

Parenting Coordination Handbook

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Case Setup & Agendas for Initial Meetings

SET UP/PRE-MEETING
Counsel contact – conference call Client chemistry session Service Agreements customized w/ counsel SAs reviewed with client by counsel Authorizations reviewed and approved by counsel SAs Distributed and E-Signed Stip, proposed Order/Judgement w/ SAs attached submitted – Counsel Order Judgement of Appointment in hand Retainer tendered Client Intake, Behavior Assessment, CoPAFS, Parent Problem Checklist - completed GAL report received/reviewed [if any] Docket/Pleadings Review completed
Receive & Review Parenting Plan
Restraining Order? Modification in place? Copy in hand?
Schedule IIS & IJS
Post to MyFiles signed service agreements, directions and instructions to access studio

IIS AGENDA
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM THIS ENGAGEMENT?
HOW WILL YOU BE WHEN THINGS GO OFF THE RAILS?
PLEASE ASK QUESTIONS AS WE GO ALONG.

Underlying premise: How can I help bring hope to your now bi-nuclear family?

PRIMARY GOAL: Design Coparenting Relationship as FUTURE FOCUSED & BUSINESS LIKE

INQUIRIES: Questions and ideas to be pondered not answered quickly

CONFLICT - consider how conflict impacts your child:

Destructive conflict – overt hostility between CPPs, Aggressive Interactions, poorly or unresolved disagreements, child is aware or worse yet, involved.

Low conflict – normal, isolated from children, resolved by compromise.

What are you seeing in your child(ren) that you relate to coparent conflict?

- How you coparent going forward will be the biggest determining factor on your children's emotional, physical, relational, and economic well-being for the rest of their lives.

See ACES in Handbook & videos in DropBox

- Children Need – support and solidarity between CPPs, consistency & predictability in approach, security and integrity of home(s), attunement to child's needs.

See Emory Hierarchy of Needs in Handbook

THREE TYPES OF STRESS:

- **Positive stress response** is a normal and essential part of healthy development, characterized by brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in hormone levels. Some situations that might trigger a positive stress response are the first day with a new caregiver or receiving an injected immunization, telling mom or dad 'I wet the bed' or what happens to you when you receive an OFW message from your CPP
- **Tolerable stress response** activates the body's alert systems to a greater degree as a result of more severe, longer-lasting difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, COVID, or a frightening injury. If the activation is time-limited and buffered by relationships with adults who help the child adapt, the brain and other organs recover from what might otherwise be damaging effects.
- **Toxic stress response** can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—*without adequate adult support*. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years.

See ACES & How Brains Are Built in Drop Box.

Who else plays a role in child's life? Noted on Intake Questionnaire?

PLEASE TELL THEM THAT I MAY NEED/WANT THEIR INPUT/PERSPECTIVE AT SOME POINT

Any questions on terms of PCSA & PGP (Service Agreements) - Review
Confidentiality vs Privilege
Signed Releases & Authorizations
Cone of Silence w Team

OFW 1. Professional access [tony@tonypelusi.com] 2. 5 days to populate calendar for entire term of engagement enter parenting time per parenting plan and ECA's 3. Download app 4. CALLS
Structure going forward - typically Zoom conference, and in person always available – ASK IF DESIRED
To set up 1:1 contact with PC: 1. OFW message w/ cc: to CPP and 2. Identify subject/topic ALL CONTENT IN OFW (EXCEPT PRIVATE JOURNAL & ATTY/CLIENT EXCHANGES, IF ANY) IS ADMISSIBLE IN COURT
BIOC does not mean kids rule! [children have a voice not a vote] NOR does it mean you alone are the one who determines what is BIOC
DEFINE SUCCESS/WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS? What does your CPP do that sets you off? If it happens in session, how will I know & what will you do? What are the common interests shared by you and your CPP? What characteristics do you and your CPP have in common? How did you and your CPP get to where you are now? <u>PC GOALS</u> Minimize Conflict – resolve it respectfully and maturely without exposing children to it Be the Change You Want to See Child's view - Restructured Family vs Two Families Communication & Language - Parenting Time vs Custody; On or Off Duty Parent; CPP Your home with Mom/Dad vs My home F.A.I.L. = FOR ALL I LEARN GOAL = Stay out of Court What else?
Costs & Reallocation – Reallocation is rare – ULYSSES CONTRACT if desired Expenses section of OFW RECOMMENDED to track reimbursement of coparent for costs You Do Not need to transfer funds using OFW as there is a fee after # transactions.
HANDBOOK REVIEW - SEE SUMMARIES OF BIFF, NVC, SWYP?
<u>NO SUBPOENA OF ME, MY NOTES, AND/OR FOR ME TO TESTIFY</u> <u>\$25,000.00 ESTIMATE/ADVANCE DEPOSIT REQUIRED IF SUBPOENAED</u>
AFTER BOTH IISs TONY WILL PREPARE AND POST TO MYFILES A SUMMARY WHICH INCLUDES HOMEWORK. USE DROPBOX LINK FOR ACCESS TO RESOURCES
POST OPEN CONCERNS MINIMUM OF 3 DAYS BEFORE IJS REVIEW ZOOM ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IN DROP BOX:

**ACCESS AFCC GUIDELINES PC & CIT
WATCH VIDEOS V1 THRU V9, DOWNLOAD CP & COPARENT AGREEMENTS
CUSTOMIZE AND SHARE DRAFTS IN OFW &**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/sdf8jblrdzl228jaqwrkm/ACFvcslgB1BLHY5bFr5AYZU?rlkey=wmd3o0sgxmaou0yma005oguh1&st=mpci3avn&dl=0>

IJS AGENDA

- **CONFIRM AND SIGN AUTHORIZATIONS & ZOOM ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**
- Share one positive Learning from videos 1 thru 9
- Review and finalize CP – response time, # per day, time of day, confirm elements of the Transition emails
- Review amalgamated version of “Coparenting Agreement to Read to Children”
- Confirm understanding of SWYP? B.I.F.F. & NVC, Ulysses Contract [optional], Service Agreements, & limitation on ENFORCEMENT
- 5 days to populate OFW Calendar with Shared Parenting Time & ECA
- Address CPP “Open Matters”
- Agreements vs. determinations
- CONFIRM - Download OFW App, turn on all notifications – INDIVIDUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR READING NOTIFICATIONS AND MESSAGES

Post your favorite photo of children in MyFiles
Place one framed of your CPP in each child's bedroom-Post photo of same in OFW

MORE HOMEWORK – SET COMPLETION DATE!

Enroll in:

1. *Between2Homes* @ <https://betweentwohomes.com/making-two-homes-work>

Course is **6-hours**. Must complete within 30 days of enrolling. Cost is \$39.95 **Set completion date**

2. *Children In Between* @ <http://www.highconflictsolutions.com>

Course is **8-hours**. Cost is \$129.95 **Set completion date**

3. *How to Write a BIFF Response* @ <https://www.highconflicttraining.com/offers/keN6FeXD/checkout>.
Cost \$47.00

4. *Co-Parenting Without Conflict* @ <https://www.onlineparentingprograms.com/online-classes/high-conflict-co-parenting-class.html>

Course is **12 hours**. Cost \$139.99 **Set completion date**

5. [OPTIONAL] *Children In Between for Kids [Age 7 – 14]* @
<https://www.childreninbetweenforkids.com>

Cost is \$19.95 for 6 months access!

Begin Reading:

6. *BIFF for Coparents* by Bill Eddy
7. *Parents Are Forever* by Shirley Thomas Ph.D.
8. *Process of Forgiveness* by William Meninger

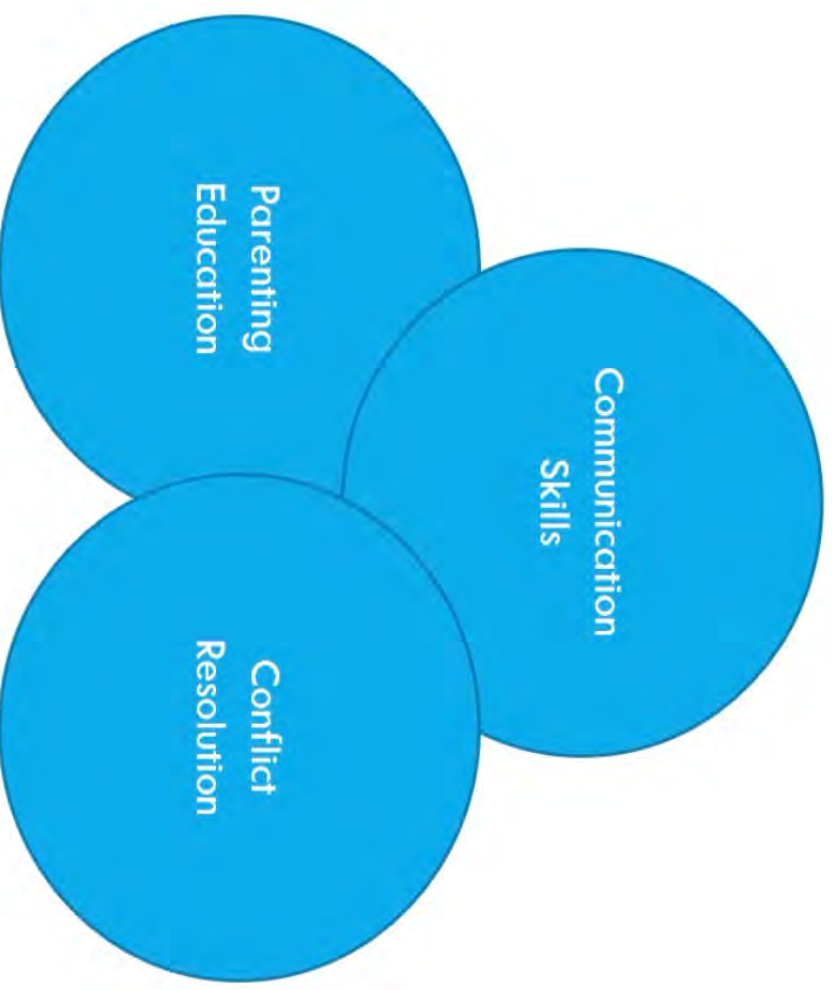
PDF versions in DropBox

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/sdf8jblrdzl228jaqwrkm/ACFvcslgB1BLHY5bFr5AYZU?rlkey=wmd3o0sgxmaou0yma005oguh1&st=mpci3avn&dl=0>

TONY WILL PREPARE AND SHARE THE IJS SUMMARY, AGREEMENTS IF ANY, AND IF NECESSARY, DETERMINATIONS
VIA OFW

PC - ROLES

- A. Intake Process
- B. Assessment or Appraisal
- C. Education
- D. Coordination/Case Management
- E. Conflict Management
- F. Communication
- G. Decision-making
- H. Parenting Plan
- I. Written Agreements
- J. Limitations on Functions



Ultimate Aim:
To help parents keep children out of the conflict,
and keep the parents out of the Court

When People Parent Together: Let's Talk About Coparenting¹

James McHale, Jason Baker, and Heidi Liss Radunovich²

What IS “coparenting”?

Coparenting refers to how parents work together when they are raising a child. Do they agree on parenting strategies? Do they support each others' efforts in raising the child?

Coparenting can refer to how a married couple works together in parenting children, but it can also refer to divorced parents, people who have a child together but never married, or any two or more people who are working together to raise a child. For example, in some families, a single mom and her mother or parents are working together to raise a child. Every family system is different, but coparenting refers to how the people parenting a child work together.

Do children have an impact on the coparenting relationship?

Yes, children's personalities and behavior play an important role in how adults coparent them! Every child in a family has unique charms and presents unique challenges, and caregivers usually respond to each child a little differently. Research has found that the level of support or disagreement between coparents can be influenced by the baby's temperament, even during the earliest months of a baby's life. Studies have also shown that babies as young as 3–4 months old already show behaviors, such as eye gaze

patterns, that can influence how their parents respond to them and to each other.



Why is coparenting important?

In over a dozen studies, problems with coparenting during the infant, toddler, preschool, and elementary school years have been related to a wide variety of child problems, including problems with social adaptation, poorer preschool and school achievement, anxiety, and aggressiveness. Moreover, well-coordinated coparenting during the child's first year of life has been found to predict better child adjustment in later years, while distressed coparenting predicts later child problems.

1. This document is FCS2277, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 2007. Reviewed July 2015. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. James McHale, professor and director of the Family Study Center, University of South Florida St. Petersburg; Jason Baker, postdoctoral associate, Family Study Center, University of South Florida St. Petersburg; and Heidi Liss Radunovich, associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The importance of developing a good coparenting alliance when children are still infants is doubly important when we take into consideration new research on brain development. Studies have found that the limbic system, the part of the brain that affects experience and regulation of emotions, undergoes its most dramatic growth and development during the baby's first year of life! Parents who find ways to work well together are more likely to succeed in helping babies learn predictable rhythms, regulate strong emotions, and reduce periods of prolonged distress. In these ways, cooperative coparenting relationships can play a significant role in supporting healthy infant and toddler development.

Is coparenting different from the marital relationship?

Absolutely! First of all, not all people who are married even have children, so the marital relationship is definitely different from the coparenting relationship. Second, the people who raise children together are not always married, and in many cases they are related in a very different way (e.g., a mom and an aunt, or a dad and his mother). This means that you can be in a coparenting relationship with someone even if that person isn't the child's biological parent. Finally, while having a good marital relationship is certainly desirable, it does not guarantee a good coparenting alliance. In fact, it is possible to have a wonderful marriage, but have difficulty doing an effective job of coparenting. The opposite is also true: some people who are divorced or who never married can do a wonderful job of coparenting their children.

Is coparenting the same as “parent involvement”?

No. The degree of involvement parents have in the lives of their children is certainly important. However, what is just as important, if not more important, is *how well* the coparents coordinate with one another. Here are some questions to ask yourself about your coparenting relationship:

- Do you and your child's other parent or caregiver work to communicate jointly agreed-upon rules and standards to the child?
- Does either of you badmouth, undermine and/or put down your child's other parent or caregivers?
- Are you and your child's other parent, whether you live together or apart, generally on the same page regarding your expectations, values, and goals for the child?

- Are you able to identify, talk about, and compromise on areas in which you differ? Or are you unable or unwilling to discuss your differences?
- When you cannot agree, do you each simply parent as you believe best, even if doing so provides an inconsistent, confusing, and/or disruptive environment for the child?

While issues of coordination and cooperation might seem to be most important when both parents are actively involved in children's day-to-day lives, cooperation and support are every bit as important in families where one parent is doing most of the active parenting. For example, in some families, life circumstances prevent one parent from being as involved as one or both parents would wish. However, if both parents make the effort to communicate, work together, and actively support one another's parenting, children will profit and reap the benefits.



Does good coparenting mean that parents must think or act exactly alike, or that they never disagree?

Of course not. All parents are different, and children delight in the differences in how different caregivers hold, stimulate, play with, soothe, and engage with them. Further, good coparenting does not require that parents always see eye-to-eye; conflict is a natural part of coparenting, and having differences in opinion is what promotes development. The important thing is how parents work together to negotiate and resolve their differences. Good coparenting

requires that parents communicate regularly (daily when-ever possible, and certainly at least weekly), about the ups and downs of parenting the child(ren). More importantly, it requires that each parent work hard to see the other's point of view, and to understand what their partner is trying to accomplish in rearing the child.

Most parenting behavior comes from a good place: parents love their children and want what is best for them. Often, though, parents value different sets of skills. For example, one parent may want the child to be a good rule-follower, to learn to conform, and to be aware of the rights of others. The other parent may want most dearly for the child to be a free spirit, a questioner, and an individual who leaves no stone unturned in their quest for the meaning and promise of life. Good coparenting often requires compromises between parents so that they can promote these different types of traits.

A strong coparenting alliance is most likely to develop if each parent finds a way to value what the other parent does well. In fact, combining the different strengths and gifts of each parent and collaborating will truly benefit the child.

What happens if there is not a good coparenting relationship?

If parents are not able to talk about their differences and concerns regarding parenting, or if they cannot come to a resolution about coparenting disagreements, then one of two things typically occurs:

1. Each parent simply continues to parent how they see fit, regardless of whether their rules and expectations violate what their partner is trying to do, or
2. One parent throws in the towel and withdraws from active coparenting, becoming more detached and/or leaving most of the decision-making, disciplining, and follow-through to the other parent.

In both of these circumstances, the child loses out. In the first case, the child is faced with inconsistent messages and active conflict, which can lead to feelings of uncertainty, instability, and worry—and often to behavior problems at home and school. In the second case, the child loses out on an important advocate and contributor. Every parent makes mistakes sometimes, which is why having a second adult at the ready is so important. Sometimes, if the family situation worsens, the second parent's emotional withdrawal is just the first step in the parent's eventual departure from the

household, depriving the child of the regular presence of a second parent altogether.



When is it important to start thinking about the coparenting relationship?

Although the coparenting relationship doesn't officially begin until the birth of a child, it is important to plan ahead. Research suggests that the way parents think about their future coparenting relationship *before* having children predicts their success in developing a strong coparenting alliance during the baby's early months. This influence can still be seen years later! There is also evidence that the way people coparent in the early years paves the way for how they will coparent over time. So, coparenting habits developed early on tend to last. This means that it is a good idea to try to do a good job with coparenting right from the start.



How do we know if coparenting disputes are something to worry about?

Although it is normal for parents and caregivers to have differences of opinion, you can assess the strengths and difficulties in your own coparenting relationship(s) by asking yourself questions, such as:

- Do I find myself unhappy with how the other parent is handling my child, but feel that I can't say anything to him or her about my feelings?
- Am I surprised by the strength of my reaction when I try to discuss differences in parenting with the other parent?
- Do I feel that I'm not always able to trust the other parent to handle our child in a way that allows me to feel comfortable?
- Do I feel that the other parent is watching my parenting far too closely?
- Do I feel unsupported or not trusted by the other parent in the way that I parent my child?
- Do I find myself saying things to my child, or to the other parent in front of my child, that put down this person's parenting and/or weaken his/her role as a respected parent in my child's eyes?
- When my child's other parent and I do try to discuss parenting differences, do we end up getting "stuck" and unable to come to a mutually satisfying conclusion?
- Do I have a hard time identifying things the other parent does that my child responds to really well, complimenting my partner on these things, and/or saying positive things to my child about the other parent even when he or she isn't around?

If you find yourself answering "yes" to many or most of the above questions, this may mean that the coparenting relationship is in need of a tune-up.

What can be done to improve the coparenting relationship?

Here are some things you can do to work on your coparenting relationship:

- **Communication:** Without question, communication is the key to building a solid coparenting alliance, just as it is the key to building a strong marital or couple relationship. Parents must make the time for communication

and learn how to effectively discuss their views about parenting.

- **Finding the positive:** Identification of, and respect for, each partner's contributions to the child's development is an important step towards an improved coparenting relationship. Parents should watch their partners' interactions with the children and attempt to identify not just the things they feel are damaging the child, but also the things that are benefiting the child. These may be things that you also do well, but often they will be things that are different from your way of doing things. The proof is in your child's response over time.
- **Compromise:** Parents need to be willing to give up the satisfaction that comes with "being right" all the time, and realize that, in many cases, both parents may hold reasonable views of how to parent the child. Parents should try to come to a conclusion that both can agree on. Indeed, research suggests that parents who are more flexible are able to coparent more effectively than those who are more rigid.
- **Never undermine or criticize the other parent's parenting:** It is easy to take verbal swipes at the other parent in front of the child, such as "Daddy's mad today," or "Mommy never lets you do anything, does she?" Or parents may actively undermine each other's parenting by "undoing" previously set limits or otherwise contradicting their partners. Behaviors such as these can reduce the child's respect for the other parent, cause conflict and/or alienation of the other parent, and create an inconsistent and potentially confusing environment for the child.
- **Cohesion:** Parents can work to foster unity in their family and to strengthen the partner's role as a coparent for the child. Making an effort to include the other parent in your fun interactions with the child (though not when s/he is stealing his or her only moment of down time that day!) and regularly asking for the partner's opinion in parenting decisions will likely benefit the child.
- **It's not written in stone:** Remember that this is an ongoing process. Parenting plans should be revised over time as needed.

Sometimes, even when you try very hard to work with the other parent, it can be difficult to improve your coparenting relationship. If this is the case for you, it can be helpful to get an outside perspective. There are licensed mental health professionals who are experts in family relationships, and they can work with you to help you improve your coparenting relationship. To find a licensed mental health professional in your area, you can ask for referrals from your physician, child's school or pediatrician, clergy, your

insurance company, or friends who have had a positive experience with a therapist, or check with the local licensing boards.



