



# Building Stepfamilies That Work®

## *The Problem Co-Parent*

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- Because of your joint responsibilities to your children and the negative impact that enduring parental conflict has upon children, it is essential to find a way to manage your interactions so they are more productive and less upsetting.
- Regard them as you would a business client, literally. Strive to deal with them in a mature, thoughtful, and business like manner.
- Use your problem solving skills and powers of persuasion rather than emotions, to get where you need to go.
- Treat the difficulty you're having with your co-parent as a problem (which is solvable) rather than a catastrophe.
- Remind yourself that finding a solution may take some time, but it's worth it.
- Ask yourself: "How else could I look at this situation?" A new view is very likely to produce a new solution.
- Before jumping into an issue, ask yourself: "In what ways have I been/am I being a problem co-parent myself?" Consider your tone of your comments (hostile or sarcastic?), your presentation (self-righteous? accusatory? impatient?). Effective communication is essential for any good relationship.
- You do not have to be chums or pals to communicate effectively, but you do need to stop sniping and criticizing if you genuinely wish to be able to co-parent effectively.
- Do ask yourself if you are still blaming your Ex for your emotions.
- Don't expect your co-parent's way of relating to you to improve after you separate or divorce. It is likely to be more problematic for the first year or two.
- Don't "accept the invitation" when your co-parent attempts to draw you into a heated exchange. Do take a mental step backward and try to understand what is motivating his/her behaviour.

- Notify your co-parent that you will not participate in any conversations that involve yelling or profanity because to do so is unproductive and fosters ill will.
- Be clear that you are open to resuming a discussion when things can be calm and remain calm.
- Set limits if discussions are yielding more heat than light: leave the scene, hang up the phone, disconnect the answering machine, turn off the telephone ringer. Consider using a neutral third party.
- If you feel physically threatened, promptly take the appropriate action (For example, change your locks, get a restraining order, call the police, remove yourself and the children to a place of safety, etc).
- Don't try to banish a problem co-parent from your or your children's life.
- Do appreciate that problem co-parents are often quite devoted to the children and, once a better co-parenting relationship has been established, you will be grateful for their involvement.

## **The Under-Involved Parent**

- Heads up. Once maintenance payments are being made, an under-involved co-parent is likely to want more involvement with the children.
- Recognize that children do *need* contact with their bio-parent and will be disappointed, angered and possibly harmed by their parent's absence, lateness, lack of interest, etc.
- If you suspect your co-parent's lack of involvement is a 'reaction' to the divorce, explain this to your children. Let them know that it takes time for adults to adjust to a divorce too, but you are hopeful that things will come around in a few months when things have settled.

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