

# Common ties

A Newsletter for Families Parenting Apart

## **Positive Conflict Management**

It's not easy for kids when their parents separate. It's even tougher for them if their parents continue to fight. While it may be difficult, it is important for co-parents to talk while keeping emotions in check. Research shows that on-going arguing between parents hurts children. Keep your child in mind and find a healthy way to resolve conflict.

### **These tips can help:**

- Avoid blaming, name calling and put downs.
- Start with something the other person has done right.
- Ask for the other person's point of view and then listen to what she/he is saying.
- Solve problems for the children's sake.
- Don't make winning your goal.
- Address one issue at a time.
- Focus on the present, not the past.
- Admit your own mistakes.
- Don't focus on defending yourself.
- If you can't have a discussion today without arguing, then

schedule another time to talk.

- Choose a good time and place for the discussion.
- Use "I" Statements.
- Stop, think, and breathe before speaking.
- Include a third party in the discussion if mediation is necessary.

### **If you are heading for an argument, ask yourself:**

- Is this situation worth arguing about? Can this conflict be resolved?
- Are you both ready to discuss the problem? Is it the right time and place?
- Can the other parent do anything about the existing problem or is it something you have to take on by yourself?
- Are you expecting too much of the other parent considering things are tough for both of you?
- Have you allowed enough time for change to happen?
- Will you be role-modeling good problem-solving skills for your children?



**“You Can’t Shake  
Hands With a  
Clenched Fist.”  
-Indira Gandhi**



# READ MORE ABOUT IT:

For the kids...



### Young Children

Lansky, Vick. (1998). *It's Not your Fault, KoKo Bear*. This children's story and parenting guide revolves around a lovable bear who doesn't want to have two homes when his parents decide to divorce.

[www.PBSkids.org/itsmylife](http://www.PBSkids.org/itsmylife)

On this interactive site, you can watch videos, take quizzes and create your own journal. Check out divorce topics like "the big questions."

## For you...

Hardwick, C. (2002). *Dear Judge*. Kids' letters to the Judge. Do you see your child in any of these letters?



# Problem Solving: Try these steps for success.

1. Name the problem. Using an "I" Statement, describe the situation with facts or observations.
2. Take turns giving your viewpoints. Try to understand the situation from the other person's point of view. Summarize what you hear to be sure you understand.
3. Brainstorm solutions. Don't judge or evaluate at this point, just list all the possible ways to solve this problem.
4. Together, choose a solution
5. Make sure both of you understand the chosen solution in the same way.
6. Put the solution into action and try it for an agreed upon length of time.
7. Check in with each other at the end of the trial period to see if it's working. If it's not, try another option.

TOGETHER, CHOOSE A SOLUTION THAT IS AGREEABLE TO BOTH OF YOU AND WILL BE GOOD FOR YOUR CHILD.

Source: Boyan, Susan and Termini, Ann (1999). *Cooperative Parenting and Divorce-Shielding Your Child From Conflict*. Atlanta, GA: Active Parenting Publishers

## "I" Statements Take Practice

Many people think that conflict is always bad. While some conflict can be damaging, other conflict may help you solve problems and clear the air.

Conflict can result in a positive solution. If a problem has been bothering you for some time, get it out in the open. But how you do this is important.

When done correctly, "I" Statements improve the odds of having a successful discussion.

The general form of an "I" Statement is:

"I feel/felt \_\_\_\_\_  
when \_\_\_\_\_  
and what I'd like is \_\_\_\_\_."

"I" Statements honestly describe how you feel without attacking the

other person. Using "I" Statements with a controlled voice and positive body language, can reduce the number and size of arguments.

Using "I" Statements doesn't come naturally—they take practice! When you stop and turn what you are about to say into "I" Statements, it will automatically lower the level of conflict. Practice what you'll say before trying it with your co-parent. If the topic is an emotional one, practice with a friend.

Don't forget that "I" Statements can be effective with children as well as adults.

Conflict happens in everyone's life! By choosing productive ways to manage conflict, you are helping yourself and your children.



## 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)



### TAKE AWAY TIPS:

What parents can do for their children

#### 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.



- **Conflict between co-parents hurts children. It's worth the effort to reduce the arguments with your co-parent.**
- **Using “I” Statements helps you communicate with less arguing.**
- **It's important to really listen to the other parent's point of view.**
- **Children are watching you solve problems.**
- **Children can learn healthy ways to solve their own problems.**
- **Resilient families share emotions**

## When Children Have Conflicts

Children have conflict in their lives, too. It might be an issue at school or a disagreement with friends or family. Don't rush in to solve the problem. Instead, teach your child a process for solving problems on their own.

Start by asking your child what is going on and what they think is the cause. Use active listening skills to help your child clearly describe the situation and how they are feeling. Help him/her try to describe the problem from the other's person point of view.

Then ask the child to give you a few possible ways to solve the problem and offer some suggestions yourself. Together, think through the pros and cons

of each solution. Let him/her decide what the best solution is and encourage your child to try it out. Point out how good they are at figuring out what to do.

Problem solving is a skill and the more you practice the better you get. The best way to help your child learn about conflict resolution is for you to set a good example. Let your child see you solve problems in a calm and rational way.



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## Other Resources:

Wallerstein, J.S. & Blakeslee, S. (2003). *What About the Kids? : Raising Your Kids Before, During, and After Divorce*. New York: Hyperion

Ricci, Isolina (1997) *Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for your Children* New York: Fireside

University of Wisconsin Extension Parenting Resources <http://parenting.uwex.edu>

University of Minnesota Extension Family Life Resources <http://www.extension.umn.edu/Family/>

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