

5 Rules To Follow For A Healthy Co-Parenting Relationship

This article was written by Teresa Virani, Co-Founder of [coparently](#) – a scheduling and communication tool for divorced and separated parents to organize & manage shared custody.

A healthy [co-parenting](#) relationship helps to provide children with stability and to maintain a strong connection with both parents. It's not easy but it is possible to develop a cordial, business-like relationship with your co-parent where you are both focused on the common goal of raising your children without the scars that too often come with divorce and separation. When you are able to set aside your differences and work together as a parenting team, everybody wins.

Here are some tried and true tips on how to successfully navigate your way through the co-parenting years:

1. Consistency between homes

Children – especially teenagers – need to have some consistency around their daily routine and what is expected of them in terms of chores and their role within the family. This helps kids to develop self-discipline and also provides them with a sense of security. This is a difficult transition for your children, as they have to adjust to lots of big changes in their daily life, all at the same time.

This is especially true for teenagers who are also trying to deal with the changes happening to their bodies, the social pressures of being a teenager and more complex learning at school.

With all of this going on, it feels comforting for your children to be able to come home at the end of a day and know that it's snack time or when they will be doing their homework. By having a daily routine that your child is used to, you can help your kids feel less stressed about their day. Work with your co-parent to provide your children with the consistency they need in their everyday lives to feel safe and secure.

2. Communicate regularly

Divorced and separated parents often go to great lengths to avoid talking to each other and it can be tempting to communicate with your co-parent through your child – especially when children are older. It is not fair to put your children in the middle or ask them to relay your messages. You're

putting them in a difficult position that will inevitably make them feel torn between you both. There's also a good chance that they will either forget an important part of the message or just decide they don't want to pass on that information. Miscommunication often leads to conflict between divorced and separated parents and can leave your child feeling guilty. Be sure to always communicate directly and regularly with the other parent.

As your children grow up and start to crave independence during the teenage years, you might think that you don't need to communicate as often or share as much information with your co-parent. But communication between you is just as important as it's always been, just for different reasons. Teens like to experiment and try new things as they begin to work out their identity. This is a time when parental guidance and consistency is particularly important. So when communication is limited between co-parents and your teenager controls the flow of information, they can start to push boundaries in unsafe ways. If your teen knows that you are not likely to be talking to each other, it becomes very easy to tell you that they are spending time with the other parent, when in fact they are heading out for the night. By communicating regularly and agreeing consistent boundaries, you are giving your teens the opportunity to explore their own identity in a safe way.

3. Keep the conflict away from your children

Disagreements between parents are a fact of life – this is true of all parenting relationships, not just divorced and separated parents. And even with the most successful co-parenting relationships, there will be differences of opinion you will need to work through.

One of the most important co-parenting rules (if not the most important) is to make sure you never fight in front of your children. For children, one of the few silver linings of their parents separating is that they won't have to put up with all the arguing anymore. Ongoing conflict between parents can scar children and have long-term damaging effects on their mental well-being. If you find a conversation is getting heated in front of the kids, you need to agree to discuss at a different time when the children aren't present. Always aim to take the high ground and focus on [what your children need from you](#). They need to know that you have their best interests at heart and that you will always put them first.

4. Treat your co-parenting relationship like a business partnership

To establish a truly healthy co-parenting relationship, it's important to set your intentions and have a very clear understanding that you are no longer in an intimate relationship with your co-parent. You

are both undertaking a very important business partnership – one that you really don't want to fail – the business of raising your children together.

To achieve this, you will need to set new boundaries for yourself and for each other. When communicating, make sure it is always about the children and communicate as you would with any other colleague. It's important to always be polite and treat your co-parent with respect: even if this isn't always reciprocated. Be civil and communicate in a professional, clear way. Communicate with your co-parent in the way you would like them to communicate with you. This can be a challenge – especially if this is a one-way street. But if you stay consistent, there's a chance your co-parent will eventually adopt a similar approach. Either way, you will be sending a very clear message to your children that they come first and that their happiness is very important to you.

Always use a respectful tone, and try to make requests in the same way you would a colleague. It's unlikely that you would send an email to a colleague demanding that they attend a meeting. Usually you would send a meeting request and give that person a reasonable amount of time to respond. Give your co-parent these same courtesies.

By keeping things professional and staying focused on what's best for your children, you will find it much easier to stay calm and to keep your emotions out of it. Remember that even though you are no longer a couple, you will be parents together forever. You need to find a way to make it work for the sake of your children.

5. Be flexible

Flexibility is key to a successful co-parenting relationship. There will be times when your co-parent will need to make changes to the schedule or ask a favor. Wherever possible, be accommodating and find a compromise that works for everyone. For example, if your co-parent has theater tickets and really wants to take your child during your parenting time, be generous and agree to the schedule change. Your children will get to have a fun time with their parent and you're sending them a clear message that it's not a competition and your children don't need to choose between you. It also means that when you want to celebrate something special with the kids that's during your co-parent's parenting time, they are much more likely to be flexible too.

Flexibility becomes even more important for the teenage years. As your child grows up, it's important that they have their say about the parenting time schedule. Work with your teen and your co-parent to come up with a plan that fits with your teen's schedule and activities. Friends are a high priority for teens and you will need to accept that they are going to want to spend more time with their friends which will impact your parenting time together. It's important not to make them feel guilty about this. Try instead to schedule specific times to spend together.

Parenting from two homes comes with its own unique set of challenges for everyone involved and daily life is anything but easy. But if you follow these guidelines, you can work together as a parenting team and your children will grow up feeling loved and supported by both of you.