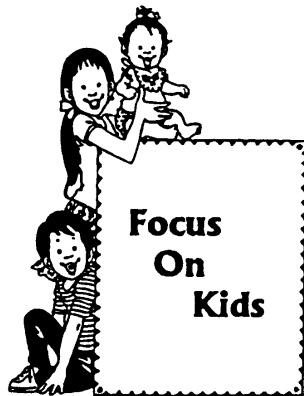


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FOCUS ON KIDS

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MOVING?

Please update your mailing information so you can continue to receive this important newsletter. Contact the Specialist listed above in the County where you attended FOK.

Cooperative Co-parenting for Your Children's Sake

Lisa Wallace,
Human Development Specialist

Do you want your children to do well in school? Do you want to boost your children's self-esteem? You have the power to influence both by simply getting along with their other parent.

Co-parenting after divorce involves negotiating how day-to-day parenting responsibilities and decisions will be shared. The extent to which you work together as partners in parenting is related to your children's adjustment and well-being.

Studies have shown that children with divorced parents who cooperate and support each other do better in school and have higher self-esteem. However, co-parenting after divorce can be difficult. Below are some tips to make co-parenting easier:

Five Tips to Promote Positive Co-Parenting

- ◆ Stay focused on the present. Don't bring up old issues.
- ◆ Keep the relationship simple and business-like.
- ◆ Remind each other that you need to work together for the sake of the children.
- ◆ Attack the problem, not the other parent.
- ◆ Avoid making assumptions. Check things out and clarify points with the other parent.

What Do the Kids Say?

A group of researchers at the University of Missouri asked children about their parents' post-divorce relationships. According to these children, being put "in the middle" of their co-parents' disagreements is distressing.

Here are examples of what the children said:

(Girl, age 14) *"I get stuck in the middle a lot: 'What's your dad doing,' 'What's your mom doing?' It gets annoying 'cause then I get to a point where it's like 'if you really want to know, ask them yourself.'"*

(Boy, age 10) *"I don't like being the messenger between parents. I mean they'll tell me something, like my mom will say, 'Oh, what's your dad doing,' or 'Oh, by the way, could you tell him this and that for me,' and it just goes back and forth for a while until I quit doing that. I just didn't want to do that job anymore."*

Keeping your children out of the middle of post-divorce co-parenting conversations is important for their well-being. Your children need to be free from the responsibility of delivering messages and information between you and their other parent.

Remember, the whole point of cooperative co-parenting is for the sake of your children.

Four Don'ts for Positive Co-parenting

◆ Don't Be Defensive

It can be easy to respond to the other parent's complaints or suggestions for change with defensiveness. *Example: "It's not my fault."* Resist the urge to hear what is said as a personal attack. Instead, listen to the other parent's words as



helpful information and ideas. Keep your response non-emotional and view the exchange of information as intended to

help, not to make the other parent feel badly.

◆ Don't Criticize ...Be Positive

Avoid criticizing the other parent and finding fault with his or her thoughts and ideas.

◆ Don't Be Passive

Withdrawing from the disagreement does not resolve the problem. Some people feel physically uncomfortable and tense with difficult conversations. If the conflict is too uncomfortable, you can say, "I can't deal

with this right now. Let's agree to talk about it in an hour, after I've calmed down and had time to think."



◆ Stop the Sarcasm

Sarcasm is especially damaging because it is often intended to hurt the other parent.



Questions and Answers

Q. I was recently divorced. We have so many important issues to discuss about our children, but I can't stand being in the same room with the other parent. Our conversations are disasters. Any advice?

A. We work with many people we don't like or trust, yet we get along with them on the job...because we have to. We are paid to get along with them and we develop a civil, business relationship. Think of the other parent in a business-way and consider that you must deal with them because of your children.

- ◆ **Define** your new relationship based on your children's needs, not on past "couple" needs. You are still linked as parents and your love for your shared children demands that you have continued contact as you plan for your children's well being.
- ◆ **Think** about these questions: What "business" do you share? What goals do you hold in common? What role does each partner play in reaching these goals?
- ◆ **Choose** a neutral location for your "business" meetings—like a coffee shop or public place—where the rules of courtesy apply. Discuss your matters related to your children away from them.
- ◆ **Develop** and stick to an agenda that focuses on the children and the future you'd like to see for them. Bring along any relevant facts or papers; if it helps, take notes and sign agreements.

Web Resources

Co-parenting After Divorce....<http://missourifamilies.org/features/divorcearticles/divorcefeature34.htm>
Making Joint Custody Work....<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5314.html>