

FACTSHEET No 8:

Co-parenting for Separated Couples

As a separated parent knowing how best to approach the co-parenting of your children with your ex partner can be particularly challenging.

These guidelines, adapted from Therapeutic Family Mediation by Howard H Irving and Michael Benjamin have been pulled together to provide some pointers on how to make co-parenting work for the benefit of your children.

Aim to achieve a respectful, business-like, working relationship with one another

- Watch language used; be courteous and mutually respectful.
- Try to keep your personal feelings in check.
- Respect your co-parent's privacy and expect the same in return.
- Act like a guest in the other parent's home.
- Don't expect appreciation or praise from your ex partner. Acknowledge when they show understanding, sensitivity, compromise or flexibility and support.
- Keep a positive but realistic attitude towards each other.
- Maintain your sense of humour and encourage it in the other parent.
- Be reliable and consistent; do what you say you will and expect the same from the other parent.
- Be flexible and supportive of your co-parent and expect the same in return.
- Be patient in developing your new relationship; Rome wasn't built in a day.
- Realise that the new relationship will feel strange at first and give yourself time to adjust.
- Though it may be difficult at first, don't give up; the effort is worth it.

Ensure clear, consistent and regular communication with each other

- Be explicit with your co-parent.
- Ensure direct communication between you at all times; do not communicate through third parties, especially the children.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say; make no assumptions.
- Double-check your verbal understandings; to help build trust between you, don't take your co-parent for granted.
- Demonstrate you understand what the other parent is saying.
- Ensure as much as possible that verbal and non-verbal messages are the same and are not in conflict.
- Identify the things that are likely to trigger conflict with your ex partner and avoid them.
- Confront the other parent only with great care.
- Regardless of your personal relationship and history, keep the other parent a person in your mind, don't make him or her into a monster.

Work together to maintain a healthy, positive parenting pattern

- Ensure that time with your children is time together, not babysitting.
- Make your children's needs more important than your own territorial rights or independence; remember always, children before rules or procedures.
- Respect your co-parents time with the children.
- Understand and respect that your co-parent might have a different parenting style to your own.
- Interfere with the other parent's effort only if your children need your protection.
- Share information about the children frequently; parenting continuity is important when children are moving between different households.
- Compare notes on the other adults in your children's lives including teachers, doctors etc
- Remember to be supportive of your children's relationship with their other parent.
- Don't use the children to carry messages to each other.

Develop and maintain a healthy, positive relationship with your children.

- Let them know you are thinking about them. Ask them to keep in touch when with their other parent.
- Ensure regular contact with other adults in your their lives, including teachers, doctors etc
- Talk to your children regularly; young children in particular need to understand the changes in their lives in ways that are visible, touchable, and concrete.
- Give children a say in the decisions that affect their lives based on their age and understanding; ensure that they feel heard, even though adults make all the final decisions.
- Don't badmouth your ex partner in the presence of the children.
- Don't participate in any anger your children might feel towards their other parent.
- Encourage the children to speak about any difficulties they are having with their other parent, but don't pursue it at length; suggest other adults with whom the child might wish to confide.
- Don't ask the children about your ex partners life or circumstances; respect their privacy
- Don't expect the children to keep secrets about you from their other parent.
- Be the grown up.
- Keep changes to routines to a minimum for the first few years especially in regards to young children.
- Never threaten to abandon your children.
- Identify and respond to signs of distress with your children and get help as required.
- Provide your children with structure and predictable routines.
- Don't mislead your children into thinking that you may reconcile with the other parent.
- Calm your children's fears and help rebuild trust and security.
- Provide frequent reassurance of your love and that you will always be there to care for them.

Further Information & Help:

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