

## Co-parenting After Divorce

If you've decided to separate or get a divorce, your next most important decision could be about co-parenting. People who separate but continue to work cooperatively as parents have a very positive effect on their children's development and adjustment to living in two separate households.



### What is Co-parenting?

Despite beginning with a sense of joy and commitment, about 50% of marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. Even though they will no longer be together as a couple, most people with children want to continue being good parents and to remain involved in their children's lives. Co-parenting means sharing parenting responsibilities with someone living in a separate household.

However the decision was reached, a divorce can be a crisis and a major loss for the adults and children involved. Upon separating, each parent has a dual task: to make the adjustment to being a single person as well as to being a single parent. At the same time, they are not exactly single parents, if they intend to work out a co-parenting agreement to remain involved in their children's lives.

### Benefits of an Amicable Co-parenting Relationship for your Children

Kids whose divorced parents have a cooperative and cordial relationship:

- are more likely to adapt better to the divorce
- are less likely to have long-term negative effects after the divorce
- benefit when they see their parents modeling ways to solve problems, cooperate, show flexibility and demonstrate compassion
- are provided with a sense of security

Through your attitude and actions, they may see that they are more important than the conflict that ended your marriage. In essence, your children may understand that your love for them prevails.

But there are some cautions to amicable co-parenting relationships:

- Kids may feel confused and build fantasies about reconciliation.
- If there has been much conflict in your relationship with your ex, your children may have misgivings about a parent's sudden friendliness and suspect negative motives. It may help to tell children that you've made a decision to focus on having a friendly relationship for their sake, and to make it clear that the marriage is over.



## **Recipes for Success at Co-parenting**

Many aspects of co-parenting are the same as parenting in one household:

- Be respectful toward the other parent: don't express critical or hostile feelings about the other parent to the children
- Resolve conflicts with the other parent privately, not with the children present
- Discuss major issues as adults and arrive at some agreement or mutual understanding before discussing with the children
- Don't make a child your confidant – you need family, friends or a therapist for that role
- Don't make a child a messenger between you and the other parent
- Assure your child that you will listen to feelings and meet needs in this situation just as you would in other difficult family situations

In addition to these basic parenting issues, the couple must somehow find ways to do what was probably a challenge in their relationship: communicate clearly and effectively with each other.

Working together to develop a co-parenting arrangement is essential to its success. Such an arrangement is possible where both parents keep their children's best interests in mind and where both are able to find a way to work cooperatively as parents.

Many experts agree that children adjust better to divorce when both parents continue to be active in the children's lives without putting the children in the middle of their personal feelings or conflicts.