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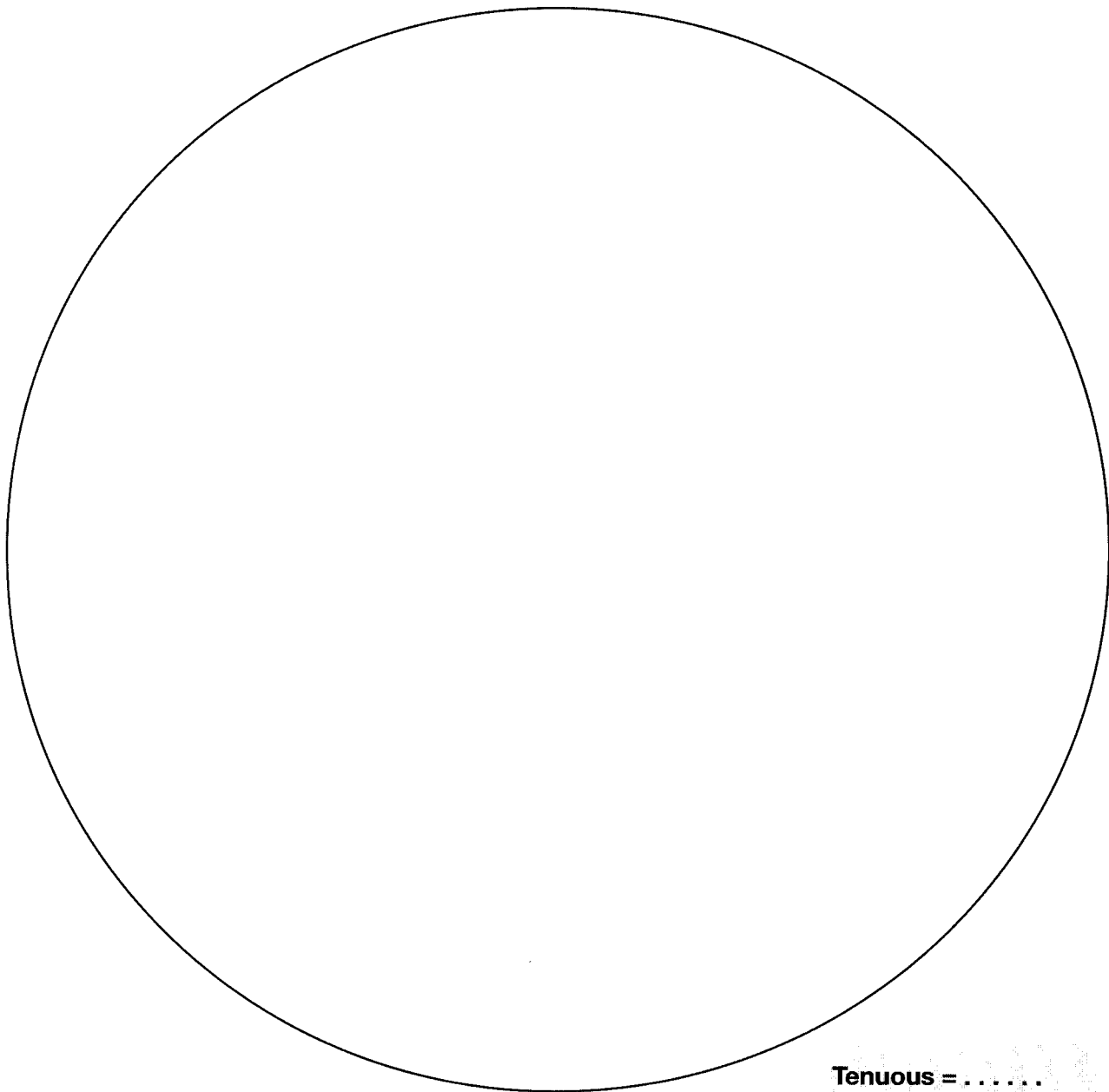
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Tenuous =

Average = _____

Strong = = = = =

Conflict = //
(example —//— = an average
bond with a conflict)

Communication Protocol

Preamble

This Parenting Coordinator (PC) has met with both parents and screened for the appropriateness of the parenting coordination process, including but not limited to issues of abuse/neglect, violence, substance use/misuse, mental health concerns, and power imbalances. Appropriate safeguards have been discussed and implemented. Both parents expressly waive any claim that these individual meetings compromise their rights to fairness, equality, or due process.

Parenting coordination involves both verbal and written communication. Participation in this process requires the ability and willingness to engage in English-language communication and computer proficiency. *Parents should notify the PC immediately if they need additional time or support to process information so accommodations can be made.*

The parents have reviewed a draft of these Communication Protocols with counsel and signed service agreements which were approved by the court. Each has completed the intake process and, once finalized at the initial joint session, agrees to adhere to these communication processes throughout the engagement.

Effective communication is essential in any relationship. Unfortunately, many people have not been taught how to communicate constructively, particularly during emotionally stressful situations. One of the main functions of parenting coordination is to support co-parenting partners (CPPs) in transitioning from a formerly intimate/spousal and more recently adversarial, sometimes hostile relationship to a respectful, business-like partnership focused solely on the best interests of their children.

Both parents acknowledge that:

- *Extraordinary situations aside, children benefit from meaningful relationships with both parents.*
- *Exposure to parental conflict adversely affects children's development.*
- *It is in the children's best interest when parents treat each other with respect and resolve disagreements away from the children.*
- *Discussing parental conflict with children is inappropriate and harmful.*

Communication Principles and Goals

Effective conflict resolution begins with direct, respectful communication between the parents, away from the children. Ideally, the parent who first identifies a concern should raise it in a calm, non-accusatory manner. Through respectful exchange, employing flexible thinking, and with a primary focus on the children's needs, parents can and often do reach mutually acceptable decisions. Tools such as Nonviolent Communication (NVC), So What's Your Proposal

(SWYP?), and the BIFF method (Brief, Informative, Friendly, Firm/Factual) will be introduced to support this goal.

CPPs succeed by setting aside old narratives, expectations, and existing habits and adopting new protocols that promote mature, two-way dialogue. This Communication Protocol (CP) provides essential tools to encourage independent resolution of issues. Research undeniably confirms that children exposed to persistent parental conflict experience significant negative effects on their development and well-being (Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACES).

As new practices are introduced, parents must understand and accept the following:

- Change may feel uncomfortable at first; this is only natural.
- Progress requires patience with oneself and the other parent.
- Children may be bewildered or confused by improved communication; be patient with them.
- The PC is not a “hall monitor.” Parents must hold themselves and each other accountable.
- Except in rare cases, only one issue will be addressed at a time.

Using Our Family Wizard (OFW)

1. Both parents must create and maintain an OFW account for the entire term of this engagement. All written electronic communication is limited to this platform.
2. If they have not already done so, parents must register with and explore the OFW platform within two days of signing the service agreements and must grant Professional Access to the PC.
3. Each parent is responsible for learning how to use OFW.
4. Each parent may choose to provide limited independent access to their attorney and/or a mental health professional. Doing so allows the professional to view that which their client views and to communicate **only** with their client.
5. The possibility of granting access to children will be discussed in the Initial Joint Session (IJS).
6. Both parents must download the OFW app to their phone or tablet and enable notifications.
7. Parents must read all OFW messages daily. All unread content is treated as received and, 24 hours after notification, treated as read.

Calendaring Responsibilities

9. Within five days of the IJS, each parent must update the OFW calendar with parenting time the children share with them per the court order or judgement.
10. All standing appointments or activities must be added - within the same timeframe - by the parent who established each or is primarily responsible for them.

11. Parents acknowledge each has an ongoing obligation to update the calendar; unless otherwise agreed priority is given to earlier entries, subject to PC review and if necessary, determination.
12. Parenting time trades must use the OFW "Trade" function with at least 48 hours' notice.
13. Parents must read all system messages especially those regarding calendar changes.

Expense Sharing

14. PCs generally do not resolve financial disputes. Parents should discuss and agree on expense sharing in advance before making any expenditure they wish their coparent to share.
15. All reimbursement requests must be submitted via OFW's Expense Log with a copy of the receipt.
16. Each parent must review the Expense Log weekly and respond to requests promptly.
17. Requests not responded to within 10 days are deemed approved.
18. Approved expenses must be reimbursed within 30 days or in accordance with the terms of the separation agreement, judgement, or temporary order.
19. Payments may but need not be transferred via OFW; depending on the plan each parent chooses a transaction fee is charged by OFW after a designated number of exchanges for using the funds transfer service.
20. When considering extracurricular or other activities for the children, if reimbursement is a consideration, all financial considerations regarding children's activities are to be discussed and resolved prior to any child being enrolled. If the PC is involved in these discussions, expenses must be allocated in accordance with the terms of the parents' separation agreement, judgement, or temporary order.
21. Disputes over expenses will not be addressed unless these procedures are followed and may not be reviewed at all depending on the scope of authority granted to PC.

Communication Guidelines

20. Tips for respectful communication:
 - Use a professional tone.
 - Write as if your child will read the message someday.
 - Be clear and concise.
 - Avoid blame, history, or scolding.
 - Offer solutions, not complaints.
 - Fake respect if necessary.
 - Use brief acknowledgments (e.g., "Got your message", "Unable to accommodate", etc.) when appropriate.
21. Texting is allowed only in emergencies (e.g., urgent medical situations requiring immediate attention) or when time-sensitive (running late to an event/parenting exchange). After attending to child's needs, the on-duty parent must notify the off-duty

parent via text with key details (What happened, where, how you can reach me). The off-duty parent shall respond via text as well.

22. Phone communication is limited to emergencies unless otherwise agreed in advance and in writing. Oral conversations should be summarized in OFW Journal.
23. All communication must be respectful and consistent with BIFF and NVC. Avoid ALL CAPS, except for labeling messages in Subject line [such as SWYP?. FYI, RR, ASAP].
24. The OFW Tone Meter is a guide, not a filter.
25. The PC can view all OFW messages. Aside from Transition Messages discussed below, PC will charge for time when copied on a message or in a thread. If he is unnecessarily included charges might be attributed to only one parent.
26. Not every message requires a response. Silence does not imply agreement.
27. Always respond to the most recent message in the thread to avoid a “split thread.”
28. Wait one hour before responding to emotionally charged messages and always reply within 24 hours unless otherwise noted or agreed. Only respond when you are in the “Green Zone.”
29. If additional time to respond is desired, send an “expectation-setter” or “placeholder” that looks something like this:

“Got it. A lot on the plate today, I’ll get back to you tomorrow afternoon”.

Or

“I’m in the middle of something right now; I’ll get back to you this evening.”

This provides a timely acknowledgment and resets expectations
30. If no response is received after 24 hours, a “Gentle Reminder” may be sent.
31. If the Gentle Reminder is ignored, the PC may be invited to become involved without further input, and the non-responsive parent may bear costs disproportionately.
32. Best practice is to draft important messages in a word processor. Then review after a pause, copy, paste, and send via OFW. *Always consider that a neutral third party, such as the judge, will see your message.*
33. Oral conversations with third-party providers may be initiated only after coparents have consulted and agreed. Parents must include each other in all oral and written communications with third-party providers. Ideally oral conversations occur via conference call so both parents can participate. Authoring parent must cc: their coparent on all written communication with third party providers. Should only one parent be involved in any communication they must summarize, in an OFW message shared with nonparticipating parent within 6 hours, any oral conversations with third-party providers. If after communicating with a third-party provider [without one’s coparent] the parent a written response from any third party that does not include their CPP that parent shall attach a copy of their written communication and/or provide a written summary of the response in OFW.
34. Limit messaging to one new thread per day. Avoid starting conversations immediately after transitions to allow your CPP and children time to acclimate to the transition. Use subject line codes: “FYI,” “RR,” “Critical, Time Sensitive” or “Please respond ASAP.”

35. If communication must be monitored/previewed by PC due to repeated violations, the authoring parent will bear associated costs.
36. Subject to the terms of their Separation Agreement, Judgement, or Temporary Order, unless a written agreement supersedes, and regardless of who pay for the device each parent agrees to provide the other with all login credentials needed to gain access to any portal that contains their child's information (think doctor, school, sport or extracurricular activity) as well as credentials needed to access any/all electronic devices (including but not limited to phone, tablet, game station, and/or computer) and all "apps" used by any child so that each parent has the ability to access and monitor the child's online activity. Both parents are equally entitled to have all necessary login credentials for each, and every online platform used by a child (including but not limited to Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, X, Discord, etc.)
37. If communication becomes coercive or threatening, the PC may suspend services and perhaps recommend remedial steps.
38. Avoid using social media to discuss family matters.

One Thread Per Topic

39. Parents may consult legal or professional advisors but must send a placeholder message if doing so will delay their response.
40. *Each thread must contain only one topic.*
41. Use "Reply All" when exchanging messages within the same thread.
42. Simply add PC to the thread if/when his support is desired.
43. Avoid split threads by responding to the most recent post in the thread; the parent who creates one must consolidate the communication.
44. Parents shall neither provide determinations to nor permit a child to access their OFW account. Nor shall a parent grant access to their OFW account to new partner/significant other, spouse, friend, relative, etc. without first discussing this with their coparenting partner and getting permission from this PC.
45. Limit messages to 300 words unless an exception is granted by PC.

Structured Conflict Resolution

46. Two rounds of communication between parents are required before involving the PC.
47. Use the "So, What's Your Proposal?" (SWYP?) method to discuss resolutions to disagreements.
48. SWYP? format includes proposal, questions (other than "why?"), answers, counterproposal, questions, and answers. Always complete this process before seeking PC involvement.
49. The PC may request clarification or justification that a proposal serves the child's best interests.
50. Use NVC/BIFF for non-proposal conversations. Again, exchange two rounds before involving the PC.

Documenting Agreements

- 48. All substantial agreements must be documented in the “Agreements” document posted in the MyFiles section in OFW.
- 49. Agreements take effect on the specified date and may only be changed by mutual written agreement, the PC, or the court.

Disagreement Resolution

- 50. Unless preapproved, PC will only address one disagreement at a time.
- 51. Each parent should maintain an up-to-date list of unresolved concerns.
- 52. The PC may arrange Zooms, meetings or request information to resolve disputes; usually Zooms and meetings are preceded with agenda shared beforehand.
- 53. On urgent matters, the PC may divert from these best practices and/or provide immediate verbal decisions which will be documented in writing within a reasonable period.
- 54. Generally, only communications documented in OFW or Journal Entries will be considered. If it becomes necessary to share texts, is the responsibility of the parent who presents them to share them in chronological [as opposed to reverse chronological] order.
- 55. When issuing a determination PC will either clearly note same in the appropriate messaging thread or by posting a detailed determination in the MyFiles section of OFW.
- 56. PC decisions carry the weight of a court order. See Leon v Cormier.
- 57. Parents must instruct attorneys to not initiate parallel conflict resolution processes while a matter is before the PC.
- 58. The PC may, with prior authorization, consult with others to gather relevant information.
- 59. Conversations between PC and children while possible will be rare, limited, and confidential [between PC and child] unless disclosure is approved by the child. That said, some parents request a brief meeting of PC and children so PC can introduce himself to and explaining his role to the child. It is important for parents to know that this PC is conservative when it comes to inviting conversations with the children about any particular disagreement.
- 60. If the court becomes involved, the PC will pause until the matter is resolved or redirected by the court.
- 61. Agreements and PC determinations remain in effect unless modified in writing by mutual agreement, a successor PC, or court.

Individual Communication with the PC

- 62. Either parent may request one-on-one contact with PC. Request must be in writing through OFW with ones CPP copied on the request. Parent must briefly describe topic of discussion in the request.

63. The PC may accept request, will grant the CPP a similar one-on-one opportunity on the same topic, and may or may not provide a written summary of the one-on-one communication in OFW.

64. Either or both parents may request joint Zoom meetings in the same way.

Transition Messages

65. Parents must not raise any substantive concerns or issues during transitions.

66. Transition conversations must be brief, cordial, and child focused....aka "Dunkin Donuts Conversations." For example: 'Hi, mom. Kids, have a good time with mom, see you later.'

67. For longer visits [to be determined during IJS], the on-duty parent must send a brief "Transition Message" with relevant updates. Please caption message as "[DATE] Transition Summary" and post it within 3 hours of the transition, and when possible within 1 hour before transition.

68. Suggested updates include:

- **For infants and toddlers:**

- o Share at least one positive experience (per child) during parenting time
- o Feeding
- o Nap & sleep schedule (changes)
- o New ways to soothe and calm child
- o How a bump or bruise occurred
- o Potty training techniques and update
- o Moods
- o Medical appointments/Health update
- o Illnesses & medication
- o Developmental issues or milestones
- o Bed, bath, & meal routines

- **For Pre-school and School-aged children:**

- o Share at least one positive experience (per child) during parenting time
- o Relationships with friends & social activities
- o School, extracurricular & religious activities
- o Homework & school projects
- o Scheduled events & activities
- o School progress & meetings
- o Behavioral & disciplinary issues
- o Health updates
- o Bed, bath, & meal routines

69. Bullet pointed updates are acceptable, and parents are invited to create templates and only need update on relevant developments.

70. Editorial or personal comments are not permitted.

71. Like all others, Transition Messages must be civil and contain a civil greeting. PC is to be copied on all Transition Messages.

Note: During the Initial Joint Session, additional family-specific preferences may be discussed, including limits on OFW message frequency and preferred communication times.

Here is an example of an effective (sanitized to conceal the identity of the family who granted me permission to share this with other clients) Transition email from Mom to Dad after S, their 8 y.o. daughter, shared 5 days of parenting time with Mom, her significant other and his boys:

Relationships w/friends & social activities: including time with G*** and E** as social activities. She's had a great time with them the last 5 days. Sat-Sun we went to Plymouth which included lots of walks around the harbor, amazing pool time at the hotel, bowling and eating out. S***** met J***'s mom for the first time when she joined us at the bowling restaurant.

S****, the boys, J*** and I shared 1 hotel room with S**** and me in one bed, the boys in another and J*** sleeping on the floor. We of course ensured people changed privately. It all went really well with everyone getting along really well and sharing close quarters! When we go to Portsmouth next week we'll be in separate rooms (girls in one and boys in the other). We got a last-minute room deal in Plymouth and decided to take it even though it was a single room.

School, extra-curricular & religious activities: sent her to camp today even though her belly hurt and she had diarrhea this morning. She didn't seem worse after she had a piece of toast and water for breakfast. The boys got up shortly after and her energy seemed to perk up so I thought it would be worth having her try to be at camp as long as possible today.

Homework & school projects: n/a

Scheduled events & activities: looking forward to vacation next week and have a tentative dinner date with L**** and C***** next week.

School progress & meetings: n/a

Behavioral & disciplinary issues: S*****'s swimming skills are really improving! I got in the pool with her myself one evening last week. Then we swam a few hours at the hotel with the boys and J*** Sat night plus a bunch of other families at the hotel. It was like a big pool party! She did a ton of jumping into the deep end (impressive cannon balls!) with me right next to her and us even swimming all the way to the opposite end of the shallow end!

Bed, bath & meal routines: please refer to my earlier messages about S**** waking up this morning and having diarrhea plus a stomach ache. J*** has the same thing since last night so it seems like a virus unfortunately.

S***** didn't eat a lot of fruits and vegetables while we were in Plymouth. She also didn't eat a ton at lunch at camp but I made sure she ate them at home with dinner (fresh peach, cucumber slices, ate a little sliced apples). She had fresh pineapple and a little cantaloupe with breakfast yesterday. She said she pooped while we were in Plymouth but she didn't have an ideal amount of fruits and veggies while we were away. She is eating plenty of ice cream so I'm wondering if she's getting a dairy sensitivity? Then again J*** is sick, too.

She has been sleeping well. Her last bath with hair washing was Friday night. We swam in a pool Sat night and waded in the ocean Sat and Sun (lots of sea creatures in the harbor where we waded!). She ran around a ton with the boys of the playground at the beach and we did a ton of walking all weekend.

Hopefully I captured everything from our busy 5 days! Her mouth continues to heal well. Her medicine is in her lunch bag for you.

**

Follow ups:

From Mom

I forgot to mention that I haven't nit combed her hair since I did it 2 weeks ago. Would you be able to do it in the next week? I'm hoping we can take turns every 2 weeks so we each end up doing it once a month. I cringed seeing her have to wear the camp t-shirt last week.

From Dad

Sure thing, let's agree to that plan.

BTW, S***** is doing well tonight. She ate only the peanut butter crackers at lunch, but her belly is feeling better. She's eaten cucumber and asked for more. She ate green pepper and commented on how fresh it was (it is from my farm share). She ate corn on cob. I staggered timing so the taco wasn't ready until after she ate some veggies. I've asked her to eat the apple before asking for another taco.

