the point, and solely focused on the kids. Avoid emotional jabs and digs.

Communicate about the negative and positive issues- You are both parents to this child so share the joys and concerns with each other.

Positive comments from someone who spends time with your child can help parents feel that their child is adjusting to all the change after the divorce. Communicating about the areas of improvement is important to keep each other informed so you know if your child is struggling and needs help.

Use each other as a resource- Most likely if your child is going through a “phase” or is exhibiting a concerning behavior, they are doing it in both environments. Ask your ex if they have noticed it and how they handle it at their home. You are both parents to this child, so each of you may have some good ideas.

Let go of control- Part of divorce means you don’t get to have a say so on how, if, when, and who in regards to your child when they are not at your home. Trying to “control” the way your ex does things at his/her house will only create conflict. Pick your battles wisely--otherwise you will feel like you are constantly nagging.

Respect each other’s discipline- When it comes to big issues, it is ideal to see divorced parents work together and collaborate with disciplining a child. It can help the child know that both of you are on the same page and agree. This way the child cannot split or manipulate you and use your disagreement with your spouse to his/her advantage. If you don’t agree, and your ex is not putting your child in harm’s way, it is valuable to still keep your comments to yourself and address the issue in a way you see fit when they are at your house.

Encourage your child to have a relationship with your ex- This will help your child feel that you value and recognize the important role both parents play in their life. Doing this will lessen your child's chance of struggling with divided loyalty issues. This includes you being civil and cooperative when you and your ex are both at sporting events, parties, or other significant moments in your child's life.

Don't put your child in the middle as the messenger- Your child should never be the one to pass along any information between you and your spouse. Talk to your ex directly.

Don't be scared to talk to your ex- Kids pick up on this. If they see that you won't call them at your ex's house because you don't want to chance having to talk with them or if they see you won't even make eye contact with each other at an event, they feel uncomfortable and as if they need to "take care" of your feelings. You don't have to be best friends, just business partners.

Be flexible- There will be times where the schedule won't be followed to a tee. Being flexible can help you both. Swapping weekends or who will pick your child up from daycare may be a favor you are willing to give when it can benefit you in the long run. Being strict will limit the possibility of your ex's openness to help you out in a bind down the road. Just be careful to not get taken advantage of and to say "no" if it really won't work for you.

Keep your child's best interest at the focus of all decisions- Think about how your actions are impacting your child. Try to avoid saying "no" just because your ex says "yes." This is not about you and your ex. It is about your child. If you compete and your focus is on winning, your child will be the one who loses. But if you are in tune to your child's needs, it will be easier to push your personal issues with your ex to the side.

Co-parenting is a challenge, but can be accomplished when you have two people who are willing and dedicated to their role as parents. Doing this can be an opportunity for you to lessen the negative impact of divorce on your child. Divorce affects all kids, but varies in the severity based on



how the parents deal with it and their interaction with each other after the divorce.

Contact Renewed Horizon today if you need more information and resources on this topic or to set up an appointment.

About Renewed Horizon

Renewed Horizon is a Christian counseling practice that serves individuals, couples, families, and teens to address difficulties in life. It is a place to find guidance, healing, and hope when life feels hopeless and unimaginable.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” ~ II Corinthians 5:17



Teri Claassen received her Bachelor’s Degree from Anderson University with a double major in Psychology and Family Science. She completed her graduate studies at Indiana University where she received her Masters in Social Work.

Teri is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Florida and Indiana and a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor in Indiana.

Teri was a Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) and a member of The National Council on Family Relations for 8 years. She is currently a member of The National Association of Social Workers.

Co-Parenting & Divorce www.renewed-horizon.com



Teri has been in private practice since 2004 serving various populations including individuals, couples, teens, families, and kids.