

What is co-parenting?

Co-parenting is a phrase used to describe parents who together take on the socialization, care, and upbringing of children for whom they share equal responsibility. It means learning to make decisions together that both serve their children's best interests and avoid putting them in the middle. Most serious problems occur when children are stuck in the middle of divorced parents who hate (or at least act like they hate) one another. Our recommendation (not something all parents want to hear) is that kids need both parents. In addition, experts in child development agree that in most cases, children will thrive best when there is input from both a mother and a father. While some may question this, there is little doubt that most damage to children in divorce results from being stuck in the middle of warring parents.

Resources: <https://yourmedicalinfo.net/category/parenting-advice/>

Studies have shown that when there is high conflict between parents, kids who have more frequent contact with a non-custodial parent fare **WORSE** than kids who see the non-custodial parent less frequently. This happens because there are more opportunities for these parents to argue and fight with one another in the presence of their children. It is not easy to collaborate with someone you dislike or hate. At the same time, remember, this is about your children.

Begin with the realization that healthy children have positive relationships with both parents. Your job is to begin focusing on those areas (however small they may seem) where you can feel positive about the other parent and what he or she has to offer your children. All parents have something to offer. Nurturing the seeds of what is good in the other parent can often help more positive things grow. This means that whatever good that parent has to offer should have some pathway of getting through to the child. Step back and look at your ex-spouse in the role of a parent. Many people make lousy husbands or wives but have the potential to be terrific parents. Don't assume that the parent he or she was in your marriage will be the same parent once you are divorced. Remember also that in some ways, your child identifies with your ex-spouse. On some very basic level, children have a sense that they are 50% Mom and 50% Dad. Any trashing of your ex inadvertently trashes 50% of your child. Also, children have a shared history with both parents, and a shared present and future. Your ex-spouse is an important part of your children's lives, and just as you would help your children succeed in school or sports, it is important to help them succeed in that relationship.

Encourage the other parent to stay involved in the children's school and extra-curricular activities. Respect your child's needs to have both parents there, without making them worry about the embarrassment of a public fight. If you cannot be civil with one another, work out an arrangement where your child does not have to witness ongoing conflict. If exchanging the children is problematic, you can find creative ways to minimize your contact with each other. You can arrange for someone else to send and pick up the children, or arrange the exchange at a neutral place. The key is to let your children go back and forth between homes with ease, rather than going through a minefield of conflict.

How do I deal with a parent who is sabotaging my co-parenting efforts?

Dealing with a parent who will not cooperate or negotiate under any circumstances is extremely frustrating. It can also make it difficult for you to make good decisions. It is all too easy to sink to the uncooperative parent's level and make choices not in your children's best interests. For example, one parent communicating adult issues through a child can tempt the other parent to do the same. Resist the urge to do this, and **keep doing the right thing**. Making good choices for your children must be your focus. Parents often wait years for the payoff, but it will be worth it.

It is never too early to begin working on your negative feelings toward your ex-spouse. Having angry or painful feelings about your ex is not the problem. The problem comes when parents don't find appropriate ways of expressing and dealing with these away from their children. It is best to have a support system of family and friends, as well as a trusted mental-health professional with whom you can process these feelings appropriately. Don't expect to get through negative feelings overnight. Most parents report a back-and-forth process between negative feelings and a sense of resolve. Remember that this happens over time, and you have to find your own timetable. Parents who avoid dealing with these difficult feelings merely prolong the suffering for themselves and their children.

Parents who are unwilling to cooperate on any level usually have unresolved anger, grief, sadness, or all of the above. One parent's unresolved feelings can create an emotional atmosphere that prevents both parents from remaining child-focused. Do not stoop to that level. Historical arguments are better left behind; leave the issues of your marriage in the past and resist playing out those never-ending conversations that just leave everyone frustrated, angry, and tired. Everyone feels the lure of these arguments, but they are dead-ends to cooperative parenting. Simply refuse to engage in such conversations, and continually stress that you are interested in communicating about what is currently affecting your child's life. Doing this consistently may help, in that at least you (and your children) won't have to be exposed to these dead-end conversations.

If you are stuck dealing with a difficult parent, especially when there is a pending court case, it is a good idea to keep good records of all your interactions. Keep track of whether they are keeping their commitments to any original agreements regarding custody, visitation, appointments, and providing consistent positive messages to the children.