Informed Consent Regarding Electronic Communication

E-MAILS, CELL PHONES, TABLETS, CONFERENCE CALLS, VIDEO CONFERENCES AND COMPUTERS

It is very important to be aware that many forms of electronic communication are convenient AND can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people and hence can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. E-mails, in particular, are vulnerable to such unauthorized access due to the fact that servers have unlimited and direct access to all e-mails that go through them and many servers are poorly or totally unencrypted.

Even though Tony's computer is password protected and encrypted - messages sent via regular emails are not. It is always a possibility that e-mails can be sent erroneously to the wrong address. And computers, including laptops and tablets may be stolen. Tony's computer is equipped with a firewall, virus protection, and passwords, and he also backs up all confidential information from his computer into "the cloud" and onto an external hard drive on a regular basis.

Our Communication Protocol requires that **all written electronic communication**, including e-mail, shall be conducted via OurFamilyWizard.com (OFW). This platform has the added feature of password protection, requiring the user to log in each and every time using both a user name and password, *and* the benefit that all information stored and/or transmitted via OFW is encrypted.

Please notify Tony if you decide to avoid or limit, in any way, the use of e-mails, cell phones, or storage of confidential information on computers.

If you communicate confidential or private information via regular e-mail, Tony will assume that you have made an informed decision and will view it as your agreement to take the risk that such communication may be intercepted.

Please understand that due to computer and/or network problems (much less likely with OFW), e-mails that you send may not be deliverable to the addressee, and Tony does not regularly check his e-mail for client communication.

Adapted from: Zur, O. (2011). *I Love These Emails, or Do I? The Use of Emails in Psychotherapy and Counseling*. Retrieved from http://www.zurinstitute.com/email_in_therapy.html.

Telesessions Informed Consent

The purpose of this document is to inform you, the client, about many aspects of written electronic communication [OFW] and video telesessions [Zoom]: the process, the services, the potential risks and benefits of services, safeguards against those risks, and alternatives to online services. Please read this entire document, initial next to each understanding, sign, and return.

I _____, (name of client) hereby consent to participate in written electronic communication and video telesessions with Tony Pelusi & Associates as part of our professional services engagement. Professional services include parenting coordination, individual and/or coparenting coaching, and consulting. I understand that written electronic communication and video telesessions is the practice of delivering professional services via technology assisted media or other electronic means between a practitioner and a client who are located in two different locations.

By adding my initial in the space provided below I intend to convey my understand of and agreement to the following with respect to written electronic communication and video telesessions:

_____ 1. I understand that there are risk and consequences associated with written electronic communication and video telesessions, including but not limited to, disruption of transmission by technology failures, interruption and/or breaches of confidentiality by unauthorized persons, and/or limited ability to respond to emergencies.

_____ 2. I understand that misunderstandings are possible with written electronic communication and video telesessions because nonverbal cues are relatively lacking. Even with video webcam software, misunderstandings may occur due to connection problems causing image delays or less than optimal image quality. Providers are observers of human behavior and gather much information from body language, vocal inflection, eye contact, and other non-verbal cues. If you have never engaged in online sessions before, please have patience with the process and clarify information if you think your provider has not understood you well. Also, please be patient if your provider asks for periodic clarification.

_____ 3. Although the internet provides the appearance of anonymity and privacy, privacy is more of an issue online than in person. Tony Pelusi & Associates has chosen to use OurFamilyWizard.com [OFW] and Zoom.us [Zoom] as the software providers for written electronic communication, web conferencing telesessions, and chat communications between the provider and clients. Both platforms have instituted exemplary processes to ensure confidentiality. All clients are invited to explore this aspect of their services by contacting either provider directly. Each client is responsible for securing his or her own computer hardware, internet access points, and password security.



_____ 4. Tony Pelusi & Associates has a right to privacy and has prohibited the recording any and all communications with clients. Clients must seek the written permission of Tony Pelusi & Associates, and other participants before recording any portion of the video session is made and/or before sharing any copy of a recording with anyone else. Nonetheless, it is perfectly appropriate for each client to share copies of any written exchanges in OFW with their counsel.

_____ 5. I understand that there will be no recording of any of the video telesessions by any party without the express written consent of all participants. All information disclosed within sessions and written records pertaining to those sessions are confidential and may not be disclosed to anyone, other than counsel to a party, without written authorization, and except where the disclosure is permitted and/or required by law. I understand that MA is a two-party consent state and it is unlawful to record any conversation unless all parties explicitly authorize it.

_____ 6. I understand that during a video telesessions session, we could encounter technical difficulties resulting in service interruptions. If this occurs, the first attempt at correcting the problem is for one to log out and thereafter log in to restart the session. If we are unable to reconnect within ten minutes, please message Tony and your coparenting partner via OFW to discuss since we may have to re-schedule.

_____ 7. I understand that Tony Pelusi & Associates has established an account with Zoom for messaging and video communications to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. And, that a unique set of credentials has been established for use by our family alone. In order to benefit from these safeguards, the client is required to download, register and utilize the chat and video software app from Zoom. Your personal information is encrypted and stored on a secure server in compliance with HIPAA regulations.

_____ 8. I understand I am responsible for creating and using additional safeguards when the computer used to access services may be accessed by others, such as creating passwords to use the computer, keeping my email and log in credentials, and passwords secret, deleting browser history, and/or maintaining security of my wireless internet access points.

_____ 9. I understand I will need to use a webcam or smartphone during all Zoom sessions.

_____ 10. I understand it is important of being in a quiet, private space that is free of distractions (including cell phone or other devices) during the session.

_____ 11. I understand it is important to use a secure internet connection rather than public/free Wi-Fi.

_____ 12. I understand Tony Pelusi & Associates may determine that due to certain circumstances, telesessions is no longer appropriate and that sessions may resume only in-person.

_____ 13. I understand that third parties may be required to join in the meeting with my provider and me to provide technical support. I understand that I may be asked to interact with the technical support person on camera in order to fix the problem. I understand that if I decline this request and my equipment is rendered unusable for video conferencing, I may forfeit my option to use video telesessions.



____ 14. I understand that I, not Tony Pelusi & Associates, am responsible for the configuration of equipment on my computer which is used for written electronic communication and video telesessions. I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure the proper functioning of all electronic equipment before my session begins. I understand that I may need to contact a designated third party (OFW and/or Zoom) for technical support to determine my computer's readiness for written electronic communication and video telesessions prior to beginning telesessions sessions with Tony Pelusi & Associates

____ 15. I understand confidentiality standards required for telesessions include:

- a. During a telesessions session, all locations of the professional service provider and each client shall be considered an Office regardless of locations intended use.
- b. All sites shall be appropriately chosen to provide suitable audio and visual privacy.
- c. Offices shall be designated private for the duration of the session with the provider and no unauthorized access shall be permitted.
- d. I shall take every precaution to ensure the privacy of the session and the confidentiality of the parties. I agree to participate in all Zoom conferences from an Office where I am the only person present. I accept that it is my responsibility to arrange appropriate child care so that I may participate in the Zoom without interruption. Any persons in an office at any site shall be identified to all participants prior to the session and the permission of the provider and each client shall be obtained in order for any visitors or other professionals to be present during the session.
- e. I will refrain from multi-tasking, including checking texts or emails or using any other device while in all Zoom sessions.
- f. I understand it is important to be on time. If I need to miss, reschedule, or arrive late it is my obligation to notify all participants in advance. And the cost reallocation provisions relating to attendance and cancellation in the Service Agreements apply.
- g. I understand the need for a backup plan (i.e.: a phone number where I can be reached) in case technical difficulties arise. My phone number is: _____

I have read the information provided above. I understand and agree with all of the information contained in this form, I have had the opportunity to review this document with counsel, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby give my informed consent for the use of written electronic communication and video telesessions for all professional services and authorize Tony Pelusi & Associates to use written electronic communication and video telesessions in the course of providing all services.

Signature

Date

Tony Pelusi & Associates wishes to express gratitude to [Brad Craig and Between 2 Homes](#) for providing a template for this document.

A Brief Statement To New Clients

In my role as PC I may be in a position to point out unskillful choices one is making or tweaks one can make in one's behavior that will help them be more effective in their coparenting partnership. In these situations, I may invite that person to join me in a one on one conversation. I recognize these types of discussions can be uncomfortable, but it is part of what my job is about.

In the same way, I want clients to know there may be times they don't like what I recommend or may have ideas about how I can be more effective in my work with them. And, I would like them to be comfortable letting me know when I have made a mistake. I am only human. We are here to work together.

It will be helpful to remember, anything I do that might be upsetting to a client is not done on purpose as I am not trying to be hurtful. If and when either client feels offended, I would appreciate it if that person could come to me first and discuss any concerns they have about our work together or something I've said or done so we can work out any misunderstandings. After all, clients are here to deal with conflict and working through conflict with me directly is a great way for them to practice conflict resolution skills and see how to move through these conversations more effectively. If a client is truly uncomfortable talking with me, it is okay to let their attorney know so the attorney can let me know and we can work through it. While not ideal, that is preferable to ignoring a problem.

Always try to remember I am here to be helpful not hurtful, and I work hard to maintain my neutrality and integrity. These are fundamental values of mine.

Thank you.

Coparenting Agreement To Be Read To The Children So That The Children Know What To Expect If Or When They Complain About Their Coparent Or Parents Are In Disagreement

We both recognize that our decision to divorce has caused you frustration, impacted your lives in meaningful ways, and brought you much sadness. For this we are sorry.

It is our divorce. You should not have to feel responsible for our decision to divorce, hear about it, or provide emotional support for either of us as we go through it. You should not have to ensure that either of us is behaving properly about it.

We want your childhood to be safe, secure and devoted to the problems children have, not to our adult problems.

Here are our rules:

- Neither parent is allowed to make critical statements about the other.
- If you hear either of us make a critical statement about one another, please point out that we are breaking the rule, and you have our permission to tell your other parent what you heard said about them, if you wish.
- You are not allowed to read court documents, read our text messages or emails to one another, or overhear our conversations with each other or any other adults about divorce-related matters. It is your responsibility and ours to ensure that you are not exposed to such matters.
- If one of us seems angry or upset about the divorce, please don't ask us to talk about it or even listen to us if we speak out loud about our distress; instead, give us time and space. We are competent adults and can take care of our own business although sometimes we need a time-out to settle our emotions.
- If you have a complaint about either of us, talk to us directly rather than your other parent. Everyone has to learn to address relationship problems. We know it can be tough for a kid to be direct with a parent; we will help you along if you start the talk. But going forward, if you complain to me about your Mom/Dad, I will listen politely, and ask you to bring the issue to your Mom/Dad; I won't jump in for you.
- However, if you tell one of us that you have an issue with your other parent and are not comfortable to talk to your other parent directly, we can make arrangements for all of us to meet and/or to have a conversation together. And, I will do my best to help you find words to talk about your issue *without talking for you*. [Note: if the child has a counselor, the parent should also direct the child to share their concerns and issues with the counselor.]
- We expect that there might come a time when your Mom/Dad and I disagree, that you ask us for something and we will each have different answers, or that we will just have different ideas about something. When this happens, we promise to work together as your parents and to come to a decision in your best interests. If we are unable to agree between ourselves, we already have someone lined up to help us find a solution so we can do what is best for you. We promise find a solution as promptly as possible. And whether we find a compromise that we both agree with or if a decision is made that either of us personally disagrees with - we will both support it and you. Please understand that the last thing either of us wants is for you to be stuck in the middle between us. When something like this happens, you can expect each of us to say something like this: "Thank you for sharing, we appreciate hearing your view. Mom/Dad and I will discuss this and let you know what we decide. We appreciate your understanding and patience while we do. Thank you for understanding. We love you."

Adapted from "Overcoming the Co-Parenting Trap" by John A. Moran, Ph.D., Tyler Sullivan, & Matthew Sullivan, Ph.D. pp 40 - 41

Coparenting Agreement To Be Read To The Children So That The Children Know What To Expect If Or When They Complain About Their Coparent Or When Parents Are In Disagreement

We both recognize that our decision to divorce has caused you frustration, impacted your lives in meaningful ways, and brought you much sadness. For this we are sorry.

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We want your childhood to be safe, secure, and devoted to the problems children have, not to our adult problems.

Here are our rules:

- Neither parent is allowed to make critical statements about the other.
- If you hear either of us make a critical statement about one another, please point out that we are breaking the rule, and you have our permission to tell your other parent what you heard said about them, if you wish.
- You are not allowed to read court documents, read our text messages or emails to one another, or overhear our conversations with each other or any other adults about divorce-related matters. It is your responsibility and ours to ensure that you are not exposed to such matters.
- If one of us seems angry or upset about the divorce, please don't ask us to talk about it or even listen to us if we speak out loud about our distress; instead, give us time and space. We are competent adults and can take care of our own business although sometimes we need a time-out to settle our emotions.
- If you have a complaint about either of us, talk to us directly rather than your other parent. Everyone has to learn to address relationship problems. We know it can be tough for a kid to be direct with a parent; we will help you along if you start the talk. But going forward, if you complain to me about your Mom/Dad, I will listen politely, and ask you to bring the issue to your Mom/Dad; I won't jump in for you.
- However, if you tell one of us that you have an issue with your other parent and are not comfortable to talk to your other parent directly, we can make arrangements for all of us to meet and/or to have a conversation together. And, I will do my best to help you find words to talk about your issue *without talking for you*. [Note: if the child has a counselor, the parent should also direct the child to share their concerns and issues with the counselor.]
- We expect that there will come a time when your Mom/Dad and I disagree, that you ask us for something and we will each have different answers, or that we will just have different ideas about something. When this happens, we promise to work together as your parents and to come to a decision in *your* best interests. If we are unable to agree between ourselves, we already have someone lined up to help us find a solution so we can do what is best for you. We promise to find a solution as promptly as possible. And whether we find a compromise that we both agree with or if a decision is made that either of us personally disagrees with - we will both support it and you. Please understand that the last thing either of us wants is for you to be stuck in the middle between us. When something like this happens, you can expect each of us to say something like this: "Thank you for sharing, we appreciate hearing your view. Mom/Dad and I will discuss this and let you know what we decide. We appreciate your understanding and patience while we do. Thank you for understanding. We love you."

Adapted from "Overcoming the Co-Parenting Trap" by John A. Moran, Ph.D., Tyler Sullivan, & Matthew Sullivan, Ph.D. pp 40 - 41

**Our Coparenting Agreement To Be Read by
Mama and Pappa to
////
So That You Know What To Expect
As We Evolve and Grow
Into a Two Household Family**

As you know, Mama and Pappa each love you very much. We drafted this agreement with the help of, Tony Pelusi, someone we are working with so we can learn to be the best parents we can be. And we both agreed that each of us will read and discuss it with all three of you.

We know that our decision to divorce has caused you stress and frustration, and has impacted your lives in difficult, meaningful ways. For this we are sorry. We are now committed to developing two strong households where each of you will be loved and cared for and be able to enjoy your childhood/teen years as you deserve to.

We would like you to always know that it is Mama and Pappa's divorce, and that we want to minimize the impact of our decision to divorce on each of you as much as we can. With that in mind, it is important for you to know that there is no need for you to worry about, hear about, or feel the need to emotionally support either of us. The legal part of the divorce is over. It is not your worry or your job to try and make sure that either of us is behaving properly as we move forward and evolve and grow into a two-household family.

We both want you to know that in no way, not even in the littlest bit, are any of you responsible for our decision to divorce. This is a decision that we made on our own. And, now that the divorce is finalized, we can and will focus on making sure we can work through disagreements without you being involved. That is one of the reasons why we are working with Tony.

We want your childhood/teenage years to be happy, safe, secure and we want you to focus on being a child/teenager, not to waste your time worried about our adult problems, especially ones that you cannot solve for us. And, we cannot wait to both watch your lives evolve and look forward to the day when our relationship has evolved to the point where we can both comfortably be with you as you to enjoy your successes as you achieve important milestones in your life.



To help with this evolution into two loving and supportive households, we started to develop some rules, that both of us fully agree upon. We made them to support you and our evolution into a two-household family that is as warm, and productive, and collaborative as possible. And we expect that we will make more agreements in the future.

Both Mama and Pappa love you very much. We want you to know that it is GREAT for you to show your love and affection for both your Mama and Pappa, no matter where you are. Even though Mama/Pappa and I are not getting along as well as we expect to now, that is for us to figure out. We are and we will!

We totally agree that it is a priority for us that you have the best relationship possible with both your Mama AND your Papa.

1. So, our first rule is that neither parent is allowed to say something that is negative, disrespectful, or critical about the other.

If you ever hear either of us, make a statement like that about the other, please remind us that we are breaking this rule. We give you permission to tell us something like: *"Please stop. It's not right for you to involve me in this. Do not clutter my life with this negativity or with these disrespectful remarks about someone I love. Thank you."* And know that you have our permission to tell your other parent what you heard said about them, if you wish.

2. The courts have established rules for all divorces, and one of those important rules that has been made in the best interests of all the millions of children who have divorced parents, is that no children, you included, are allowed to read court documents, read our text messages or emails to one another, or overhear our conversations we have with each other or with any other adults about divorce-related matters. It is Mama and Pappa's responsibility to ensure that you are not exposed to these things. And, if one or both of us forget, we ask that you please remove yourself from any place where you might be if you hear talk like this.
3. If one of us seems angry or upset about the divorce, it is not for you to worry about. It is for us as grown-ups to deal with it. Please do not ask us to talk about it or even listen to us if we speak out loud about our distress; instead, just give us some time, space, and privacy. Mama and Pappa are adults working through the ups and downs of our divorce and it's not for you to worry about us. Mama and



Pappa will take care of our own business even though sometimes we will need time to work things out and settle our emotions.

4. If there is something that bothers you or that you want to say about either of us, please let us know rather than hold it inside or talk to the other parent about it. *This is very important.* It is important for you to learn to speak up about challenges and it is our job as parents to help you learn how to address relationship and communication challenges and opportunities in life. And it is our job as parents to help you develop skills to understand and explore the reason you are experiencing these challenges.

So, going forward, if you complain to either Mama or Pappa about the other parent, each of us will listen politely, and help you figure out how to express your concerns to that other parent. If you are uncomfortable talking directly with your other parent, we will brainstorm with you to find ways to ensure that your concerns are communicated respectfully. This may even involve the three of us talking or meeting together so you will feel supported as you state your concerns or maybe getting some help from a therapist. And if you have a therapist, we will encourage you to share your concerns with them to get their support and guidance as well.

5. Whichever parent you are sharing parenting time with is in charge. While we may not always agree, I trust your Mama's/Pappa's judgement and will respect their household rules, just as you should. Please do. We will be doing our best to make the transitions between households as smooth as possible for you. It is important to respect the rules at each home and cooperate with what is expected of you.
6. We fully expect that there will be times when Mama and Pappa disagree or have different thoughts on things and it will be helpful for you to be honest with us about the differences you see. We promise as parents to come to a decision that is in *your* best interests. And if we are unable to agree between ourselves Tony is there to help us find a solution so we can do what is best for you.
7. We also expect that at times you might ask one of us for something and we will each have different answers than the other, or that we will just have different ideas about something. Please do not play us off against each other. Be honest and let us know the truth. We promise to work together to find a solution as fast as we can. Sometimes we will find a compromise that we both agree with, and sometimes there might be a decision that one of us disagrees with, but either way we will still support that decision knowing it is best for you!



When something like this happens, you can expect each of us to say something like this: *"Thank you for sharing, we appreciate hearing your view. Mama/Pappa and I will discuss this and let you know what we decide. We appreciate your patience while we do. Thank you for understanding. We love you."*

Please understand that the last thing either of us wants is for you to feel stuck in the middle between us. We want to hear your thoughts and opinions and will need some time to discuss and let you know what we decide. We know that will get through this together and things will become more peaceful as we all adapt to using these new rules. We both love you very much and we promise that we both will do everything we can to make sure you have an easy time transitioning between two loving households. Each one of you has the most important place in each of our hearts.

Thank you for listening and supporting our new rules.

Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

Or any suggestions you would like to offer?

We are always open to listening to your concerns.

Love,

Mama and Pappa

**Coparenting Agreement For
So That /// and /// Know What To Expect
As the Family evolves and grows
Into 2 Households**

Mom and Dad each love you very much.

We recognize that our decision to divorce has caused you stress and frustration, and has impacted your lives in difficult, meaningful way. For this and how long it is taking to finalize, we are sorry. We are committed to evolving this divorce as soon as we can and to developing two strong households where each of you will be loved and cared for.

