



Building Stepfamilies That Work®

A Letter to the “EX”

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Instructions: Your assignment is to write, But **NOT NECESSARILY TO MAIL**, a letter to your prior spouse.

Purpose: Conflict that lingers after the breakdown of a relationship can be very damaging to the children involved. Often the anger and hurt that remain are so intense that the children’s needs are overlooked.

You have no obligation to your children to remain as a couple with your prior spouse. However, you do have an obligation to continue to parent your children. Effective co-parenting is what protects your children from the potentially enduring wounds of family breakdown. ***This requires a functional co-parenting relationship.***

The purpose of your letter is to lay a foundation for effective co-parenting that separates the ‘couple’ issues from your joint, and continuing responsibilities as the children’s biological parents.

Part A (below) outlines concerns that are typically at issue. Part B is a condensed version of Part A that you can use (if you wish) to help you organize your letter. In your letter, include only the points that apply to your situation. Feel free to add, delete, or re-order any points as you see fit.

Bring a draft of your finished letter to the next class.

Part A

- I’ve been doing a lot of reading/studying – found important information about the kids – wanted to share it. We’ve had difficulties communicating in the past – so decided to write – too important to mis-communicate.
- When our relationship ended – so many emotions – failed to realize that our dreams and goals as a couple; and our vision of what the family would be, all died. This is a very sad thing – but the death of our family, as we knew it, is our reality now.
- Lingering conflict following the breakdown of a family can be very damaging to kids.
- We both love our kids and would never knowingly do anything to hurt them. Effective co-parenting is essential to protect them from enduring wounds.

Kids’ Needs

- End ‘badmouthing’. It damages their self-esteem because they are equal parts of both of us and they love us both. Even hearing labels like “the Ex” hurt them.
- Kids need to be kept out of the middle of the issues between us. We must communicate directly to co-parent effectively.

- Kids often feel to blame for the breakdown and typically seek to reunite the original family unit. We need to meet with them (ideally at the same time) to inform and/or reassure them that:
 - a) the breakdown wasn't their fault,
 - b) we won't be getting back together,
 - c) we will all cherish the memories of the good times we shared together, and
 - d) we will always continue to co-parent them to the best of our ability.
- Suggest or request methods to:
 - a) debrief the kids (e.g., a face to face meeting with all present, or two separate meetings where the same content is covered), and
 - b) establish regular communication (e.g., weekly telephone calls, email, etc.)
- Include booklet on Divorce and article on Visitation* – they outline what kids need at different ages and stages.
- In closing:

I want you to know that I am truly sorry for my part...

I sincerely hope that, even though we are no longer a couple, we will be able to put our personal differences aside when it comes to the kids so we can be the kind of parents they deserve.

Part B

Reading/study > share information. Communication problem history > decision to write (too NB)

When relationship ended > intense emotions > hid shattering of dreams and sadness for the death of the family as we knew it

Parental conflict > damaging to kids. Both love kids. Neither would knowingly hurt them. Effective co-parenting protects.

Kids' Needs: Shielded from badmouthing; kept out of middle; told "not your fault"; told "we won't reunite"; told "fond memories are OK"; and told, "we'll continue to co-parent".

Suggest/request methods to meet/communicate.

Provide literature.

Sorry for my part. Reinforce: Separating couple issues from parenting responsibilities and kids needs.

* Note:

1. *Because Life Goes On: Helping Children Live With Separation and Divorce* (available from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/>)
2. *Mediating Agreement on Parenting Issues* by Kathleen O'Connell Corcoran (available at www.stepfamily.ca).

Letter to Ex.rtf Feb 2008

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