Importance of Maternal and Paternal Relative Access

518.1752 GRANDPARENT VISITATION.

In all proceedings for dissolution or legal separation, after the commencement of the proceeding or at any time after completion of the proceedings, and continuing during the minority of the child, the court may make an order granting visitation rights to grandparents under section 257C.08, subdivision 2.

One advantage of co-parenting is the opportunity for your child to have an increased relationship with both sets of grandparents. The Parenting Plan discussed in the post-divorce family should also include grandparents and other extended family members. It's important to recognize that grandparents are vital in the unique developmental stages of the divorce process. If given the opportunity to participate, grandparents are more likely to become an important support resource to your children as they adjust to the divorce. This bond can be a critical ingredient to their development. The grandparent-grandchild relationship continues after divorce and so their role in helping your children adjust to the divorce can provide a safe place for the child's emotional needs.

For more information, please visit the website <https://yourmedicalinfo.net/grandparents-affected-by-adult-child-divorce/>

An exception to the preceding discussion is when children are in jeopardy from abuse or neglect. These are the only reasons to keep a child from seeing the other parent without supervision or appropriate safeguards. When there is an element of such danger, you must get the assistance of the courts, police, and anyone mandated to become involved in protecting the safety of children. In all other disagreements, attempts to foster positive relationships with both parents must be made in the children's best interests.

If you are faced with a parent who refuses to keep to an agreed schedule, or is putting your children at serious physical or emotional risk, then consulting with legal counsel and/or child protective agencies may be necessary. However, under no circumstances should you make a false report of abuse or neglect. Unlike abuse and neglect, bad parenting is not against the law.

Another point to keep in mind is that both of you, as parents, are experiencing changes. For example, spending time alone with your children might be a new experience for you. Sharing custody is a further adjustment, especially if you are used to having access to your kids at all times. You may feel differently about how the other parent is handling a situation from your reactions while you were married. That is normal. Likewise, your feelings and emotions as residential or non-residential parent may alter how you choose to deal with situations in the future. Try to understand that the other parent is in a different role that may prevent them from handling a situation as you think they should. Allow for differences. Your children will adjust to your parenting differences, and they may even come to appreciate such differences.

How do I begin seeing my ex in a new light?

It is not easy to develop a new perspective about your ex solely as a parent. You will most likely have some leftover negative feelings as a former spouse. It can be particularly difficult when there was a lot of stress, tension, and difficult times during the marriage. Remind yourself that your common goal now is the well-being of your children. Issues that were alive and well in your marriage can be left in the past when you are dealing with present situations. Many parents feel they are doing a good job if they are not saying bad things about the other parent in front of the kids. This is good, but it is not enough. Most kids pick up on parents' actual feelings through subtle, usually nonverbal, cues. By getting support for

yourself, you are less likely to create unhealthy messages even inadvertently. If you become overwhelmed with feelings of anger, resentment, jealousy, or revenge, make special efforts to address these with members of your support system or a good practitioner of mental health.

How do I balance my children's needs with my own needs?

Parents should realize that focusing on their own needs helps their children. Most children, regardless of their age, will feel secure if they sense their parents are emotionally healthy. Making time for yourself, while often difficult, is important. Healthy outlets include counseling with a professional therapist, meeting with friends or support groups, or any activity that brings you pleasure. Neglecting yourself makes it difficult to be effective with your kids' needs. You must have outlets for dealing with your own difficult feelings.

Be mindful that your needs and those of your children will often be very different. While you might be feeling angry, anxious, or depressed about your new living situation, it is entirely possible that your child feels a great sense of relief now that things have changed. Avoid assuming that your children feel or think exactly the way you do. Their experience of your ex is very different from your experience. That is the way it should be. Remember, the relationship your children have with both parents is different from the relationship parents have with each other. You may feel betrayed or rejected by your ex-spouse, but that may not be what your child experienced. Parents and children rarely experience a separation and divorce in exactly the same way. If you suspect you are confusing your own feelings with those of your kids, get some outside objective feedback from someone you trust.

In the next section, we will explore one important way parents can create a stable home environment for their children: a well-thought out and flexible parenting plan.

What is a Parenting Plan?