We would like you to always know that it is Mom and Dad's divorce, and that we want to minimize the impact of any and all of the divorce on each of you. With that in mind, there is no need for you to worry about it, hear about it, or emotionally support either of us as we go through it. It is not your job to try and make sure that either of us is behaving properly, both during the divorce, and moving forward as we evolve and grow into 2 households. In no way, and not even in the littlest bit, are any of you responsible for our decision to divorce. This is a decision that Mom and Dad have made on our own.

We want your teenage years (and all those afterwards) to be safe, secure and devoted to being a teenager, not to our adult problems.

To help with this evolution into 2 strong households, we have developed rules, that Mom and Dad fully agree upon, to make this evolution into 2 households as warm, and productive, and collaborative as possible.

Both of us love you very much. We want you to know that it's GREAT to show love and affection for your mom/dad. Even though Mom/Dad and I are not getting along now, that is between us. It's a priority for us that you have the best relationship possible with your mom AND your dad. Neither parent is allowed to make critical statements about the other.

If you hear either of us make a critical statement about the other, please point out that we are breaking the rule, and you have our permission to tell your other parent what you heard said about them, if you wish.

If you hear either of us make a critical statement about the other tell us: "Please stop. It's not appropriate for you to involve me in this. Do not clutter my life of waste my time with this kind of remarks."

The courts have long ago established rules for all divorces, and one of those rules that has been made for the best interests of all the millions of children who have divorced parents, is that no children, you included, are allowed to read court documents, read our text messages or emails to one another, or overhear our conversations with each other or any other adults about divorce-related matters. It is Mom and Dad's responsibility to ensure that you are not exposed to such matters.

If one of us seems angry or upset about the divorce, it's not for you to worry about or clutter your lives with. You don't need to ask us to talk about it or even listen to us if we speak out loud about our distress; instead, give us time and space. We are adults working through the ups and downs of our divorce and it's not for you to worry about or clutter your lives with. Mom and Dad will take care of our own business although sometimes we need time to work things out and settle our emotions.

If you have an observation, concern, fear, or complaint about either of us, talk to us directly rather than your other parent. This is very important. Everyone must learn to address relationship and communication challenges and opportunities in life, and it is our job as parents to help you develop skills to understand and explore the root causes of the challenges you are experiencing. Going forward, if you complain to either Mom or Dad about the other parent, each of us will listen politely, and help you redirect your concerns to the other parent.

Whichever parent your sharing parenting time with is in charge. I trust your Mom/Dad's judgement and will respect their household rules.

We expect that there might come a time when your Mom/Dad and I disagree, that you ask us for something and we will each have different answers, or that we will just have different ideas about something. When this happens, we promise to work together as your parents and to come to a decision in your best interests.

If we are unable to agree between ourselves, we already have someone lined up to help us find a solution so we can do what is best for you. We promise find a solution as promptly as possible.

Whether we find a compromise that we both agree with or if a decision is made that either of us personally disagrees with - we will both support it and you.

Please understand that the last thing either of us wants is for you to be stuck in the middle between us.

When something like this happens, you can expect each of us to say something like this: "Thank you for sharing, we appreciate hearing your view. Mom/Dad and I will discuss this and let you know what we decide. We appreciate your understanding and patience while we do. Thank you for understanding. We love you."

We will get through this together and move to a more peaceful, stress-free place. We both love you very much and are doing everything we can to evolve us into 2 strong, independent, yet collaborative households, with each of you at the very center of our love and affection.

Coparenting Agreement to be read to Our Children

To our dearest loves /////,

We, your (dad/mom) and I are reading this to you because we know that our divorce has caused you pain and confusion. We are working with someone who helps parents through divorce, named Tony Pelusi. He will help us be better parents.

Throughout the divorce the # of you have been incredibly thoughtful and loving to us, and each other. For that we are grateful. You are kids, and it is your job to be kids. It is not in any way your job to protect either of us or make either of us feel better about the divorce. We are sorry if you have felt that you have had to take care of us or worry about us. You do not have to solve any of our problems or worry about adult matters. We want you to enjoy being kids.

To help with this, dad/mom and I came up with 8 rules for all of us. Dad/mom and I worked on these rules together, and we agree on all of it. We will both be reading this to you:

1. **No put-downs.** Neither me, nor (daddy/mommy) is allowed to say bad things about the other. If you hear either of us say bad things about the other, please point out that we are breaking this rule; and know that you even have our permission to tell the other parent what you heard said about them. You can also add something like: “Hey, do not put this negativity in my life by saying something bad about my [dad/mom]. I love him/her.” “Uh-uh, you’re not gonna to say bad things about my [dad/mom]!!!”
2. **Secrets are bad.** Secrets are not good for anyone. We both agree that you should not keep secrets from either parent. Neither of us should ever tell you to keep secrets from the other. If that happens, then you have

permission to tell that parent “No, we agreed that there will be no secrets in our family.” If you are not comfortable doing that you can talk to your therapist about it.

3. **Don’t put me in the middle.** It sucks being put in the middle, asked to take sides, and we have agreed not to put you in that uncomfortable position. If you ever feel that either one of us is putting you (or your siblings) in the middle by asking you to agree with one of us, please tell us. You can say “Don’t put me in the middle!” or “I won’t be monkey-in-the-middle!” It may take a while for you to come to this feeling, and it’s okay to say something a day or so after you’ve realized it. We are all trying to learn new ways of being and understand that takes time.
4. **Privacy please.** Kids are not allowed to read any court documents (papers), text/email messages from parent to parent, or overhear our conversations with each other, or any other adults about divorce matters. It is our job, and not yours, to make sure you are not hearing these conversations. And, if we say we need some space or time, please understand.
5. **Talk about your feelings.** If you are upset with one parent, talk to that parent rather than telling the other parent or not talking about your feelings at all. If you talk to me about your (dad/mom), I will listen and help you brainstorm ways to speak your truth, but I will also ask you to talk directly with your (mom/dad). You can say something like: “Daddy/mommy, I didn’t like it when you [did that]. It made me feel bad/hurt my feelings. I don’t want you to do it again.” You can also ask your therapist for help.
6. **House rules.** We know that our houses have different rules. We will work on trying to make them as similar as possible for you. But when you are at each house, it is important that each of you follow that parent’s rules. We

each promise to respect each other's rules and would like you to as well. If you have a concern with a rule, talk to the parent who has the rule about it.

7. **No grown-up talk to kids.** It's not appropriate for either of us to talk to you about adult topics. If that ever happens or if you ever become uncomfortable with that type of a conversation you can say: "I'm not a grown-up. This isn't appropriate for me.", "I have little ears", or simply say "inappropriate" or "please stop."
8. **Let us work on it.** There might be times when your dad/mom and I might not agree on something. For example, you might ask each of us for something and we might each have different answers. When this happens, we may need to get help from Tony Pelusi. We promise to work together and do what is best for you as soon as we can. In the end we both promise to support you.

Even though your (dad/mom) and I are not getting along as great as we should be, please know that we are working on it. We both think it is important for all of you to have a great relationship with both your mom and your dad.

We hope these rules can help all of us, and will be a better way to work together.

Finally, please know that we love all of you the same no matter what, and will forever!

Mom & Dad

To our much-loved children,

Your mom/dad and I recognize that the decision to divorce has impacted your lives in a lot of meaningful ways. We know that you have had many feelings around this and that it has caused you sadness, anger, and frustration, as well as change that you were not prepared for. For this we are truly sorry. And now, we are both committed to developing two strong homes, where you can each feel supported, loved, and safe.

This is a divorce that you did not create, and it is something between your father/mother and me. We would like to remind you that there is no need to worry about it. You should not feel responsible for this decision to divorce, hear about it, or provide emotional support for either of us as we go through this process. We have agreed to change the way we have been doing some things and how some things have been going to minimize the impact the divorce has upon each of you.

As we commit to setting a good example of how that can be done, we want you to know that you should not have to ensure that either of us is behaving properly as we move forward to develop how our two-home family works. And, if you wish, you can help us by letting us know if we break any of these new rules. Your only responsibility in this process is to be safe, secure, respectful, and devoted to being children. You should have children's problems, not adult problems. With that in mind, know that your mother/father and I will prioritize your needs above our own needs and desires.

To help with this, we have devised some new rules to help us develop a consistent way to allow you to live in two homes that are independent, supportive, and consistent as is reasonably possible.

For starters, we both want you to know that we both love you. We understand that over the past few years, there have been times where we have not behaved properly with regards to the divorce. We are now committing to make changes for the future to ensure that you no longer feel the weight of our adult problems. So, we have come to an agreement on some rules which we promise to follow in our evolution into a two-home family that is as warm, and supportive as possible. We would like you to focus on kid things and know that your mother/father and I prioritize you above all else.

We love you very much no matter what is happening between the two of us.

New family rules

1. Neither of us is allowed to make negative comments/say bad things about the other parent or what goes on in your other home. If any of you hear either of us or anyone else say such things, you should feel empowered to let us know that this person is breaking the rules we have agreed upon. While you are welcome to use your own respectful words, this can be done by simply saying something like: "Please stop. It is insulting and/or disrespectful" or "Please

do not involve me in this type of talk.” And we will stop and listen. We also give you permission to tell either or both of us about what was said as well, so we can work on it.

2. It is not allowed for either of us to ask you to or for you to keep secrets from either parent. And neither of us will ask you questions about what goes on in your other home. We will leave it with you to share whatever you feel comfortable or want to share.

3. We do not ever want you guys to feel stuck in the middle and if you feel that way, please say something about it to us so we can change what might be contributing to that awful feeling.

4. Kids should not be allowed to be involved in any adult conversation or discuss adult matters with either parent be it regarding the divorce, or lawyers, or any adult topic. If either of us seems angry or upset about the divorce it is not for you to worry about. We will work through our own business even though sometimes we need time to settle our emotions. Please just give us that space when we need it.

5. If you have an observation, concern, fear, or complaint about either of us, talk directly to the parent who you have this problem with rather than with your other parent. This is very important. In life, we all must learn to communicate with other people. This includes having difficult conversations or talking respectfully with people we have disagreements with. It is our job as your parents to help you learn these skills. Going forward, if you learn to do this in an effective and productive way you will be much better off. This begins with you speaking to us first.

If you do wish to express concerns about one parent to the other, of course we will listen to your concerns, if you express them respectfully. We will also initially direct you back to discuss them with either Mom/Dad so you can see if you can find a way to resolve these concerns between yourselves. If you are unable to resolve the concern, or if we can't help you find a good way to express your concerns, we may recommend that you speak to Jenny, Renee, or Emily about them. This way, you can feel that you are heard, each of us will listen politely to your respectful conversation, and help you redirect your concerns to the other parent.

6. We will not involve you in adult conversations regarding this divorce. We will not let you read any court documents. There are rules surrounding this that were created to keep children safe and out of any disagreement that may be going on between the two of us.

7. Our family now has two homes, and we all know that these houses will have different rules. We ask that you respectfully follow the rules in the home where you are. We will as well, even if we disagree with them because we know both of us are always keeping your best interests as a top concern. While we might have some agreement on rules, we will not have agreement on other rules. Each of you should respect the parent you are with and follow the rules in the home you share with them while you are there. If you do not like the rules, discuss your thoughts and feels about them with the parent who made the rule. Remember, whichever parent you are sharing your parenting time with is in charge.

8. We fully expect there will be times you ask one of us for something and we will have different answers than the other. Please do not play us off against each other. Be honest and let us know the truth. We promise to work together to find a solution as fast as we can. Sometimes we will find a compromise that we both agree with, and sometimes there might be a decision that one of us disagrees with, but either way we will still support that decision knowing it is best for you!

Hopefully these rules will make all of our lives more peaceful and relaxed as you guys continue to grow up. Above all, we would like for you to enjoy your childhood without having to worry about adult problems. We both love you very much and are committing to doing everything we can so we all can live in a peaceful stress-free place. We trust these new rules will help us as we evolve us into two strong, independent, safe, secure, and respectful homes, with each of you at the very center of our love and affection.

Please take a copy of this and read it any time you want. And, especially, feel free to remind either one of us of it when one of us slips up.

Do any of you have any questions you want to ask? If not now, know you can always ask in the future.

Thank you for listening.

Mom/Dad

ELEMENTS OF COPARENTING AGREEMENT TO BE READ TO THE CHILDREN

Acknowledge impact of divorce on children and apologize	
Children not responsible for divorce	
Children are not to provide emotional support to parents	
Children focus on child matters, not adult ones	
New rules we commit to with you	
Neither parent makes statements critical of the other	
If you hear critical statements, point out parent is breaking the rule; you have our permission to tell your other parent if this happens	
You are not allowed to read court documents, our text or email messages to one another, or listen in/overhear any conversations between anyone about adult matters including the divorce. Each parent is responsible to make sure this happens.	
If one of us seems angry, sad, or upset about the divorce do not ask us to talk about it or even listen to use speak about it. Just give us some time and space while we settle our emotions	
If you have a complaint about either of us, bring it to that parent directly	
If you complain to mom/dad I will listen politely and help you figure out how to express your concern. I won't jump in on your behalf so you can develop your own voice.	
If you are uncomfortable speaking to mom/dad we can plan to meet together, but you will need to do the talking.	
If you have a therapist surely, they can help you find your words	
Mom/dad and I will disagree at times. We promise to work together to find a solution in your best interests. If we can figure it out on our own, we have someone who will help us.	
The last thing we want is for you to be stuck in the middle between us so sometimes you might hear us say 'thanks for sharing that I'll talk with mom/dad about it and we will let you know what we decide	
We both love you	
Do you have any questions	

Why are we being asked to draft this Agreement to be Read to our Children?

During every single interaction each parent has the opportunity to influence how their and their coparent's behaviors will impact [by either helping or harming] their children. Often, after exposure to the adversarial court process, parents' initial perspective when dealing with each other is still win or lose. This zero-sum gain view is harmful to their children, themselves, and substantially undercuts the goal of creating a respectful coparenting partnership designed to serve their children's best interests. So, let's leave that behind!

Now, after 'the battle' and the exhaustion/frustration that resulted from it; informed by some of what we discussed during our IIS about the negative, mostly unintended, consequences behavior such as that has on their children, I hope you are motivated to consider a new, different, and positive approach to resolving differences with your coparent.

This is your choice point...help or hurt.

Let's start by looking at the pros and cons from your children's perspective; which you are well advised to consider as you approach the process of drafting this agreement.

Before we do, though, remember, the goal in this homework is for each of you to capture the essence of the models and to express it child focused language to let your children know that going forward both of their parents commit to finding "solutions" instead of "wins"; otherwise known as committing to cocreate a respectful coparenting partnership whose function is to raise well-adjusted children.

1. Benefits of Parents Being on the Same Page

- **Consistency and Stability:** When parents agree, create "new rules", and share them with their children, it provides a stable and consistent environment for the child, which is crucial for their emotional and psychological well-being.
- **Reduced Conflict:** Cooperative, and if not cooperative, at least respectful, coparenting minimizes your and your children's stress by reducing conflicts to disagreements which can then calmly and respectfully be resolved, away from the children, either between parents themselves or with the support of your parenting coordinator. This allows for clearer thinking, better decision-making, a more peace full coparenting partnership, and a much healthier and happier life for the children. [See Bob Emery's Hierarchy of Needs]
- **Improved Child Outcomes:** Research shows that cooperative coparenting, the gold standard, is linked to higher self-esteem, improved academic performance, and better mental health overall in children.
- **Unified Front:** Presenting a united front helps children understand boundaries, supports the children in building stable and respectful relationships with each of their parents, and sets appropriate expectations for the children. Thereby, reducing confusion and eliminating many behavioral issues.

2. Potential Harms of Disagreement

- **Confusion and Stress:** Lack of clarity and inconsistencies in parenting practices can send mixed signals to children, leading to confusion, disrespect, gamesmanship, and increased stress.
- **Emotional Strain:** Even if they are not overtly aware of any particular disagreement, children can sense the emotional field of their parents' relationship. Children may feel caught in the middle of parental disagreements, which can lead to emotional strain and feelings of guilt or responsibility. Or worse yet, they might choose to actively play one parent against the other in order to get a desired result.
- **Coparenting conflict and triangulation** after separation or divorce are associated with poorer child adjustment especially when gatekeeping/overreaching, and conflict occur.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Different rules and varied expectations in each household can lead to confusion, acting out, and other behavioral problems.

Understanding this and recognizing how challenging it is to recalibrate thinking and adjust behavior I know that whatever skill I introduce and/or use as your parenting coordinator might not help (this is why I am always learning new tools and employing best practices). That said, I always start slowly and first with education. Then, only after giving a good faith effort to help parents align for the benefit of their children, do I consider if it is time to shift the focus to building a solid parallel coparenting approach that better serves the children, is often effective when both parents commit, and again minimizes the impact of conflict in the children's lives.

At this juncture, the biggest question I ask is this:

Are clear boundaries in place to protect the child from their parents' differences of opinion and/or values and which protect the child to exposure to unhealthy conflict?

That's where this agreement is essential. It is unreasonable to expect either of you to change your values. And, there are helpful, neutral, and respectful ways of expressing yourself. [This is where BIFF, NVC, and SWYP? come in]

With a sincere commitment to the PC process, some parents I work with do, over time, begin integrating some cooperative coparenting aspects into their relationship/partnership. And, when some modicum of trust is re-established, they and their children experience the benefits this growth. One way parents learn how and are guided to creating appropriate boundaries and respectful communication skills is by learning to use neutral statements, such as:

"I know your father is okay with you seeing rated R movies when you are with him, but I am not comfortable with that when you are with me,"

Rather than,

“Your father shouldn’t be letting you see R rated movies and I’ve told him that and he just won’t listen, that’s why you are having these bad dreams. I know it’s just because he likes those movies and wants to watch them.”

Or,

“Your mother and I have different religious beliefs, while I am an atheist and I do not believe there is a God, your mother is Christian and does believe in God and that it is why it is important for you to go to church with her now. Then, when you are old enough, you will be able to make choices based on your experience and both of our beliefs,”

Which is neutral, instead of:

“Your mother is just trying to brainwash you, there is no higher power than yourself. There is nothing I can do to stop her from taking you though, and I know you hate it and get bored, but law says there is nothing I can do...unless you want to live with me full time and then I’ll fight for you.”

For sure, it is better for the child if the parents can be on the same page [aligned]; which is not the same as agreeing. Recognizing this I see an essential function of parenting coordination to be helping parents “coordinate”. However, while it is ideal for parents to be in agreement we know that parallel coparenting, correctly done, can be an effective alternative when cooperation is not possible.

Even with this recognition, most the families I work with are able to make some cooperative coparenting decisions. The key is to protect the child from conflict and ensure they feel supported and understood in both homes. In my opinion, setting clear boundaries against disparaging the other parent or their parenting style is crucial. As is, previewing to the children how their parents intend to handle situations when a child expresses a desire to one that might be displeasing to the other. This process helps create a respectful and supportive environment for the child, regardless of the question or potential activity.

And this is why your first homework assignment is to create an **Agreement to be Read to the Children**. I look forward to reading the version you create using the models I’ve provided. Please let me know if you want to discuss it further.

And more so, as challenging as it will be, especially at the beginning, know that I am here to support both of you as you learn to employ the self-regulation skills we’ve discussed, remembering these reasons why it is important, and ultimately adhering to this agreement.

May this be helpful.

Child Safety Zone Pledge for Our Children

***Children have no defense
against their parents' anger.
--Dr. Ross Campbell***

The Philosophy of a Child Safety Zone:

There are about 10,000 minutes in a week, and on average most children of divorce see their parents together for about 4 of those minutes. This leaves the parents about 9,996 minutes when they can talk about any topic, no matter how difficult or emotional. Is it really selfish for the children to ask that the 4 minutes when they see their parents together be consistently peaceful?

Because these times together are so brief, all parents can give their children the gift of decent interaction during these times.

Our Pledge to Our Children:

We now agree that all times when our children see us together or hear us speaking ***belong to our children***. They make up their ***Child Safety Zone*** and are entirely for meeting their needs, including especially their need to see us act as responsible adults in a partnership for them. They are not for conflict or dealing with any difficult issues.

Other children receive this gift from their parents, and our children are no less deserving.

From today forward, we each give our children the gift of this ***Child Safety Zone***. Regardless of what my co-parent does or how I think I've been treated, I will always speak and act as a courteous and responsible adult during:

- o All pick-ups and drop-offs.
- o All other times our children see us together.
- o All telephone conversations when our children know we're speaking.

With this agreement each of us will have the benefit of knowing that our children will be safer and happier—and that we can approach all family encounters confident of a civil time.

Signature and date

Signature and date

Note: For a personalized version, use the "Replace" function under your Edit tab. Just replace "our children" with the names of the children you have together.

