

Communities

A Newsletter for Families Parenting Apart

Positive Communication

It is crucial that your children are never placed in the middle of the communication between you and your co-parent. Asking your child questions that attempt to get information about the other household or using them to send messages back and forth place your child in a terrible position. If they are grilled about their other parent, it produces anxiety and dread – especially when honest answers might lead to a negative response.

Communicate with your co-parent directly. The tips below can help you keep your conversations civil, lessening unhealthy feelings of “battle-fatigue.”

Remember, Less is more. Keep communication short and to the point. Think ahead about what you *really* have to find out. If you need basic information like the location of soccer practice or the time of the dentist appointment, consider sending a text message, email or a short voice mail. If the question can be answered with a simple response, you may not need more conversation.

Resist the urge to call or appear in person when the children are present. If the discussion might lead to conflict, set a time to talk when the children will not be around.

Use a business-like approach and tone of voice. Think how you speak to a receptionist at an office or a salesperson in a retail store. Requests are usually civil, direct and respectful, often followed with a “thank you.” Talking with your co-parent this way can reduce the chance of emotional conflict that can lead to rage and insults.

When your co-parent is flexible and respectful, acknowledge it. If they ask for a simple change or a temporary switch of visiting days, try your best to accommodate them. It builds cooperation. It also sends a message to the children that parents can be civil and respectful - a great behavior model for them!



Positive co-parenting doesn't mean that you always have to agree; the key is learning to work through your differences.

READ MORE ABOUT IT:

For the kids...



Young Children

Abercombie, Barbara (1995) *Charlie Anderson: Two sisters discover their cat has two homes and that's not a bad thing!* Charlie has two families who love him very much.

Ages 9-12

Dawson-Boyd, Candy (1993): *Chevrolet Saturdays: Joey is a fourth grader dealing with his parents' divorce and his mom's remarriage.*

For Teens

Buscemi, Karen (2009) *Split in Two: Keeping it Together When Your Parents Live Apart*

This resource guide is designed to help teens feel less crazed and confused, and more self-confident.

For you...

Craig, Bradley (2014) *Between Two Homes: A Co-parenting Handbook* This book offers many practical tips for parents.

Active Listening

Communicating successfully with co-parents takes energy. Thinking about what to say, how to say it and how it will be heard is not easy. Active listening includes specific skills that help do exactly that. Here are a few of them:

- **Use non-verbal language to show you are listening.** Stop what you are doing and turn towards the speaker. Make eye contact; nod your head while the other person is speaking. Stay calm and think about what your facial expression is saying.
- **Show you 'heard' the other person.** You can do

this by summarizing what the they said. "What I heard you say was..."

- **Listen for feelings.** How did the speaker feel? After they are done talking try reflecting back the feeling, "That must have been hard for you." "I might have felt frustrated, too."
- **Make sure you understand what was said.** It is easy to misinterpret others. Here are some ways to check that we are on the same page. "Let me see if I understand you correctly..." "Tell me more about this."

-Adapted from *Parents Forever™*

Top 10 Tips for Listening



1. **Stop Talking!**
You cannot listen if you are talking.
2. **Put the talker at ease.**
Help the talker feel that he is free to talk.
3. **Show the talker that you want to listen.**
Look and act interested.
4. **Remove distractions.**
Put down your phone.
5. **Empathize with the talker.**
Put yourself in their place and see their point of view.
6. **Be patient.**
Allow plenty of time. Do not interrupt the person talking.
7. **Hold your temper.**
When you are angry you hear things that were not said.
8. **Go easy on argument and criticism.**
Do not argue; even if you win, you lose.
9. **Ask questions.**
This shows you are listening and helps you truly understand.
10. **Stop talking!**
This is first and last, because all other tips depend on it.

Source: *Human Relations in Business*, Keith Davis, McGraw-Hill Book Company

Resilience in Tough Times



Experts say: Resilient families “say what they mean and mean what they say.” Communication that is direct, clear, specific, consistent and honest helps all family members understand the crisis that the family is facing and encourages them to share their feelings and opinions with one another. (Walsh, F. 2006 *Strengthening Family Resilience*. New York: The Guilford Press)

In other words:

When a family faces challenges, individual family members often have different perspectives. Open communication is a key in helping everyone get through the situation. Start by clearly identifying the situation and then work towards a common understanding of the situation. Listen “between the lines”, ask questions and summarize the conversation from time to time. Give attention to both content and feelings.

What you can do:

Share facts and feelings. Listen carefully without judging, arguing or evaluating. Consider taking a break if discussions become heated. Don't forget that young children often hear more than you think they do. They may have many misconceptions in their heads and they don't ask questions to clarify what they have heard. Be sure your children have basic, age-appropriate facts.

Communication with Children



Your tone and body-language can let the child know that no matter what, there are caring adults who will be there for them.

Learn to listen to verbal cues and recognize nonverbal cues in your child. A child's tone of voice, posture and actions can tell you a lot about how they are doing. Be aware of changes in their habits and feelings of sadness. While you may feel overwhelmed with your own issues, you have the power to help make things easier for your child and

help them believe they will be ok.

Be genuinely interested in what your child is saying to you – and that's hard to do when there's a television, newspaper, radio or laptop in front of you. Take just a few minutes to drop everything and really listen to your child talk. Let them interrupt you during the day (within reason, of course!) and get a caring response back. They may not even be talking about the deeper issues your family is facing, but being listened to builds confidence that they have someone, one caring adult, who is in their corner.

TAKE AWAY TIPS:

What parents can do for children



Sometimes even when we think we are communicating in a positive way, children may feel quizzed—watch for their non-verbal cues.

Remember, the goal is to have life long positive relationships with your children.

Practice business-like communication with your co-parent.

Listen to understand—both your children and your co-parent.

Use active listening skills like summarizing what you heard and asking clarifying questions.

Pay attention to your non-verbal language.

Take a break if the conversation becomes heated.



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Other Resources:

Keeping Lines of Communication Open
<http://articles.extension.org/pages/15955/keep-lines-of-communication-open>

Staying Connected to Your Children and Co-Parent
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/parents-forever/resources-for-families/co-parenting/staying-connected-children-co-parent/>

Forgiveness: Letting Go of Grudges and Bitterness
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>

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