A parenting plan is a written proposal by a parent indicating how two parents will handle their future relationship with their child. It contains provisions on custody, visitation, decision making, and many other co-parenting responsibilities. A carefully constructed parenting plan is an important part of raising healthy children after a divorce. A parenting plan must evolve with the changing needs of your children. Therefore, it does not have to include every potential situation you may encounter. However, it must be revisited regularly to make sure it meets your family's needs.

As stated above, an effective parenting plan will outline how both parents will maintain a close and loving relationship with their children. Although the plan should contain many specifics, it should also permit some flexibility. You should be prepared to make occasional changes to schedule or routines if it will assist your co-parent. These times should be the exception and not the rule, however. Remember, when you show flexibility and understanding, you are loving your children; ideally, your co-parent is acting in kind. If they are not, keep doing the right thing.

Below is a summary list of what should be included in a parenting plan. This list is not exhaustive, and parents should use it as a guide to construct a plan that is right for them, their children, and their particular situation (see the “Reference” section for books with comprehensive information on how to create excellent parenting plans).

Things to consider when making a parenting plan:

1. Schedules will cover time spent with both parents on weekdays, weekends, the school year, summers, birthdays, vacations, and holidays. This section should also outline how changes to the schedule will be handled.
2. Decision-making will include day-to-day decisions like eating meals and ensuring that homework is done as well as major decisions like health care and moving.
3. Information sharing will outline how parents will communicate about the variety of issues that involve their children.
4. Parent-child communication should be addressed and provisions made for how children will communicate with one parent while with the other parent.
5. Exchange of children for visitation will describe schedules and places for the effective transfer of children from one parent to the other.
6. Handling disputes will provide a brief plan for how parents should deal with the inevitable differences and conflicts that arise when raising children.

Six Keys to Successful Co-parenting

1. How you feel about your ex is less important than how you act toward him/her. Putting aside your negative feelings is definitely in the best interests of your child.
2. Respect your need for privacy and the other parent’s too. The only information that needs to be shared between co-parents is that pertaining to their children.
3. Both parents’ time with the child is sacred. Don’t make or change plans for the time your child is scheduled to spend with your ex. Honor the pre-arranged schedule.
4. Both parents have the right to develop their own parenting styles. As long as no abuse or neglect is happening, let your ex-spouse relate to your child as he or she sees fit.
5. Acknowledge what your ex-spouse has to offer your child. Remember the qualities that first attracted you. Those qualities still exist and are available to your child.
6. Expect to feel awkward and uncomfortable with this new way of relating. But keep affirming your commitment to the new relationship, and eventually your ex will begin to play by the same rules.

518.175 PARENTING TIME.

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/518.175>

Please refer to the above link to read the complete statute on Parenting Time. In all proceedings for dissolution or legal separation, subsequent to the commencement of the proceeding and continuing thereafter during the minority of the child, the court shall, upon

the request of either parent, grant such parenting time on behalf of the child and a parent as will enable the child and the parent to maintain a child to parent relationship that will be in the best interests of the child. The court, when issuing a parenting time order, may reserve a determination as to the future establishment or expansion of a parent's parenting time. In that event, the best interest standard set forth in subdivision 5, paragraph (a), shall be applied to a subsequent motion to establish or expand parenting time.

If the court finds that parenting time with a parent is likely to endanger the child's physical or emotional health or impair the child's emotional development, the court shall restrict parenting time with that parent as to time, place, duration, or supervision and may deny parenting time entirely, as the circumstances warrant. The court shall consider the age of the child and the child's relationship with the parent prior to the commencement of the proceeding.

A parent's failure to pay support because of the parent's inability to do so shall not be sufficient cause for denial of parenting time. The court may provide that a law enforcement officer or other appropriate person will accompany a party seeking to enforce or comply with parenting time.

Upon request of either party, to the extent practicable an order for parenting time must include a specific schedule for parenting time, including the frequency and duration of visitation and visitation during holidays and vacations, unless parenting time is restricted, denied, or reserved.

If a parenting plan or an order granting parenting time cannot be used to determine the number of overnights or overnight equivalents the child has with each parent, the court shall modify the parenting plan or order granting parenting time so that the number of overnights or overnight equivalents the child has with each parent can be determined.