Child Safety Zone Pledge for Our Son

***Children have no defense
against their parents' anger.
--Dr. Ross Campbell***

The Philosophy of a Child Safety Zone:

There are about 10,000 minutes in a week, and on average most children of divorce see their parents together for about 4 of those minutes. This leaves the parents about 9,996 minutes when they can talk about any topic, no matter how difficult or emotional. Is it really selfish for the children to ask that the 4 minutes when they see their parents together be consistently peaceful?

Because these times together are so brief, all parents can give their children the gift of decent interaction during these times.

Our Pledge to Our Son:

We now agree that all times when our son sees us together or hears us speaking ***belong to him***. They make up his ***Child Safety Zone*** and are entirely for meeting his needs, including especially his need to see us act as responsible adults in a partnership for him. They are not for conflict or dealing with any difficult issues.

Other children receive this gift from their parents, and our son is no less deserving.

From today forward, we each give him the gift of this ***Child Safety Zone***. Regardless of what my co-parent does or how I think I've been treated, I will always speak and act as a courteous and responsible adult during:

- o All pick-ups and drop-offs.
- o All other times our son sees us together.
- o All telephone conversations when he knows we're speaking.

With this agreement each of us will have the benefit of knowing that our son will be safer and happier—and also that we can approach all family encounters confident of a civil time.

Signature and date

Signature and date

Note: For a personalized version, use the "Replace" function under your Edit tab. Just replace "our son" with the name of the son you have together.

Child Safety Zone Pledge for Our Daughter

***Children have no defense
against their parents' anger.
--Dr. Ross Campbell***

The Philosophy of a Child Safety Zone:

There are about 10,000 minutes in a week, and on average most children of divorce see their parents together for about 4 of those minutes. This leaves the parents about 9,996 minutes when they can talk about any topic, no matter how difficult or emotional. Is it really selfish for the children to ask that the 4 minutes when they see their parents together be consistently peaceful?

Because these times together are so brief, all parents can give their children the gift of decent interaction during these times.

Our Pledge to Our Daughter:

We now agree that all times when our daughter sees us together or hears us speaking ***belong to her***. They make up her ***Child Safety Zone*** and are entirely for meeting her needs, including especially her need to see us act as responsible adults in a partnership for her. They are not for conflict or dealing with any difficult issues.

Other children receive this gift from their parents, and our daughter is no less deserving.

From today forward, we each give her the gift of this ***Child Safety Zone***. Regardless of what my co-parent does or how I think I've been treated, I will always speak and act as a courteous and responsible adult during:

- o All pick-ups and drop-offs.
- o All other times our daughter sees us together.
- o All telephone conversations when she knows we're speaking.

With this agreement each of us will have the benefit of knowing that our daughter will be safer and happier—and also that we can approach all family encounters confident of a civil time.

Signature and date

Signature and date

Note: For a personalized version, use the "Replace" function under your Edit tab. Just replace "our daughter" with the name of the daughter you have together.



**AUTHORIZATION FOR THE RELEASE AND EXCHANGE OF
CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

(Please print clearly in ink or type **your** identifying information)

Your Name:

Residential Address:

Date of Birth:

I understand that it may be necessary for Tony Pelusi, and those who provide services to me and/or our child(ren) to disclose, receive, and exchange confidential information, and/or records to, from, between and among one another relating to me [and/or a minor child if one is specified below], as may be necessary for the development and delivery of comprehensive Parenting Coordination Services. I therefore give my informed consent for Tony Pelusi to share any information about me and what he believes is in the best interests of our child(ren) with my therapist, /, to the extent that he believes the information is essential for effective parenting coordination. I also provide informed consent for my therapist, /, to share any confidential information with Tony Pelusi that (s)he believes is essential to Parenting Coordination, after Tony Pelusi has provided to them an explanation of Parenting Coordination and a copy of the AFCC Guidelines for Court-Involved Therapy. I further acknowledge and authorize the sharing of confidential information about me among the participants of any a "team meeting" that Tony Pelusi convenes involving my therapist, my CPP's therapist, and/or our child(ren)'s therapist(s).

I understand that I am not obligated to sign this Authorization and am doing so because I believe it is necessary to assist in achieving the best possible results from this Parenting Coordination engagement.

I affirm that this form has been reviewed and approved by my attorney, has been reviewed by me, and my attorney has answered all of my questions about anything I did not understand.

**THIS RELEASE DOES NOT PERMIT THE DISCLOSURE OF ANY PRIVILEGED
INFORMATION ABOUT THE MINOR CHILD(REN) LISTED BELOW.**

I understand that Tony Pelusi may not be covered by federal or state privacy laws. Any release of information to him pursuant to this release is limited to his work as our Parenting Coordinator and for the purposes of this engagement only. This release is solely for the purpose of allowing Tony Pelusi to obtain relevant information to assist him in his work with our family and shall not be deemed a waiver of any applicable privilege.

I understand a photocopy of this release form will be valid as an original hereof, even though said photocopy does not contain an original writing of my signature.

This permission for Tony Pelusi and / to communicate and share information that is essential to Parenting Coordination is valid for one year from the date it is signed or unless revoked by me in writing. During this timeframe, after Tony Pelusi provides an initial description of Parenting



Coordination, each other authorized provider, Tony Pelusi and //// respectively, shall have the discretion to determine what information within their possession is necessary to share for purposes of Parenting Coordination.

I understand that I can change my mind and cancel this permission at any time. To do this, I need to notify Tony Pelusi in OurFamilyWizard and deliver a written notice to the person(s) or place(s) where I am now giving this permission. If the information has already been given out by anyone subject to this authorization, then I understand that it is too late for me to change my mind and cancel the permission as to the information previously released.

Complete this section if your Minor Child is also subject of this authorization:

Relationship of Representative to Minor Child(ren):

Name of Minor Child:

Date of Birth:

Name of Minor Child:

Date of Birth:

Name of Minor Child:

Date of Birth:

Name of Minor Child:

Date of Birth:

Your Signature: _____



**AUTHORIZATION FOR THE RELEASE AND EXCHANGE OF
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(Please print clearly in ink or type **your** identifying information)

Your Name:

Residential Address:

Date of Birth:

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Date of Birth:

Name of Minor Child:

Date of Birth:

Name of Minor Child:

Date of Birth:

Your Signature: _____

BACK UP PLANS

Advice for parents new to single parenting:

1. Each is responsible for the child on their own time and will need to have and make plans accordingly.
2. Each parent should have a list of back up plans for sick days, snow days or other unexpected child-care needs
3. Each parent should share where the child is on a back-up plan day is sick and not at their usual place
4. Parents can offer **ROFR** (right of first refusal) to the other parent, but NO expectations should be placed on a parent by either parent beyond the ROFR
5. Sometimes - parents may wish to share a common Back-up plan list, or may wish to each have their own list of resources
6. The school should be notified of a sick day
7. The other parent should be notified of a sick day that requires an alternate Plan B - back up plan
8. SCHOOL POLICY- the preschool or school policy should be respected and adhered to
9. COMMUNICATION IN ADVANCE: parents should each have their plans laid out in advance and be able to communicate those plans to one another before they are needed

Additionally:

Each parent is to post their Back up plan in MyFiles by /////.

This issue also raises many other relevant questions you are wise to consider. (e.g.: parent illness, snow days, teacher/school closures, etc.)

Here are some resources to consider – you are encourage to read through some of these helpful websites for ideas.

TIPS: IMPORTANCE OF BACK UP PLANS FOR A CHILD'S SICK DAYS

<https://www.parents.com/parenting/work/life-balance/a-working-moms-guide-to-sick-kids/>

TIPS: OFW'S TIPS FOR BEING PREPARED FOR SICK DAYS- HAVE GOOD BACK UP PLANS

<https://www.ourfamilywizard.com/blog/4-tips-co-parenting-when-your-child-sick>

TIPS: HOW TO MANAGE A SICK CHILD AT TIME OF TRANSFER (OPTIONS DISCUSSED)

<https://www.womansdivorce.com/visitation-guidelines-for-a-sick-child.html>

WHEN A PARENT GETS SICK (Special situations now present with COVID- as illness can last longer and pose risks most illnesses do not pose)

<https://www.lynchowens.com/blog/2020/june/how-does-child-custody-change-when-a-parent-gets/>

TIPS: SNOW DAYS & WEATHER DISRUPTIONS

<https://blogs.lawyers.com/attorney/child-custody/children-and-snow-days-52737/>

TIPS: ROFR (Right of 1st Refusal), SCHOOL CLOSURE & HOSPITAL DAYS & OTHER UNUSUAL THINGS

<https://bjmediationservices.com/critical-divorce-parenting-plan-topics/>



Boiling Mad

Fire, Revenge, Infuriated, Outraged,
Belligerent



Frustrated and Resentful

Bitter, Irritable, Exasperated,
Sarcastic



Tense and Restless

On edge, Fidgety, Uneasy



Normal

Relaxed and Calm



Withdrawn

Mind wandering, Distracted,
Inattentive



Disengaged

Separated, Preoccupied



Totally Checked Out

Detached, Isolated, Disconnected

How to Self-Regulate in the Moment

Grounding

Supporting

Centering

Noticing your breath

Orienting (all five senses)

Meditate (eyes open/closed)

Sensory / fidget tools

Soothing movements (grab or tap elbows)

Somatic hug

Self-contact

Gentle movement

EFT – The Emotional Freedom Technique

EFT was created by Gary Craig. If you desire a complete and in depth explanation of EFT please visit Gary's website: <http://www.emofree.com> Briefly the technique helps to free blocked and negative energy in your body. You do this for yourself by "tapping" on energy points that lie upon the meridians of your energetic body. Sometimes this procedure is referred to as "Emotional Acupuncture". I will be more than happy to share more with you about this powerful technique so feel free to contact me at tony@tonypelusi.com.

Here I have synthesized the technique into a set of easy to follow instructions. I invite you to use this process to reduce and eliminate the debilitating effect of negative emotions in your life. I have utilized this modified version of the technique for years and get powerful relief each time I employ it. My clients and many others report success as well. It is my sincere hope and desire that you too will experience the positive effects of this simple technique when the time is right.

1. The first step is to identify the emotion or thought you want to work on; be as specific as you can. For example, I am anxious; I am unsure; I am scared...
2. Next close your eyes and allow yourself to connect deeply with the thought or emotion. Now check in and see how activated you have become on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 meaning there is no charge at all and 10 representing the most intense charge you have ever experienced.
3. Now begin tapping by striking the Karate Chop (KC) point of one hand on the side of your other hand. I am a lefty so I tap the KC point of my left hand on the side of my right had. I strike the right hand on the side at the knuckle where my index finger meets the palm.



As you are tapping, say out loud, "Even though I have/am (name your thought or emotion here)...I deeply and completely love and accept myself." Repeat this statement 3 times, while still tapping.

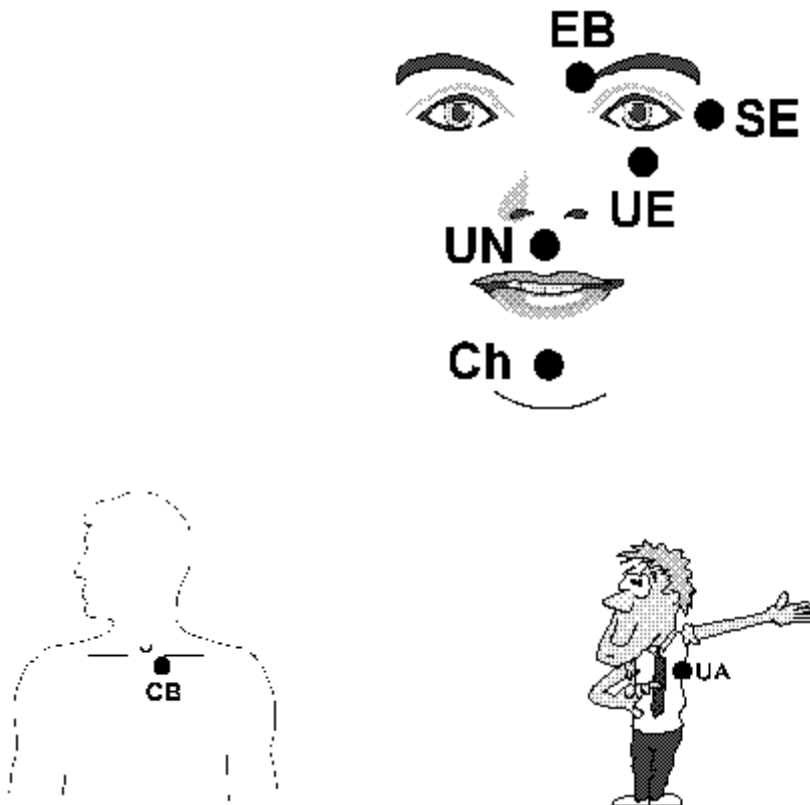
This is called the Set-Up statement.

Ex: "Even though I am anxious because I have to deliver this presentation, I deeply and completely love and accept myself."

4. Next, tap on each of the points illustrated below, 7-10 times, tapping with enough pressure to feel the tapping, but not so hard that it hurts. While you are tapping you will say a reminder phrase that comes from the Set-Up Statement.

Ex: "Even though I am Anxious"...or unsure, or scared...

Repeat the reminder phrase at each tapping point (See diagram below):



EB = Above the beginning of the **Ey**e**B**row

SE = **S**ide of the **Ey**e

UE = **U**nder the **Ey**e

UN = **U**nder the **N**ose

Ch = **C**hin

CB = Beginning of the **C**ollar**B**one

UA = **U**nder the **A**rm

5. After completing this phase of the process once again strike the KC point of one hand on the side of the other. Do this 3 times while repeating the entire

Set-Up phrase. "Even though I have/am (name your thought or emotion here)...I deeply and completely love and accept myself."

Ex: "Even though I am anxious because I have to deliver this presentation, I deeply and completely love and accept myself."

KC = Karate Chop

6. Now take a deep breath and tune back into your issue. Give it another rating - did it drop? Some people will drop significantly with their first round, others may notice only just 1 point.

7. If need be Start again with the same Set-Up statement, but this time say, "Even though I still have some of (your issue here) remaining, I deeply and completely love and accept myself."

Ex: Even though I still have some anxiety because I have to deliver this presentation, I deeply and completely love and accept myself."

8. Tap on each of the tapping points saying your reminder phrase with "remaining" in front. Ex: "Remaining Anxiety"

9. When you complete the process for the second time take another deep breath and re-rate how you are feeling. You can get your rating down to zero with continued use of this procedure.

10. On the other hand if you find that your issue isn't changing in rating, look for what is underlying it. For example, even though you feel anxiety about delivering the presentation, perhaps the negative emotion is really about feeling like nobody understands you, or that you feel incompetent.

EFT IN A NUTSHELL

Memorize The Basic Recipe. Aim it at any emotional or physical problem by customizing it with an appropriate Set-Up affirmation and Reminder Phrase. Be specific where possible and aim EFT at the specific emotional events in one's life that may underlie the problem. Where necessary, be persistent until all aspects of the problem have vanished. Try it on and again and again, if you would like to talk with me about this tool please get in touch with me at tony@tontpelusi.com.

Thank you and Be Well,

Tony

TWELVE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE OFW MESSAGING

1. In general, only send necessary messages. [Remember to ask yourself: Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it necessary?]
2. Clearly identify the one topic in subject line. [add tag if appropriate, - Gentle Reminder - SWYP? - FYI - RR - ASAP]
3. Include friendly opening and closing [Greetings or Your CPP's Name, Thank you]
4. Remember BIFF and NVC [not every message needs a response. I notice, I feel, I need, Will you?]
5. Address only the present and future; not the past.
6. Maintain nonjudgmental tone. Do not give directions on how you believe your CPP should parent, unless they explicitly request your input.
7. If you are addressing what you see as a concern or problem, include a possible solution or option. [Flexible thinking]
8. Make requests instead of demands
9. Remember, no response for at least 1 hour; get into the green zone. [What is your go to practice?]
10. Prepare a draft, pause, reread as if message was sent to you. Edit. Copy and paste into OFW.
11. Remember to share a place setter if you are unable to offer a timely response.
12. Be mindful of children's and your CPP's activities before clicking on Send or Reply. You can always save a draft and send it at a more convenient time.

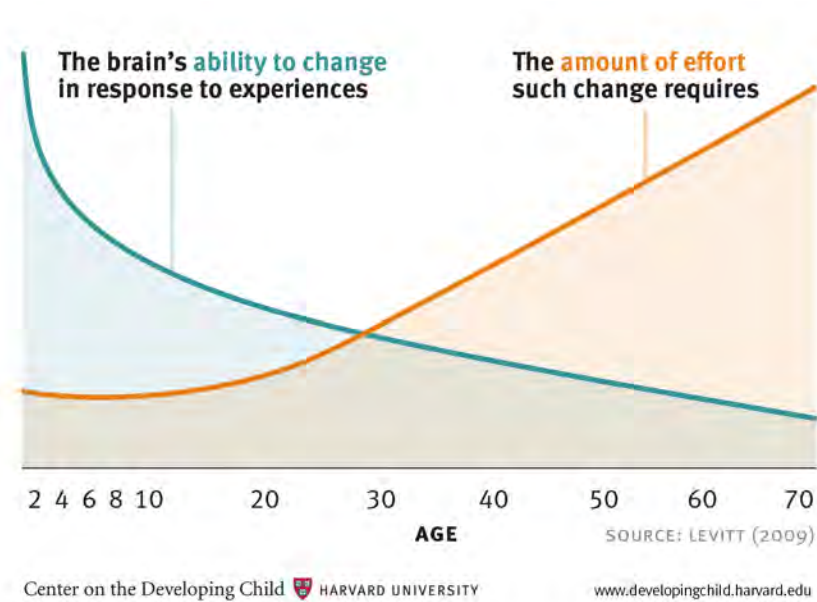
Best practice is to review this list after you compose and before you send each message.

If it does not meet every tip, then stop and rewrite.

Thanks to Brad Craig and Between 2 Homes for sharing their model for these best practices.



ABILITY OVER TIME AND EFFORT NEEDED TO CHANGE



Radical Acceptance

- You don't have to like it.
- You don't have to agree with it.
- You can even hate it.
- But it is your reality.

ACCEPTANCE is acknowledging what is.

My CPP and I have a strained relationship.

To ACCEPT something is not the same as judging it to be good.

My CPP and I cannot resolve conflicts without the involvement of a third party. This is unfortunate and not ideal, but it is the way it has to be at the moment.

ACCEPTANCE ≠ approval.

My CPP parents differently than I do. It is not how I would do things, but it is their way. On their parenting time, they can do what they feel is appropriate.

MYTH ABOUT ACCEPTANCE

If you don't accept something, it will magically change and you won't have to deal with it.

You have three choices to deal with these issues:

Fight it
Do nothing
Radically accept it and move on...

Responding to Verbal Jabs: A skill we all need to learn.

Verbal Jabs are common among CPPs but need to stop because once one party throws a verbal jab the other side thinks it is fair game to jab the other side and then we have the effect of Newton's Cradle – each action has an equal and opposite reaction (the balls on the cradle stop when you pull back on the end and do not react).

How do you make Verbal Jabs stop... do not respond, eventually when the desired response is not forthcoming the one throwing the verbal jabs will eventually stop or you will find a way to ignore them and not let them bother you.

Stages of Forgiveness and Grief

Forgiveness:

1. Claim the Hurt - denial
2. Guilt – blame
3. Victim – express emotions
4. Anger – mindful and controlled
5. Wholeness – acceptance

Grief:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Purpose and Origins

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the model in 1969 to describe how people facing terminal illness often respond emotionally to their own impending death, and it was later applied more broadly to many kinds of loss (death, divorce, serious diagnosis, job loss, major life changes). The stages are not a strict roadmap but a framework that gives language to intense reactions and helps people and helpers make sense of shifting emotions.

The Five Stages

- * Denial: Denial is a protective shock response in which the loss feels unreal or “this can’t be happening.” It buffers the impact of the news, allowing a person to absorb the reality of the situation in small, manageable pieces while continuing daily functions.
- * Anger: As reality intrudes and denial fades, anger may emerge, directed at oneself, others, medical providers, a higher power, or even the person who died. This stage often masks deeper pain and fear, and feeling anger is a natural sign that the numbness of denial is loosening.
- * Bargaining: In bargaining, people think in “if only” or “what if” terms and may mentally negotiate with themselves, others, or a higher power to change the outcome or lessen the loss. Bargaining is a way to search for control and postpone the full weight of grief by imagining different scenarios (“If I do X, maybe this won’t be true”).
- * Depression: When the finality of the loss becomes undeniable, deep sadness, withdrawal, low energy, and a sense of emptiness or meaninglessness can take hold. This is not necessarily clinical depression but a natural, often necessary, pulling inward to mourn what is gone and begin to reorganize life around the absence.
- * Acceptance: Acceptance means recognizing that the loss is real and permanent and beginning to live with that reality, not that the loss is “okay” or no longer painful. In this stage, emotions tend to stabilize, people may re-engage with life, make new routines, and carry the loss as part of their continuing story.

