

What is Co-parent Counseling?

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Working with clients who are often hostile and resentful requires that a therapist possess, in my opinion, the ability to be both directive and strategic in his or her approach. It is also essential to be familiar with the developmental stages of children, the dynamics, dilemmas and problems of divorce (both for parents and for children) and to have a dynamic approach to working with couples. Below is a handout entitled "A Guide for Divorced or Separated Parents" which outlines what parents can accomplish in co-parent counseling.

A Guide for Divorced or Separated Parents

For most children, divorce or separation is a traumatic event that requires time, effort and support from both parents in order to heal. The single best thing that parents can do to help their children through this process is to learn to cooperate for the sake of the children by reaffirming and maintaining a commitment to their parental obligations and responsibilities.

Divorce or separation is perhaps hardest on children as they are usually forced to transition between two different households. It is also useful to keep in mind that while each parent is missing the children some percentage of time, the children are missing one parent 100% of the time.

Guidelines for parents

- 1) Frequently remind your children that the divorce was not their fault in any way and that you will always love them and remain a part of their lives (unless, of course, this is not true).
- 2) Learn to view your current relationship with your ex-partner as a business-like, co-parent relationship that focuses only on matters directly involved with the ongoing rearing of the children. Refrain from speaking about any other personal matters.
- 3) Always communicate about matters involving the children directly with the other parent and never use any child as a "go-between." Asking children to deliver messages to the other parent, however innocuous these messages might appear, can generate tremendous anxiety for children, especially if conflict already exists.
- 4) Never speak disparagingly about the other parent to the children as this causes a loyalty conflict within a child.
- 5) Learn to convert your complaints of the other parent into requests for behavioral change from that parent. Beginning requests by using phrases such as, "Would you be willing to:" "I'm wondering if it is possible for you to:" etc., demonstrates both respect and politeness to the other parent, which will go a long way toward establishing cooperation and softening anticipated resistance.
- 6) Never engage in conflict with the other parent in front of the children. Keep all communication with the other parent business-like and positive or, at the very least, neutrally-toned.
- 7) When conflicts occur between parents that involve the children, learn to focus on the facts surrounding the actual problems as reported by the children (using their exact words as much as possible), rather than editorializing or exaggerating the events for dramatic effect.
- 8) Don't involve your children in your new personal, intimate relationships unless you are certain that the relationship is a committed one that will become an important and integral part of the children's lives.

Casual dating and/ or temporary, non-committed relationships should be kept separate from the children and enjoyed during the parent's own time.