

Co-parent Communication: Rules of Engagement

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.

When parents divorce or separate, it is widely agreed that it is in the best interests of the child to maintain an ongoing, stable and loving relationship with both parents. Studies have shown that it can improve a child's outcome and long-term emotional well-being and helps them to fully recover from their parents' separation. It also means that children aren't left worrying about what they did wrong, or feeling like they have to choose between parents or wondering why one parent doesn't love them enough to be involved in their life anymore.

Children also benefit when parents are able to establish a respectful and co-operative co-parenting relationship. To achieve this, parents need to come to terms with the fact that even though they are no longer in an intimate relationship with each other, they will be parents together forever. Parents need to establish a business partnership to manage the important business of raising their kids.

Communication between parents needs to be consistent, purposeful and child-focused. It helps to keep in mind that your overall goal is the happiness and well-being of your child. This will help set the tone for peaceful and effective communication with your ex.

Communicating with your ex is most likely going to be difficult and uncomfortable. But remember you don't have to always meet face-to-face or even talk over the phone. Co-parenting scheduling and communication tools such as [coparently](#), as well as email and texting, can help parents to communicate in a professional, business-like way and to focus on child-related issues. Your goal is to establish and maintain a business-like relationship and to communicate without conflict.

The following techniques will help you to open up effective communication lines with your co-parent and to keep putting your children first:

- **Set a business-like tone**

It's very important that you establish the right tone for your co-parenting partnership and keep things professional. You will need to set new boundaries and keep the attention firmly focused on your children. Treat your co-parenting relationship as a business partnership. This means you need to communicate with your ex as you would with a colleague – be respectful, polite, cordial and objective.

- **Keep communication brief, to the point and always about the kids**

Be sure to establish a platform for clear, child-focused communication. Find a way of communicating with each other that enables you to do this effectively and consistently. Don't let discussions between you and your ex become about your needs or his/her needs – it should always only be about your children's needs.

- **Commit to regular communication**

It's really important for your children to see you both take an active, interested role in their lives. When you are sharing parenting, regular communication is key. Not only will it help to reduce miscommunications about important pick up/drop off information, but it also gives your kids the message that you are a committed parenting team who love them very much. This can be very challenging in the early stages of your separation, and it helps to use communication tools where you don't actually have to talk to each other. You will have a better chance of keeping emotion out of the conversation and it gives you the opportunity to reflect on what you are saying before you send the message.

- **Stay on topic**

When you are communicating with your co-parent, remember to stick to the matter in hand. Try not to bundle up all your concerns, requests and information sharing into one long monthly message. This can be confusing and lead to misunderstandings and missed information. This doesn't mean you should be sending multiple messages every day – try to communicate once or twice a week and keep the communication as brief and to the point as possible. This enables clearer communication and helps to reduce friction.

- **Focus on the present and the future, don't bring up the past**

You need to agree not to discuss issues that you had in your previous relationship with each other. These problems are in the past and not relevant to your co-parenting relationship. You should be completely focused on your children and their needs now. By bringing up past issues and complaints, it sets a negative tone for your co-parenting relationship and the business of raising your children will continue to be a struggle. Whatever your co-parent did or didn't do or should or should not have done, is irrelevant now – it's in the past. It's your present and your future that is important now: the children that you both love and will continue to raise together.

- **Keep any conflict away from your children**

Communicating with your ex isn't easy and anger and resentment can arise when a parent feels they are not being heard. Never fight or argue in front of your children. This is one of the most damaging behaviors you can engage in post-separation in terms of the long-term negative impact on your children. If there is an issue that cannot be resolved amicably when the children are present, you need to agree to either discuss it at another time when they are not around, or if you can, agree to let it go. Always try to take the high ground when conflict arises. As difficult as this can be, you need to be present in the moment and make a conscious decision that you are not going to risk your children's long-term happiness in order to "win" this particular battle.

- **Don't use your child as a messenger**

Communicate parent to parent. Don't use your children to relay information to the other parent. You are putting them in the middle and potentially making them feel like they have to take sides. There's also a good chance that the message will be forgotten or misremembered. It's not fair to put this expectation on a child. Stick to your chosen method of communication and keep the kids out of it.

- **Be courteous and respectful**

Try to communicate with your co-parent in the way you would like them to communicate with you. Use "please" and "thank you" and try to make requests rather than demands. By cooperating with your co-parent and being courteous, you are demonstrating that your children are your first priority. Try to give your co-parent a realistic amount of time to get back to you with requests and due dates. Be reasonable in your expectations and keep your tone professional. You are going to be co-

parenting together for a very long time so try to find a way of not overreacting when your ex tries to push your buttons. Don't write all in capitals – it sounds like you are shouting. Don't curse. Don't be rude or make sarcastic or negative comments about your co-parent. Try to keep emotion and anger out of your communication. Also, try not to blame the other parent when things go wrong – work together to find a solution so it doesn't happen again. And when you're in the wrong, say sorry. Chances are, the more positive you are in your communications, your co-parent will show you the same courtesy.

- **Listen and be considerate**

Good communication starts with listening. Even if you don't end up agreeing with the other parent, it's important that you demonstrate that you have listened and understood their point of view. If you have taken the time to fully understand your co-parent's opinion, it will be much easier for you to explain why you disagree and help you to start down the path of a mutually agreeable resolution to the problem.

- **Compromise and be flexible**

In a co-parenting relationship, there will be many situations when you will need to compromise. When there is something that you and your co-parent don't agree on, you will need to work together to find a common middle ground. If you can both learn to compromise, you can avoid an impasse and find a way for both parents to be content with the outcome. Flexibility is also key to a successful co-parenting relationship. For example, if the other parent wants to take your child to a special event during your parenting time, be gracious and agree. It's important to remember that you want your children to be happy so don't make them miss out on a fun outing just because you want to punish your ex. Nobody wins in this scenario. Also when you show flexibility, it's much more likely that your co-parent will do the same.

When it comes to co-parenting communication, remember to always have your children's best interests at heart. This will help provide a solid foundation for you to build a strong co-parenting relationship and your children will benefit from having both parents in their lives. When communication becomes challenging, think of your children and just be the best parent you can be.