How Grief Actually Moves

Although the stages are often shown as a neat sequence, research and clinical experience indicate that grief is not linear, and people do not reliably move through these steps in order. People may skip stages, revisit them, feel several at once, or feel emotions that do not fit the model at all (such as guilt, anxiety, or numbness); this variability is normal and does not mean someone is grieving “wrong.”

Here's how those five stages of forgiveness can look in the context of divorce, especially when there has been real hurt or betrayal.

1. Acknowledge the hurt (and the loss)

In divorce, this means fully naming what was lost: the marriage, the future you imagined, financial security, time with kids, community, identity, etc.

You let yourself feel grief, anger, confusion, or humiliation instead of pushing it down, and you recognize how your ex's actions (and the divorce itself) affected you.

Example: "I lost a partner, a co-parent under one roof, and the life we planned together; that hurts more than I wanted to admit."

2. Decide to move toward forgiveness

At some point you consciously choose a goal: "I don't want this resentment to run my life anymore," even if you are nowhere near feeling forgiving.

This decision is about your own peace and health, not about saying what happened was okay or inviting your ex back into close emotional space.

Example: you might decide that, for the sake of your health and your parenting, you want to work toward letting go of revenge fantasies and constant mental replays.

3. Understand and reframe (without excusing)

Here you start to look at the fuller picture: your ex's limitations and history, the dynamics between you, and your own part where appropriate, while still holding clear boundaries.

You may recognize that both of you contributed in different ways, or that your ex acted out of immaturity, fear, addiction, or unresolved trauma, which can soften pure blame even while you remain firm that the behavior was not acceptable.

Example: "Their affair was not my fault, but I can see how both of us avoided hard conversations, and they chose a destructive way out."

4. Let go of resentment and revenge

This stage is about gradually releasing the grip of bitterness, rumination, and the desire to "make them pay," because you see how much it costs you emotionally and even physically.

You may still enforce legal and parenting boundaries, but you stop nursing grudges, rehearsing courtroom speeches in your head, or using kids as messengers or weapons.

Example: instead of replaying the worst moments every night, you redirect your attention to your own goals, self-care, and rebuilding your post-divorce life.

5. Move forward with a new story

Finally, you integrate what happened into a larger story of your life where you see yourself as resilient and growing, not as a permanent victim of your ex.

You may relate to your ex in a limited, businesslike way (especially if co-parenting), but their choices no longer define your identity, your mood, or your future.

Example: you can talk about the divorce without a surge of rage, focus more on your own plans and values, and—even if quietly—wish your ex well enough that you no longer need them to suffer for you to feel okay.

An effective apology has a few core elements that together show sincerity, accountability, and a real desire to repair the relationship.

Core elements

1. Clear statement of regret

- * Say plainly that you are sorry, without hedging.
- * Example: "I'm sorry I snapped at you in the meeting."

2. Specific acknowledgement of what you did

- * Name the behavior or failure clearly so the other person knows you get it.
- * Avoid vague phrases like "for what happened" or "if I hurt you."

3. Acceptance of responsibility

- * Use "I" language and avoid excuses, blaming, or the passive voice.
- * Example: "I was wrong to interrupt you and dismiss your idea."

4. Validation of impact and empathy

- * Acknowledge the effect on the other person, not just your intent.
- * Example: "I can see that embarrassed you and made you feel disrespected."

5. Explanation (without defensiveness)

- * Briefly explain what went wrong only if it helps understanding, not to minimize responsibility.
- * Keep it short and avoid turning it into self-justification.?

6. Commitment to change

- * State how you will act differently to prevent a repeat, showing you've learned something.
- * Example: "Next time I disagree, I'll ask to talk privately instead of calling it out in front of others."

7. Offer of repair

- * Ask what you can do to make amends or propose a concrete step.
- * This might be practical (redoing work) or relational (giving space, rebuilding trust over time).

8. Optional: request for forgiveness

- * You can say, "I hope you can forgive me," but research suggests this is less important than the elements above.

Putting it together (template)

"I'm sorry for [specific action]. I was wrong and I take responsibility for that. I understand it made you feel [impact], and I regret causing that. Briefly, here's what was going on: [short explanation, no excuses]. Going forward, I will [specific change], and I'd like to make it right by [offer of repair]."

UNHEALTHY CONFLICT



HEALTHY CONFLICT



DARING FEEDBACK***The Engaged Feedback Checklist***

I know that I'm ready to give feedback when ...

- ___ I'm ready to sit next to you rather than across from you.
- ___ I'm willing to put the problem in front of us rather than between us (or sliding it toward you).
- ___ I'm ready to listen, ask questions, and accept that I may not fully understand the issue.
- ___ I'm ready to acknowledge what you do well instead of picking apart your mistakes.
- ___ I recognize your strengths and how you can use them to address your challenges.
- ___ I can hold you accountable without shaming or blaming.
- ___ I am open to owning my part.
- ___ I can genuinely thank someone for their efforts rather than criticize them for their failings.
- ___ I can talk about how resolving these challenges will lead to growth and opportunity.
- ___ I can model the vulnerability and openness that I expect to see from you.



Thanks to [Brene Brown](#) for sharing this.



COLLABORATIVE FAMILY LAW **GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE** **COMMUNICATION**

1. Listen ... Everyone will have an opportunity to be heard.
2. Focus on the future ... not the past. Focus... on resolving conflict ... not blaming.
3. Be Courteous: Avoid interrupting, sarcasm, critical comments
4. Check out assumptions: “Do I understand you to be saying...”
5. Speak for yourself: Use the pronoun ‘I’ and not ‘You’
6. Ask for a break: Take the time to Calm yourself if needed
7. Express what really matters to you: Your interests, needs, and wants
8. Have patience with all participants
9. Follow the agenda
10. Be respectful as you are being honest.

SO, WHAT'S YOUR PROPOSAL

Step 1: The proposal

When there is a stalemate here are some questions to ask:

What would you propose?

What do you suggest?

What are some options you would like me to consider?

Do you have any ideas that might solve this problem?

I'm interested in your thoughts on what we should do here.

Ideally proposals will include these elements: **WHO** does **WHAT**, **WHEN** and **WHERE**

Step 2: When proposal is offered by Parent 1, then Parent 2 may ask questions about the proposal.

Questions to ask:

What would your proposal look like in action?

What's your picture of how this would work?

What would you do? What would I do if you could picture your proposal actually happening?

And every other question you might have EXCEPT.....

DO NOT ASK WHY QUESTIONS!

Step 3: When all questions have been asked and answered then Parent 2 respond with either “Yes”, “No”, or “I’ll think about it, and let you know (by when).”

If Yes. Document agreement.

If No or “I’ll think about it.”, move on. Parent 2 now makes his/her proposal and Parent 1 asks questions.

In any case where either parent says “I’ll think about it”; then that parent must also give a time frame on when they will get back to the other person with a decision.

Repeat the Process until a compromise is achieved.

SPECIAL THANKS TO BILL EDDY, LCSW, ESQ. AND THE FOLKS AT THE HIGH CONFLICT INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPING AND SHARING THIS MODEL.

FOR MORE INFORMATION YOU CAN BUY THIS BOOK AND/OR VISIT WWW.HIGHCONFLICTINSTITUTE.COM

HCPC Conflict Resolution Model

BASIC ELEMENTS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Identify the problem; write it down.
2. With no blame, state the problem from your CPP's perspective to confirm a shared understanding of the problem.
3. Create a neutral problem statement that contains NEITHER blame nor any solution.
4. Brainstorm LOTS of possible solutions.
5. Hold off on evaluating good from bad until you have exhausted all possible solutions [even the crazy or outrageous ones].
6. Alternate eliminating the one possible solution you like least.
7. Keep solutions you may not like but could live with.
8. Stop when you have narrowed it down to a few. [Ideally three to five]
9. Find a solution. It might be any one, or a combination of possibilities.
10. Do not let the disagreement drag on; have the courage to come to a mutual resolution that both of you think is merely "adequate." Adequate is good!
11. Make sure you understand and documents all the details (who, what, when, where, and how). Write them down.
12. Agree to disagree, if necessary, and decide how to deal with that. [Mediation? Parenting Coordinator? Resort to court? Try again later?]
13. Move forward past the disagreement!
14. Find ways to make it work for your children's sake. Commit to the plan.
15. When problems occur [and they will], work together to modify the plan, or seek help.

Here is an example of a blaming vs non-blaming problem statement:

- "I want to have my son 50/50." or "The time that my son spends with my CPP is never spent on homework so I want him to spend more time with me during the week."

VS

- "I miss our son. Will you work with me to find a way for me to see him more?"

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) Model

When we communicate please notice:

- The concrete actions we are *observing* that are affecting our well-being
- How we are *feeling* in relation to what we are observing
- The *needs*, values, desires, etc. that are creating our feelings
- The concrete actions we *request* in order to enrich our lives

When we use this model, we may begin either by expressing ourselves or by empathically receiving these four pieces of information from others. It is important to keep in mind that NVC does not consist of a set formula, but adapts to various situations as well as personal and cultural styles. While I conveniently refer to NVC as a "process" or "language," it is possible to experience all four pieces of the model without uttering a single word.

The essence of NVC is to be found in our consciousness not these four components, not in the actual words that are exchanged.

Two parts of NVC:

1. Expressing honesty through the four components
2. Receiving empathically through the four components

Examples:

"John was angry with me yesterday for no reason."

If you understand this to be nonviolent communication we're not in agreement. I consider "for no reason" to be an evaluation. Furthermore, I consider it an evaluation to infer that John was angry. He might have been feeling hurt, scared, sad, or something else.

Examples of observations without evaluation might be: "John told me he was angry," or "John pounded his fist on the table."

"I feel you don't love me."

If you understand this to be nonviolent communication we're not in agreement. I don't consider "you don't love me" to be a feeling. To me, it expresses what the speaker thinks the other person is feeling, rather than how the speaker is feeling. Whenever the words "I feel" are followed by the words "I," "you," "he," "she," "they," "it," "that," "like," or "as if," what follows is generally not what I would consider to be a feeling. Examples of an expression of feeling might be: "I'm sad" or "I'm feeling anguished."

"You irritate me when you leave company documents on the conference room floor."

If you understand this to be nonviolent communication we're not in agreement. To me, the statement implies that the other person's behavior is solely responsible for the speaker's feelings. It doesn't reveal the speaker's needs or thoughts that are contributing to his or her feelings. To do so, the speaker might have said, "I'm irritated when you leave company documents on the conference room floor, because I want our documents to be safely stored and accessible."

"I want you to understand me."

If you understand this to be nonviolent communication we're not in agreement. To me, the word "understand" does not clearly express a specific action being requested. Instead, the speaker might have said, "I want you to tell me what you heard me say."

This material is excerpted with permission from Nonviolent Communication, A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph. D. Visit www.nonviolentcommunication.com or www.cnvc.org to learn more.



EXHAUSTED



CONFUSED



ECSTATIC



GUILTY



SUSPICIOUS



ANGRY



HYSTERICAL



FRUSTRATED



SAD



CONFIDENT



EMBARRASSED



HAPPY



MISCHIEVOUS



DISGUSTED



FRIGHTENED



ENRAGED



ASHAMED



CAUTIOUS



SMUG



DEPRESSED



OVERWHELMED



HOPEFUL



LONELY



LOVESTRUCK



JEALOUS



BORED



SURPRISED



ANXIOUS



SHOCKED



SHY

FEELINGS & NEEDS

The following are words we use when we want to express a combination of emotional states and physical sensations. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met and feelings we may have when our needs are not being met.

We also have [a list of needs.](#)

Feelings when your needs are satisfied

AFFECTIONATE

compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

ENGAGED

absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

HOPEFUL

expectant
encouraged
optimistic

CONFIDENT

empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

EXCITED

amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

GRATEFUL

appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

INSPIRED

amazed
awed
wonder

JOYFUL

amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

EXHILARATED

blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

PEACEFUL

calm
clear
headed
comfortable
centered
content
equanimous

fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied

serene
still

tranquil
trusting

REFRESHED

enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID

apprehensive
dread

CONFUSED

ambivalent
baffled

EMBARRASSED

ashamed
chagrined

TENSE

anxious
cranky

foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried
ANNOYED
aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked
ANGRY
enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful
AVERSION
animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn
DISCONNECTED
alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn
DISQUIET
agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious
FATIGUE
beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out
PAIN
agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful
SAD
depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelme
d
restless
stressed out
VULNERABLE
fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky
YEARNING
envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

Needs

The following list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

We have another list that might also be of interest to you: [a list of feelings](#).

CONNECTION	CONNECTION	HONESTY	MEANING
acceptance	continued	authenticity	awareness
affection	safety	integrity	celebration of life
appreciation	security	presence	challenge
belonging	stability	PLAY	clarity
cooperation	support	joy	competence
communication	to know and be known	humor	consciousness
closeness	to see and be seen	PEACE	contribution
community	to understand and	beauty	creativity
companionship	be understood	communion	discovery
compassion	trust	ease	efficacy
consideration	warmth	equality	effectiveness
consistency	PHYSICAL WELL-	harmony	growth
empathy	BEING	inspiration	hope
inclusion	air	order	learning
intimacy	food	AUTONOMY	mourning
love	movement/exercise	choice	participation
mutuality	rest/sleep	freedom	purpose
nurturing	sexual expression	independence	self-expression
respect/self-respect	safety	space	stimulation
	shelter	spontaneity	to matter
	touch		understanding
	water		

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An Introduction to Nonviolent Communicationsm (NVC)

A Language of Compassion Rather Than Domination

Nonviolent Communicationsm (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, guides us to reframe how we express ourselves, how we hear others and resolve conflicts by focusing our consciousness on what we are observing, feeling, needing, and requesting. It is a tool that leads us toward a quality of connection among people where everyone's needs are valued and get met through compassionate giving—out of the joy of contributing to another human being.

The potency of NVC is in its pragmatic simplicity. In any moment, there are two ways to enhance connection & understanding: (1) vulnerably express our own feelings & needs, or (2) empathically listen to the feelings & needs of the other. These are radically different choices than we are accustomed to experience when we are in conflict: namely, fight, submit or flee.

While simple, NVC is often challenging to embody because we are so deeply conditioned to perceive each other through judgments. With practice, the tool of NVC helps us navigate within ourselves to transform blame & judgment--where neither our own needs nor those of the other person are likely to be met--into a mutual awareness of human needs.

Thinking & Language that Alienate Us from One Another

- Diagnoses, judgments, labels, analysis, criticism, comparisons, etc.
- Deserve thinking (i.e. that certain behaviors merit punishment or rewards)
- Demands (denial of other person's choice; intention to punish those who don't do it)
- Denial of choice or responsibility (had to, should, supposed to, they made me do it, etc.)

Purpose of NVC

- To inspire compassionate, heartfelt connection so that all needs may be valued
- To connect to the life in ourselves and others
- To be inspired and to inspire others to give from the heart

"In every moment, each of us is trying to meet our needs in the best way we know how." ~ Marshall Rosenberg

Background of NVC

- Developed by Marshall Rosenberg during the Civil Rights era; influenced by Carl Rogers
- Center for Nonviolent Communication:
web: www.cnvc.org, email:
cnvc@cnvc.org, phone: 1-818-957-9393

"Judgments & violence are tragic expressions of unmet needs." ~ Marshall Rosenberg

What NVC is not ...

NVC is not about being nice; it's about being real. It's not about stifling intensity, but transforming it.

NVC is not about changing other people or getting them to do what we want. It's about creating connection & understanding.

NVC is not a technique or formula. It's a process that helps guide our consciousness to a new awareness.

4 Components of an NVC Expression

1. OBSERVATION

(free of judgments, labels, diagnoses, opinions, etc.)

“When I see/hear/notice...”

2. FEELING (free of thoughts)

Examples of feelings when needs ARE met:

Affectionate	Confident	Engaged
Excited	Exhilarated	Grateful
Inspired	Hopeful	Exuberant
Joyful	Calm	Refreshed

“... I feel ...”

Examples of feelings when needs are NOT met:

Annoyed	Angry	Disgusted
Uneasy	Detached	Tense
Embarrassed	Tired	Sad
Vulnerable	Scared	Pain

3. NEED (universal human needs free of strategies)

Examples:

Beauty	Autonomy	Empathy
Mourning	Honesty	Love
Meaning	Safety	Respect
Community	Contribution	Mutuality
Authenticity	Transparency	Acceptance
To be valued	Play	Support

“... because I need/value ...”

4. REQUEST (free of demands)

“Would you be willing to ...?”

2 Ways of Moving Toward Connection

1. *Honestly express* your own feelings & needs

- Ongoing awareness of feelings & connected needs in present moment
- Willingness & courage to express those feelings & needs (vulnerability)

Example: “When I see you read the newspaper while I’m talking, I feel frustrated because I’m wanting to be heard. Would you be willing to close the newspaper for 5 minutes and hear my idea?”

2. *Empathically listen* to other’s feelings & needs

- Qualities of empathic listening: presence, focus, space, caring, verbal reflection of feelings & needs
- NOT advising, fixing, consoling, story-telling, sympathizing, analyzing, explaining, ...
- No matter what is said, hear only feelings, needs, observations & requests

Are you feeling ... because you need ...?



A Comparison of Life-Serving and Life-Alienating Systems

“Giraffe” vs. “Jackal”

	Life Alienating	Life-Serving
Symbol in NVC ...	“Jackal”	“Giraffe”
Consciousness ...	Domination	Partnership
Intention ...	To be right To get others to do what I want	Connection or Understanding
Principal judgments ...	Moral judgments (good/bad, right/wrong) Dualistic (either/or)	Life-serving judgments (needs met or unmet) Dialectical (both/and)
Motivation for actions ...	Extrinsic (rewards / punishment)	Intrinsic (feelings / needs)
Source of feelings ...	Caused by outside actions, people & events	Caused by our own thoughts or needs
Create safety through ...	Obedience	Connection
Relationship with others ...	Caste system / hierarchy Power over win / lose Getting our own way	Equality / mutuality Power with win / win Meeting everyone’s needs
Source of authority ...	External government, church, employer, parents	Internal Divine within
Give through ...	Guilt or shame or anger	Compassion or joy
Want others to feel our pain by ...	Stimulating pain in others	Others empathically present to us
See another’s pain as ...	Causing pain in ourselves.	“Please” ...a cry for help. A cry for empathy ... a gift
“See” another person through ...	Enemy or hero images What do you deserve? What are you? You (object)	Wholeness as a human What do you need? What’s alive in you? Thou (person)
Focus on...	Past behaviors Future events	Present moment

The “4 Ears”: How We Choose to Hear Difficult Messages

EXAMPLE #1

Person A: How dare you walk out of the room when I'm talking! You inconsiderate S.O.B.! You just can't stand to hear the truth.

1. **B (blaming A):** Me the S.O.B. ... how about you! You're the one who started all this in the first place. You are so self-righteous telling me I'm inconsiderate. You've never thought about another human being besides yourself!
2. **Person B (blaming himself):** Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be disrespectful. It's just that I don't know what to do. I never know what to do, or what to say. I feel so worthless!
3. **B (sensing his own feelings/needs):** When I hear you say that, I feel hurt because I'm needing respect and to be seen for who I am. And I really need some space because I'm in a lot of pain right now... Would you be willing to tell me what you heard me just say?
4. **B (sensing A's feelings/needs):**
Are you feeling angry and wanting respect and to be heard? ...

EXAMPLE #2

[Mother has a 1-1/2 hour coffee with a friend... her first time away from the children in 3 days.]

6-Year-Old: Mama I don't want you to go! What could be more important than being with me?! (tugging at her leg, crying loudly)

1. **M (blaming child):** Let go of my leg! And be quiet! You've got no reason to cry ... I've been with you all day. You always make this so hard! ... when all I want to do is have a few minutes to myself!
2. **M (blaming herself):** Oh, my gosh, I've really upset you! Why do I always do this?! ... Why am I so selfish? ... I'm such an awful mother.
3. **M (sensing her own feelings/needs):** Honey, I'm really feeling exhausted and needing to just have some personal time to connect with my good friend, Betty. Would you be willing to let Mary (the babysitter) hold you? ...
4. **M (sensing her child's feelings/needs):**
Are you feeling sad and wanting to be held? ...
Are you feeling hurt and needing to know that you are precious and loved? ...

