

5 Single Parent Strategies for Communicating with your Child's Other Parent

London-based Jennifer Broadley has been a successful single parent for many years. She offers some valuable thoughts about how best to communicate with your child's other parent. While some of the phrases and word spelling is slightly different than American English, her sentiments are universal and worth heeding. You can learn more about Jennifer at www.successfulsingleparenting.com.

I heard a journalist say recently that "there's a vicious and disrespectful way of communicating that's reserved exclusively for the 'divorced with children'". Ouch, that hurt! Probably because it's so true. It doesn't have to be like that and for the sake of building a bridge with our children's other parent here are some ground-rules for practicing how to play fair. (For the sake of ease here, I'm going to assume that we're talking about divorce or separation and that the children have residence with their mum; their dad having moved to a separate home).

1. Focus on the Present and the Future

Conversations between separated Mums and Dads about the past often get heated, stressed and even dangerous. Ideally, you want to get to a point where your communication is calm and actively contributes to a positive future. If you have unresolved issues relating to your past relationship, you must find a way to process these independently to your conversations with your ex. Find a good counsellor, a qualified friend or family member (i.e. they know how to keep you moving forward and are not going to spend time just agreeing with you), or an anger-management therapist - whoever it is, work through your feelings about your ex-partner in a constructive and forward-focused way in your own time.

2. Focus on the Children's Wellbeing

Remember that regardless of what you think about your child's other parent, your child loves you both and is not a pawn. Try to encourage a good relationship with their dad after he's moved away and build up the time your children spend with him to a level where everyone's happy. Initially it may be that the children just want to be in familiar surroundings for the majority of the time. Encourage and equip them to talk about how they feel and be aware not to manipulate or colour their thinking. Asking what they want is a good start, however sometimes they will have to be stretched out of their comfort zone (like they may just have to go and spend the weekend at Dad's flat) for the long-term benefit of all their relationships.

3. Give Yourself a Time Limit for Conversations

If you find that your tolerance level for being civil to your ex-partner is limited, then make sure you only talk in short blocks of time. Practice 'doing diaries' in under 10 minutes. If you feel yourself start to get anxious, then suggest that 'we look at this again next week'.

4. Get Comfortable With Not Concluding

Not all conversations about our children have to be concluded right now. Try to plan ahead when negotiating access, holidays, saving for gifts, having your children be at their friend's parties, etc. Mention ahead of time that you'd like to take the children to Cornwall, or you want to have them visit their Granny on her birthday. This will allow time for both parties to consider the benefits for the children and to consider what a compromise or re-negotiation might look like.

5. Be Respectful

Challenging though it might be, talking to your ex with respect is the best way to begin to change things for the better. I know how hard this can be - especially in the early days; but it will get easier with practice and persistence. You owe it to yourself and to your children and ultimately it will reduce anxiety and

increase happiness all round.

These excellent suggestions come from the wisdom and experience of living it. Failing to understand the importance of creating a working, respectful, cooperative relationship between you and your child's other parent sets you up for pain, anxiety and frustration. Even more importantly, your child feels the stress as well and it creates emotional turmoil for them.

Two adults can't always agree on everything - especially when they've been divorced. But understanding that your child's well-being is at stake should keep you on the path toward mature compromise and productive dialogue.

If you have any thoughts to share with us on this topic, please send them along.