4 Ears:

1. Blaming others
(attacking)
2. Blaming ourselves
(submitting)
3. Sensing our own feelings
& needs
4. Sensing others' feelings & needs

Blaming is the realm of the jackal. The jackal part of us sees the only choices as fight, submit or flee. More than likely, the jackal doesn't even see choices, but responds in a habitual or automatic manner.

*We are each responsible for
how we hear what other
people are saying.*

Connection is the realm of the giraffe. The giraffe part of us knows that there are two ways to connect in any moment: to sense our own feelings & needs, or to sense the feelings & needs of the other person. The giraffe is also keenly aware of the choices she is making in every moment.



On Learning NVC ...

It's About *Awareness* not *Content*

by Gregg Kendrick, Certified Trainer

In my experience, learning NVC involves a different kind of "understanding" or "learning" ... very little learning from the head or making sense of concepts ... more learning from the heart, learning with my whole being, expanding my awareness ... it's not a linear progression, but *spiraling* more deeply & more *expansively*.

I have observed that this kind of learning does not happen very meaningfully by *talking about* NVC. It happens most powerfully when we seek to connect with one another and with ourselves ... when we engage in and witness the experience of NVC. The learning happens in the struggle and the longing to connect. I am often more empowered to engage in NVC when I remember that it is not about getting it right, but about *moving toward* the connection that I want (what Marshall calls "growing progressively less stupid").

Amidst these experiences, each one of us is learning what we are ready for. In the same exercise or experience, we may each be learning something very different. I find that I am nearly always surprised. If I am willing to share my experiences, I often notice that my own learning seems to deepen as it is received by the other person or people that I am with.

Creating the internal space that nurtures learning & connection

I have found that my learning of NVC happens more fully when I create a place in myself that supports that learning:

- a place of **spaciousness** ... we're discovering what's already there, not putting more stuff in
- a place of **awareness of self** in this moment ... noticing my thoughts ... my body sensations ... my feelings ... my intentions ... my needs ... my choices
- a place of **openness** ... finding where I am tense or distracted, and "letting go" to a place of being alert, yet relaxed ... not doing, but being
- a place of **choice** ... where there is no "have to", no "should", no "supposed to" ... there are only choices

Some strategies that may enhance your learning during this workshop:

- Remember often the intentions with which you came ... take responsibility for their fulfillment.
- Pause often to notice what is going on within you ... connect to your own feelings & needs
- Express your needs and ask for what would fulfill them.
- Remember the common intentions of the group.
- Before speaking in the group, be clear what your own needs are and what specific request you have of the group to meet your needs.
- When another person is speaking, focus on their feelings & needs.
- When another person is speaking, pause or check in to see if they are complete before expressing what is

- a place of **self-compassion** ... where there are no judgments, no right or wrong, no punishments or rewards ... remembering that I am trying to get my needs met in the best way I know how
- a place where I remember **what I am responsible for** and **what I am not responsible for** ...
... what are your intentions for being here? ...
... only you are responsible for your intentions, your feelings, your needs, your choices ...
... only I am responsible for my intentions, my feelings, my needs, my choices ...

Creating the community space that nurtures learning & connection

We are each co-creating and contributing to the quality of the community space that holds us, whether we are conscious of it or not. What my intention is, where I focus my attention, and the choices I make ... each of these becomes a part of the texture of the space. In my experience, certain qualities in that space support connection and learning among us:

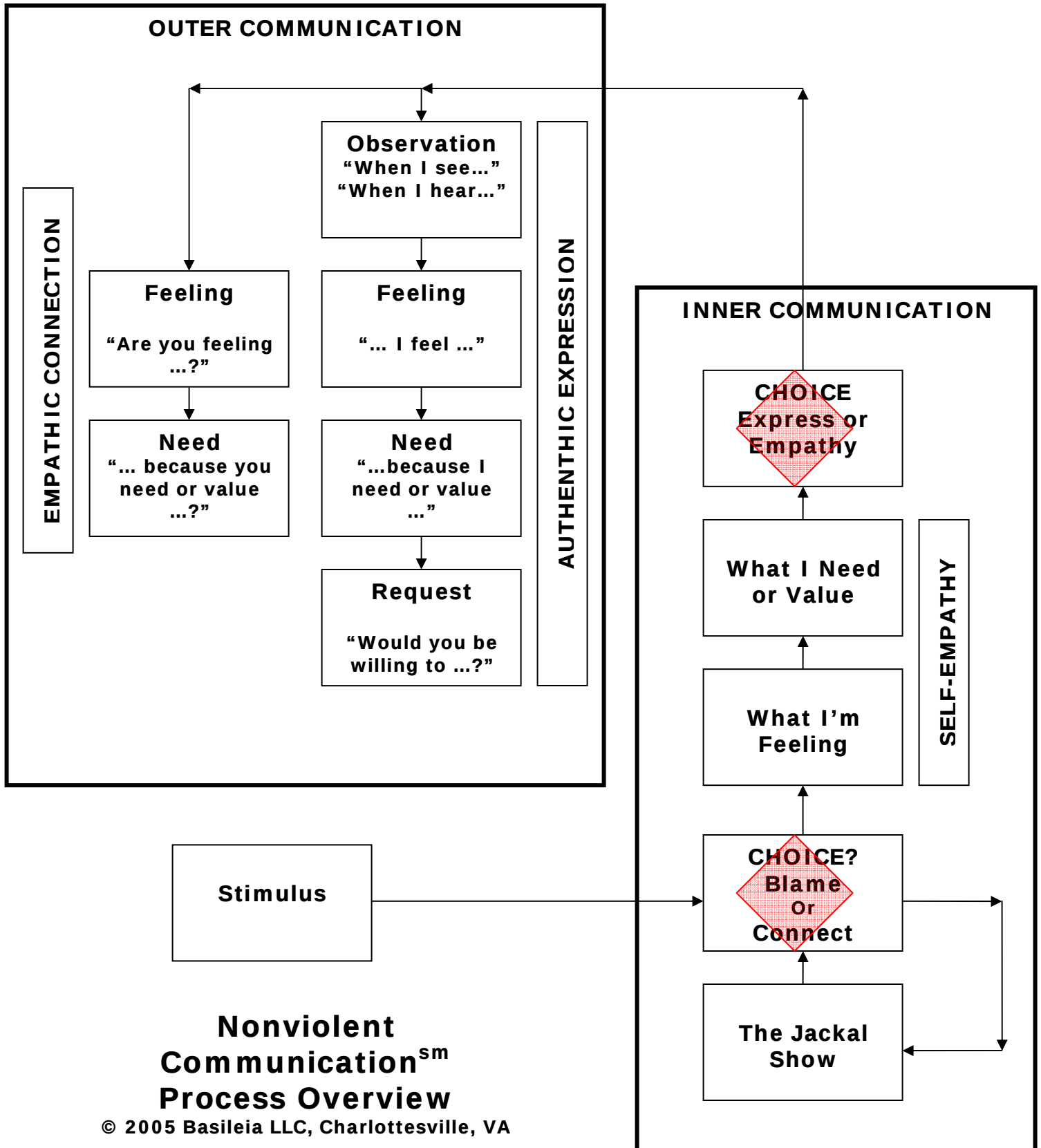
- a space of **remembering our common intention** for coming together ... to connect with one another ... to learn and grow in our understanding of that connection and in the process of NVC that takes us toward it
- a space of **inclusiveness** ... where each person is invited and given the space to be heard ... where your needs matter as much as my own
- a space of **authenticity** ... where I vulnerably express my own feelings & needs as best I can
- a space of **empathy** ... where I strive to hear feelings and needs no matter what is being said ... where I give each person plenty of space until that person has been fully heard
- a space of **conscious choice** ... where I strive to hold our common intention, the needs of each person, and my own needs as I choose how to best meet these needs ... where I honor the choices of those around me
- a space of **compassion** ... where there are no judgments, no right or wrong, no demands, no punishments or rewards ... only people trying to get their needs met in the best way they know how

stirred up in you.

- Remember: we are all doing the best that we can

Some strategies that may enhance your learning after this workshop:

- Get empathy.
Empathy is the fuel we need to connect.
- Find an empathy buddy & meet at least weekly.
- Participate in an NVC practice group.
- Meet with an experienced mentor who can nurture your growth
- Participate in a 7-day or 9-day NVC immersion training
- Strive to live NVC throughout your life: at home, in your workplace, in the organizations in which you participate
- Pause often to notice what is going on within you ... connect to your own feelings & needs
- Meditate on needs
- Love your jackal ... he has many gifts for you





Observations vs. Evaluations

By Gregg Kendrick, Certified Trainer

When we express what has stimulated us, we strive in NVC to express it without blame or criticism—simply by stating the observations of what happened without evaluation.

Observation with Evaluation Mixed In	Observation Separated From Evaluation
You are too generous.	When I see you give your lunch money to others, I think you are too generous.
Doug procrastinates.	Doug studied for the exam the night before.
She won't get her work in.	I don't think she'll get her work in.
If you don't eat balanced meals, your health will be impaired.	If you don't eat balanced meals, I fear that your health will be impaired.
Minorities don't take care of their property.	I have not seen the family living at 1679 Ross shovel the snow on their sidewalk.
Hank Smith is a poor soccer player.	Hank Smith has not scored a goal in 20 games.
Jim is ugly.	Jim's looks don't appeal to me.
You seldom do what I want.	The last three times I initiated an activity, you said you didn't want to do it.
He frequently comes over.	He comes over at least twice a week.

Observation Cues:

- "When I see ..."
- "When I hear ..."
- "When I recall seeing/hearing ..."
- "When I imagine seeing/hearing ..."

Examples:

"When I see you reading the newspaper ..."

"When I hear you say, 'I'll never amount to anything,' ..."

"When I remember seeing you hit the table with your fist, ..."

"To observe without evaluation is the highest form of human intelligence."

—J. Krishnamurti

Observation Check:

- Is my observation free of evaluation?
- Can my observation be recorded by the lens of a movie camera or the mike of a tape recorder?
- Does my observation contain words such as "always," "never," "whenever," "constantly," etc.? ... am I using these words factually or evaluatively?

* parts of this document are adapted from the book "Nonviolent Communication," by Marshall Rosenberg, 2nd Edition, 2005, Puddledancer Press



Awareness of FEELINGS

Distinguishing Feelings from Thoughts

by Gregg Kendrick, Certified Trainer

Feelings are our barometers to tell us whether our needs are being met or not. If we are experiencing pleasurable feelings (e.g. joy, relieved, calm), our present need is being met. If we are experiencing painful feelings (e.g. disappointment, frustration, sadness), our present need is not being met.

As long as we are alive, we are always experiencing feelings, regardless of whether we are aware of them or not. Our feelings are dynamic, often changing every few seconds. By training ourselves to be more mindful of our feelings and more aware of the nuances of feelings, we gain a greater understanding of and connection with ourselves.

Feelings When Needs ARE Met

AFFECTIONATE	EXCITED	HOPEFUL	JOYFUL
Compassionate	Amazed	Expectant	Amused
Friendly	Animated	Encouraged	Delighted
Loving	Ardent	Optimistic	Glad
Open hearted	Aroused	INSPIRED	Happy
Sympathetic	Astonished	Amazed	Jubilant
Tender	Dazzled	Awed	Pleased
Warm	Eager	Wonder	Tickled
	Energetic	REFRESHED	PEACEFUL
ENGAGED	Enthusiastic	Enlivened	Calm
Absorbed	Giddy	Rejuvenated	Clear headed
Alert	Invigorated	Renewed	Comfortable
Curious	Lively	Rested	Centered
Engrossed	Passionate	Restored	Content
Enchanted	Surprised	Revived	Fulfilled
Entranced	Vibrant	GRATEFUL	Mellow
Fascinated	EXHILARATED	Appreciative	Quiet
Gratitude	Blissful	Moved	Relaxed
Interested	Ecstatic	Thankful	Relieved
Intrigued	Elated	Touched	Satisfied
Involved	Enthralled	CONFIDENT	Serene
Spellbound	Exuberant	Empowered	Still
Stimulated	Radiant	Open	Tranquil
	Rapturous	Proud	Trusting
	Thrilled	Safe	

Exercises to Build Awareness of Feelings ...

1. Read over the entire feelings list slowly—out loud if you are comfortable doing so—pausing at least 5 or 10 seconds on each feeling.

2. Pick a feeling from the list and spend at least 1 or 2 minutes to experience each of the following ...

... remember a time when you felt that feeling ...

... notice any body sensations within you ...

... express the feeling through body movement and sound ...

Feelings When Needs are NOT Met

ANNOYED

Aggravated
Dismayed
Disgruntled
Displeased
Exasperated
Frustration
Impatient
Irritation
Irrked

ANGRY

Enraged
Furious
Incensed
Indignant
Irate
Livid
Outraged
Resentful

DISGUSTED

Animosity
Appalled
Contempt
Dislike
Hate
Horried
Hostile
Repulsed

EMBARRASSED

Ashamed
Chagrined
Flustered
Guilty
Mortified
Self-conscious

UNEASY

Agitated
Alarmed
Discombobulated
Disconcerted
Disturbed
Perturbed
Rattled

Restless
Shocked
Startled
Surprised
Troubled
Turbulent
Turmoil
Uncomfortable
Unnerved
Unsettled
Upset

DETACHED

Alienated
Aloof
Apathetic
Bored
Cold
Closed Hearted
Distant
Distracted

Indifferent
Numb

Uninterested
Withdrawn

TENSE

Anxious
Cranky
Distressed
Distracted
Edgy
Fidgety

Frazzled

Irritable
Jittery
Nervous
Overwhelmed
Restless
Stressed out

TIRED

Beat
Burnt out
Depleted
Exhausted

Lethargic
Listless
Sleepy
Weary
Worn out

VULNERABLE

Fragile
Guarded
Helpless
Insecure
Leery
Reserved
Sensitive
Shaky

AFRAID

Apprehensive
Dread
Frightened
Mistrustful
Panicked
Petrified
Scared
Suspicious
Terrified
Wary
Worried

PAIN

Agony
Anguish
Bereaved
Devastated
Grief
Heartbroken
Hurt
Lonely
Miserable
Regretful
Remorseful

SAD

Depressed
Despair
Despondent
Disappointment
Discouraged
Disheartened
Forlorn
Gloomy
Heavy hearted
Hopeless
Melancholy
Unhappy
Wretched

YEARNING

Envious
Jealous
Longing
Nostalgic
Pining
Wistful

Feelings vs. Thoughts

Authentic feelings emanate from the "heart"—they express vulnerability. Our language, however, enables us to use the word "feel" when we are actually expressing thoughts, not feelings. For example: "I feel like you aren't telling the truth." (thought)
Translated: *"I think you aren't telling the truth."*
"I feel inadequate to raise my children." (perception of ourselves)
Translated: *"I think I am inadequate to raise my children."*
"I feel abandoned." (perception of what others are doing to us)
Translated: *"I think that you have abandoned me."*

Other examples of thoughts that sound like feelings:

- Neglected
- Manipulated
- Abused
- Misunderstood
- Mistreated
- Unappreciated
- Betrayed
- Taken for granted
- Disrespected
- Bullied
- Put down
- Violated
- Insulted
- Victimized



Awareness of NEEDS

The “Life Energy” in Each of Us

by Gregg Kendrick, Certified Trainer

At the core of NVC is the awareness of the “life energy” that stirs in each of us in every moment. We see this life energy related to a quality we cherish which sustains life. It may be expressed as a particular dream, need, want, longing or desire whose fulfillment or lack of fulfillment causes our feelings.

In NVC, we try to identify the “universal human needs” that are common to all human beings. We distinguish these fundamental needs from more specific (time-place-person-action) wants and desires which reflect strategies to fulfill these needs. The distinction of “needs” vs. “strategies” is crucial in NVC.

The following list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. While needs are universal, the words to express them are simply words, and different people may use different words to convey a perceived need. As we develop our vocabulary of needs, our objective is not correctness, but awareness ...

SELF-AWARENESS

Autonomy/Choice
Beauty
Body sensations
Feelings
Intentions
Interdependence
Intrinsic value
Needs
Responsibility
Unity
Wholeness

AUTHENTICITY

Honesty
Integrity
Freedom
Growth
Learning
Play / Fun
Self-Reliance
Competence
Resources
Self-Connection
Self-Compassion
Self-Acceptance

TRANSPARENCY

Affection
Communication
Closeness
Companionship
Compassion
Connection
Consideration
Empathy
Feedback
Harmony / Ease
Intimacy
Nurturing

SOLIDARITY

Community
Contribute
Equality
Inclusion
Justice
Mutuality
Participation
Recognition
Simplicity

SIGNIFICANCE

Celebration
Clarity / Insight
Communion
Hope / Trust
Inspiration
Meaning
Mourning
To be valued

Self-Expression
Creativity
Be fully alive
Challenge
Stimulation
Spontaneity
Discovery
Exploration
Personal Space

Respect
Security
Express sexuality
Stability
Support
Touch
Trust
Understanding
Warmth

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Air
Food
Health / Healing
Movement
Rest / Sleep
Safety
Shelter
Water

* adapted from “Nonviolent Communication Workbook” by Lucy Leu, CNVC, 2001

Exercises to Build Awareness of Needs ...

1. Read over the entire needs list slowly—out loud if you are comfortable doing so—pausing at least 5 or 10 seconds on each need.

2. Pick a need from the list and spend at least 1 or 2 minutes to experience each of the following ...

... remember a moment when that need was NOT met for you ...

... as you focus on remembering this past moment, notice any body sensations within you ...

... what feelings arise in you? ...

... simply BE with this feeling & need for a few minutes ...

(continued on back...)

Taking Responsibility for our Feelings

We take responsibility for our own feelings by connecting them to the need within us that is either being met or not met. For example,

"I am disappointed because I would like companionship."

Contrast this expression to the more common way we often blame others for our feelings:

"You never want to spend time with me ... why are you so selfish."

When we blame others for our feelings we tend to stimulate feelings of guilt in the other person. If we express our needs we have a better chance of getting them met.

Need vs. Request

Need: Universal human quality without reference to place, person or time

Request: A specific strategy to meet a need that usually involves a particular person doing something at a particular time

EXAMPLE

I have a need for companionship. I can imagine that need being met by making a particular request of you: "Would you be willing to meet with me at 2pm today at Williams Restaurant for a cup of coffee and conversation?" If you say "No," then I may try other dates or times or places with you that might work. Or I may ask someone else to meet me.

For every need, there are an enormous (i.e. infinite) range of possible strategies that could meet that need.

Self-full vs. Selfish vs. Selfless

Selfish: I only value my own needs

Selfless: I only value others' needs

Self-full: I value my own needs and others' needs equally

The Path to Emotional Liberation

Stage 1, **Emotional slavery:** We believe we are responsible for the feelings of others.

Stage 2, **Obnoxious:** We no longer want to be responsible for the feelings of others ... and often express it with anger

Stage 3, **Emotional liberation:** We accept responsibility for our own intentions & actions, but not the feelings of others. We respond to the needs of others only out of compassion & a desire to contribute, never guilt, fear or shame.

Exercise (cont.)

3. Now imagine this need being *richly & completely fulfilled* for you, and then spend at least 1 or 2 minutes to experience each of the following...

... what are you imagining would be happening? ...

... notice any body sensations within you ...

... what feelings arise in you? ...

... simply BE with this feeling & need for a few minutes ...

... what request might you make of yourself that would contribute toward this need being fulfilled in your life?

15Feb07



Requests vs. Demands

By Gregg Kendrick, Certified Trainer

Only after a connection has happened between people (i.e. a mutual understanding of each person's feelings & needs) do we seek to find solutions. ("Connection FIRST, then solutions")

We are more likely to get our needs met when (1) we are conscious of our needs and (2) we explicitly make a request that may fulfill our needs. ("Ask for what you need.")

REQUESTS vs. DEMANDS

In making a request, we honor a "NO" as much as a "YES." For example, are we willing to try to understand what a person is saying "YES" to while they are saying "NO" to us? Do we value the other's needs in that moment as much as our own?

Example:

You: "I'd really like to understand your needs so we can work this problem out. Would you be willing to talk about it right now for 5 minutes?"

Mary: "I don't want to talk now."

You: "Are you exhausted and want to get some rest?"

Mary: "No, I just want to sit here & be left alone."

You: "So you want to just be with yourself right now?"

Mary: "Yeah, just leave me alone."

You: "I want to trust that we'll work this out soon ... would you be willing to talk this afternoon after lunch?"

Mary: "Maybe so, but not now."

You: "OK ... I'll check with you after lunch."

Request Cues

"Would you be willing to ...?"

Request Check

Requests are *clear*, *positive*, and *immediately "do-able"*. They offer a tangible solution to meeting needs in the moment.

Examples:

Clear: "Would you meet me for coffee at 3:30 tomorrow at the Downtown Coffee Shop?"

Vague: "Would you have a conversation with me sometime?"

Positive: "Would you be willing to explore with me what needs of yours are met by smoking?"

Negative: "Would you stop smoking?"

Do-able: "Would you be willing to tell me what you just heard me say?"

Not do-able: "Would you listen to me?"

Connecting Requests

- *Did the person hear what you wanted to communicate?:*

"Would you be willing to tell me what you just heard me say...?"

- *What's going on in the other person after hearing what you said?:*

"Would you be willing to tell me how you feel after hearing what I said ...?"



Giving & Receiving Gratitude

By Gregg Kendrick, Certified Trainer

Gratitude or appreciation is recognizing when a person has contributed to our life or to the lives of others.

Expressing Gratitude

In NVC, we express gratitude in 3 parts:

1. What specifically did the other person do that enriched your life?
2. How do you feel now as you recall what they did?
3. What need of yours was met by what they did?

Note that these three parts are simply the first three parts of any NVC expression: observation, feeling, need

Example:

"When I remember you asking if I could use some help this morning, I feel grateful because I value mutual support among our team."

Receiving Appreciation

In NVC, I receive appreciation joyfully, even with awe, as I hold in my awareness this power that flows through me to enrich life for others. It is often hard to receive appreciation fully because it is hard to recognize this beauty & power within us.

This is a very different experience than the way we often respond to compliments, through false humility or a feeling of superiority.

False humility: denies the importance of the appreciation; e.g. "It was nothing."

Feeling of superiority: Thinking "I am better than others because I received the appreciation or compliment."

* parts of this document are adapted from the book "Nonviolent Communication," by Marshall Rosenberg, 2nd Edition, 2005, Puddledancer Press

Appreciation vs. Compliments

Appreciation: what's alive in ourselves (feelings & needs met) stimulated by the other person's actions

Compliment: a positive judgment of the other person

e.g. "You're really great!" "Good job!"
"You are a kind person."

Compliments, though positive, are still judgments of other people. They are often used to manipulate the behavior of others.

"...the more you become a connoisseur of gratitude, the less you are a victim of resentment, depression, and despair. Gratitude will act as an elixir that will gradually dissolve the hard shell of your ego—your need to possess and control—and transform you into a generous being. The sense of gratitude produces true spiritual alchemy, makes us magnanimous—large souled."

—Sam Keen

Hunger for Appreciation

We tend to notice & express what's wrong rather than what's right. We are all hungry for our intentions to enrich the lives of others to be recognized.

Exercise: "What appreciation might someone give you that would leave you jumping for joy?"

T.H.A.N.K AND T.H.OR.N.N

Is it True, Helpful, Necessary?

If it passes through all three gates then it is OK = True, Helpful, And, Necessary, OK

And, if it fails to pass through any then it is a NO = True, Helpful, or Necessary, No

Appreciate the roses, and don't pass along thorns.

BIFF - Responding To Hostile Email

By Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.

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Hostile mail – especially email – has become much more common over the past decade. Most of this mail is just “venting,” and has little real significance. However, when people are involved in a formal conflict (a divorce, a workplace grievance, a homeowners’ association complaint, etc.) there may be more frequent and intensely hostile mail. There may be more people involved and it may become legally significant. You would be amazed at the embarrassing hostile emails that show up in court cases these days. Therefore, how you handle hostile mail may impact the future of long-term relationships and the outcome of a case. The following are some suggestions based on my experience with high conflict people:

1. Do you need to respond? Much of the hostile mail today does not need a response. Letters from (ex-) spouses, angry neighbors, irritating co-workers, or attorneys do not usually have legal significance. If someone says nasty things about you or someone else in a letter, the letter has no power, unless you give it power. Often, it is designed to get you engaged in a battle of emotional venting for the sake of relieving the writer’s anxiety.

Generally, responding with similar emotions and hostility will simply escalate things without satisfaction, and you will just get a new piece of hostile mail back in return. In most cases, you are better off not responding. However, some letters and emails develop power when copies are filed in a court or complaint process – or simply get sent to other people. At that time, it may be important to respond to inaccurate statements of fact with accurate statements of fact (leaving out your opinions). Therefore, sometimes you need to respond.

2. Don't Respond Emotionally Brain research shows that our ability to think rationally is impaired when we are very upset—and hostile mail can trigger many emotions. Therefore, you do not want to respond until you have recovered from these emotions. This is a common mistake people make in quickly responding to hostile e-mails. Calm yourself down first, either by taking a break, getting some exercise,

doing another project, talking to a friend or neutral relative, etc.

3. Determine Your Goal Before You Write Is your goal to get the other person to do something? If so, focus on what you want the person to do – not on what he or she did wrong. For example, if a neighbor has been loud, request that the person try to keep it quiet during specific times that are important to you. Avoid focusing on comments about the person's character, such as saying he or she is rude, insensitive, or stupid. These do not motivate high conflict people. Once you have identified your goal, I recommend writing a B.I.F.F. response: Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm.

BRIEF

Keep your response brief. This will reduce the chances of a prolonged and angry back and forth. The more you write, the more the other person will be tempted to criticize in your writing. It also signals that you don't wish to get into a dialogue. Just make your response, then end your letter.

Don't take their statements personally (even if they were intended as personal attacks) and don't respond with an item-by-item personal attack. It just escalates the conflict and keeps it going and going and going.

You don't have to defend yourself to someone you disagree with. If your friends still like you, you don't have to prove anything to those who don't.

INFORMATIVE

The main reason to respond to hostile mail is to correct inaccurate statements, which might be seen by others. "Just the facts" is a good idea. Focus on the accurate statements you want to make, not on the inaccurate statement the other person made. For example: "Just to clear things up, I was out of state on a trip on February 12th, so I would not have been the person who was making loud noises that day."

Avoid negative comments, like little digs. Avoid sarcasm. Avoid threats. Especially avoid personal remarks, like those about someone's intelligence, ethics or moral behavior. If the other person has a "high

conflict personality,” you will have no success in reducing the conflict with personal attacks. While most people can ignore personal attacks or might think harder about what you are saying, high conflict people feel they have no choice but to respond in anger – and keep the conflict going and going. Personal attacks rarely lead to insight or positive change.

FRIENDLY

While you may be tempted to write a response in anger, you are much more likely to reach your goal by writing in a friendly (and brief) manner. Consciously thinking about a friendly response will increase your chances of getting a friendly – or neutral response – in return. If your goal is to end the conflict, then being friendly has the greatest likelihood of success.

This does not mean that you have to be overly friendly. Just make it sound a little relaxed and non-antagonistic. Make it sound like you recognize their concerns. Brief comments that show your Empathy, Attention and Respect (E.A.R.) will generally calm the other person down, even if only for a short time.

FIRM

In a non-threatening way, clearly tell the other person your information or position on an issue. (For example: “That’s all I’m going to say on this issue.”) Be careful not to make comments that leave the door open to more discussion, unless you are negotiating an issue or want to keep a dialogue going back and forth. (Avoid comments that leave an opening, such as: “I hope you will agree with me that this does not need further discussion.” This invites the other person to tell you “I don’t agree.”)

Sound confident and don’t ask for more information, if you want to end the back-and-forth. A confident-sounding person is less likely to be challenged with further emails. If you get further emails anyway, you can ignore them, if you have sufficiently addressed the inaccurate information already. If you need to respond again, keep it even briefer and do not emotionally engage. In fact, it often helps to just repeat the key information using the same words. (“As I said in my email of March 6th, that is all I am going to say on this subject.”)

Example Joe: “Jane, I can’t believe you are so stupid as to think that I’m going to let you take the children to your boss’ birthday party during my parenting time. Have you no memory of the last six conflicts we’ve had about my parenting time? Or are you having an affair with him? I always knew you would do anything to get ahead! In fact, I remember coming to your office party at the last job and witnessing you making a total fool of yourself in front of everyone – including flirting with everyone from the CEO down to the mailroom kid! Are you high on something? I think you have a personality disorder! Haven’t you gotten your finances together enough to support yourself yet, without flinging yourself at every Tom, Dick and Harry? ...” [And the email goes on like this for about 2 pages.]

Jane: “Thank you for responding to my email request to take the children to my office party. Just to clarify, the party will be from 3-5 on Friday at the office and there will be approximately 30 people there – including several other parents bringing school-age children. There will be no alcohol, as it is a family-oriented firm and there will be family-oriented activities. I think it will be a good experience for them to see me at my workplace. Since you do not agree, then of course I will respect that and withdraw my request, as I recognize it is your parenting time.” [And that’s the end of her email.]

Comment: Jane simply provided factual information, kept it brief, and did not engage in defending herself in response to Joe’s many accusations. Since this was just between them, she didn’t need to respond. If he sent this email to friends, co-workers or family members (which high conflict people often do), then she would need to respond to the larger group with more information, such as the following:

Jane: “Dear friends and family: As you know, Joe and I had a difficult divorce. He has sent you a private email showing correspondence between us about a parenting schedule matter. I hope you will see this as a private matter and understand that you do not need to respond or get involved in any way. Almost everything he has said is in anger and not at all accurate. If you have any questions for me personally, please feel free to contact me and I will clarify anything I can. I appreciate your friendship and support.”

Comment: Again, Jane has kept it brief, informative, friendly and firm. With other people involved, it is important to keep a door open for communication and show a willingness to correct any misconceptions,

if necessary. There is no need to address all of Joe's allegations in this group email, as it will just escalate the dispute and other people will feel they have to get involved.

The above example has the man sending the hostile email. My experience in many court battles is that hostile mail is fairly equally sent by men and women – and both men and women have a hard time not getting engaged in these battles.

This example also includes a reference by Joe that he thinks that Jane has a personality disorder. While I write books and give seminars on the topic of personality disorders in legal, workplace and neighbor disputes, I strongly advise against telling someone that you think they have a personality disorder. The goal is to understand the patterns of behavior and use this information to handle the person and solve the problem – not publicly label people. Those who are eager to say, “you have a personality disorder” are more likely to be those with personality problems themselves.

Conclusion

Whether you are at work, at home or elsewhere, a B.I.F.F. response can save you time and emotional anguish. The more that people handle hostile mail in a manner such as this, the less hostile mail there will be.

High Conflict Institute provides training and consultations regarding High Conflict People (HCPs) to individuals and professionals dealing with legal, workplace, educational, and healthcare disputes. Bill Eddy is the President of the High Conflict Institute and the author of “It’s All Your Fault!” He is an attorney, mediator, and therapist. Bill has presented seminars to attorneys, judges, mediators, ombudspersons, human resource professionals, employee assistance professionals, managers, and administrators in 25 states, several provinces in Canada, France, and Australia. For more information about High Conflict Institute, our seminars and consultations, or Bill Eddy and his books go to: www.HighConflictInstitute.com or call 619-221-9108.

I'm Done! The 4D's of High Conflict Divorce

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I'm done. I quit. I can't do this anymore. I give up.

It's exhausting trying to raise children with someone who hates you.

And you're done. Done fighting. Done placating. Done brainstorming ways to make it better. Done taking the high road.

Divorce is hard at the best of times. But when you divorce someone who may have a high conflict personality? It's a whole new ball game of hell.

Daily emails that read like novels about how you are the world's worst parent; how you are destroying your children with your horrific controlling behaviors; sentence after sentence about how your children would be better off without you.

You try to be amicable. You create a shared calendar to keep everyone in the loop about kid's activities. You try to have conversations around what activities your kids should partake in. You try to engage in joint parent teacher conferences, get extra tickets for Christmas concerts and avoid saying anything negative about your Ex in front of your kids.

You've read every book you can get your hands on to try and learn about how to divorce the right way. Surely someone out there knows something you don't know about how to make your situation better.

'Cause this can't be IT – what your life is going to look like for the next 18 years; Living in constant fear of the next verbal attack, never knowing when you might get served with the next court application, being bad mouthed to family, friends, colleagues and your children. ON REPEAT.

And no one understands the private hell you are going through.

Everyone has an opinion. It's easy to have an opinion when you're not emotionally attached or when it's not your own kids who have to suffer the possible consequences.



“Take him to court.” – But real court isn’t what it looks like on TV. You want to believe that a Judge will hear your story because you’re being honest. But a Judge doesn’t know that. You both have convincing stories. Besides, the Judge doesn’t understand your children, their temperaments, their needs. A Judge would just Order a cookie cutter parenting plan and wish you good luck.

Managing a life filled with drama, inconsistencies, lies and manipulations will take its toll on you – and your children – but the 4 D’s of High Conflict Divorce can help.

Disengage. Decide. Deliver. Document.

Your divorce isn’t like your friends’ divorce, yours is different. Your friends Ex understands how to put the kids needs before his/her own and they are working cooperatively together. Your Ex is trying to destroy you.

What worked for your friend will not work for you. So stop trying. Stop idealizing the possibility that one day you and your Ex will have family dinners or amicable Christmas mornings together.

Your divorce is high conflict. You need strong and secure boundaries, clear and concise communication and you need to document your Ex’s manipulative behaviors.

I’m Done! The 4D’s of High Conflict Divorce

Disengage: You are in conflict with your child’s other parent because their words and actions negatively trigger and affect you and your children. And, like most parents, you will do anything to protect your children from harm – physical, verbal and emotional. If you take the time to sort through your triggers and plan a strategy for how to cope when triggered, you will be putting yourself (and your children) on a path for healthier conflict resolution.

Decide: You’ve likely never had to make so many decisions in your whole life. What will the parenting schedule be? Why does all the research contradict itself? Do I have to ask to get the kids haircuts? Parents in low levels of conflict have the luxury of being able to figure out a lot of their answers through regular communication. But you’re not experiencing low levels of conflict, you are stuck in the murky and smelly destructive home of high conflict decision making. How do you make decisions when the person you have to make them with says No to everything you put forward just because they hate you? How do you ensure you are triggered when you are communicating with your high conflict ex?



- o Have an agenda – if you have an agenda, you'll be more apt to refocus on what needs to be decided rather than steering off course indefinitely.
- o When communicating, communicate with proposals. Offer your proposal for what you would like the outcome to be – the other parent will say NO, because that's what they do – but rather than let it stop at the NO and stall the process, ask them to make an alternative proposal and don't take no for an answer. They will struggle – they don't really know what they want, so they'll try and create some drama (stay disengaged!). Refocus and keep pushing for an alternate proposal.

Deliver: When you are communicating with your High Conflict Ex, keep all emotional words OUT of your email. If you use an emotional word, your Ex will attach themselves to the emotional word and ignore everything else you've written. Keep your emails to 4 sentences. If you are writing more than 4 sentences, you are either sneaking in an opinion (and you will be attacked) or an emotion (you will also be attacked). Keep in mind "BIFF Responses" to hostile emails: **B**rief, **I**nformative, **F**riendly and **F**irm. (See the book [BIFF: Quick Responses to High Conflict People](#) and its [website](#)).

All communication should be child focused, emotion and opinion free and 4 sentences.

Document: In jot note form document the facts surrounding each manipulation/lie your Ex attempts to control you with. Do not add in any emotions to your notes – just the facts. Include dates, times and outcomes. High Conflict People are crafty and charismatic – often manipulating those in perceived positions of power – in order to ensure your voice is heard, you need to provide a detailed document outlining the PATTERN of behavior that is causing you (and your children) harm. Emotional words give way to the 'he said she said' argument, so you want to ensure you keep all emotions out of your documentation. Include facts only – and ideally facts with corroboration (emails/texts/Our Family Wizard®, etc.).

The 4D's of High Conflict Divorce won't change your Ex's behaviors, *nothing* will change their behaviors, ever. There will be days you still want to quit, to walk away, to escape the insanity permanently. But, if you put the 4 D's of High Conflict Divorce into practice, the high road won't be as lonely and you might just preserve a little bit of your sanity during this insane time.

RULES FOR CO-PARENTING

1. **Do not** talk negatively, or allow others to talk negatively, about the other parent, their family and friends, or their home in hearing range of the child. This would include belittling remarks, ridicules, or bringing up allegations that are valid or invalid about adult issues.
2. **Do not** question the children about the other parent or the activities of the other parent regarding their personal lives. In specific terms, do not use the child to spy on the other parent.
3. **Do not** argue or have heated conversations when the children are present or during exchanges.
4. **Do not** make promises to the children to try and win them over at the expense of the other parent.
5. **Do** communicate with the other parent and make similar rules in reference to discipline, routines, sleeping arrangements, and schedules. Appropriate discipline should be exercised by mutually agreed upon adults.
6. **At all times**, the decisions made by the parents will be for the child's psychological, spiritual, and physical well being and safety.
7. Parenting time arrangements **will** be made and confirmed beforehand between the parents without involving the child.
8. **Do** notify each other in a timely manner of need to deviate from the order including canceling time with the child, rescheduling, and promptness.
9. **Do not** schedule activities for the child during the other parent's time with the child without the other parent's consent. However, both parents **will** work together to allow the child to be involved in extracurricular activities.
10. **Do** keep the other parent informed of any scholastic, medical, psychiatric, or extracurricular activities or appointments of the child.
11. **Do** keep the other parent informed at all times of your address and telephone number. If you are out of town with the child, **do** provide the other parent the address and phone where the children may be reached in case of an emergency.
12. **Do** refer to the other parent as the child's "mother" or "father" in conversation, rather than using the parent's first name, last name, or "my ex".
13. **Do not** bring the child into adult issues and conversations about custody, the court, or about the other party.
14. **Do not** ask the child where he or she wants to live.
15. **Do not** attempt to alienate the other parent from the child's life.
16. **Do not** allow stepparents or others to negatively alter or modify your relationship with the other parent.
17. **Do not** use phrases that draw the children into your issues or make the children feel guilty about the time spent with the other parent. **Do not** say "I miss you!" **do** say, "I love you!"



Characteristics Associated With Successful Litigants and Successful Parent Clients

Successful Litigants	Successful Parent Clients
Use relationship rules that are adversarial.	Use relationship rules that are cooperative.
Use legal representation for advocacy purposes.	Work directly and collaboratively with the other parent.
Frame self-interest as the child's interest.	Let the child's interest take precedence over self-interest.
Use strategies that undermine and sabotage the other parent's functioning.	Use strategies that support and enhance the other parent's functioning.
Demonstrate distrust that leads to minimal and selective sharing with the other parent.	Demonstrate trust that leads to open and honest sharing with the other parent.
Let chaos and obfuscation drive the litigation process.	Let structure and clear communication drive the coparenting process.
Use information to obtain an advantage with contested issues.	Use information to constructively solve coparenting problems.
Develop continued dependence on litigation as the process to address problems.	Develop collaborative strategies (negotiation, give-and-take) to address problems.
Blame the other, don't take responsibility for problems.	Admit one's contribution to problems, take responsibility.
Deplete financial and emotional resources on litigation.	Preserve financial and emotional resources for family needs.

COOPERATIVE CO-PARENTING

PARALLEL PARENTING

Child focused	Adult focused
Parents actively engage one another as co-parents.	Parents are disengaged from one another; they parent independently rather than collaboratively.
Parents communicate regularly.	Parents communicate infrequently; sometimes only in event of an emergency.
Parents may, at times, communicate personal information about one another.	Communications are businesslike – not personal. Personal information is not shared.
Meetings are informal and held when wanted or necessary.	Meetings are formal, preplanned, and often conducted in public places or with a 3rd party.
Meetings or calls occur spontaneously.	Meetings or calls occur during business hours at a specified time for a specified period of time.
Major decisions are discussed and made jointly.	Major decisions are communicated rather than discussed.
Parents collaborate regarding child-related issues.	Parents function independently regarding child related issues.
Schedules are treated as flexible and negotiable.	Schedules are followed exactly. The schedule is written down in detail for both parents.
Parents discuss issues regarding the child and the other parent.	Parents refrain from discussing the child's relationship with the other parent. Parents do not advise the other parent how to parent.
Communications are open, wide ranging, regular and discussion oriented.	Parent communications are infrequent and in writing or email rather than directly unless emergency.
Child-related information is conveyed and discussed.	Child-related information is conveyed but not discussed.
Boundaries between the homes are flexible.	Boundaries between homes are fixed and relatively impermeable.
Agreements may be informal, hand-shake arrangements.	Agreements are documented in writing to avoid misunderstandings.
The divorce decree is viewed as a loose structure around which the parents make flexible arrangements.	The divorce decree is viewed as a tight document to be followed carefully.
Exchanges occur at times and places that are most convenient for everyone, but mostly for the child.	Exchanges occur at school, day care, or extracurricular activities to minimize contact between the parents.
Parents share school information.	Parents are responsible for getting own school information.
Parents negotiate changes direct with one another.	Parents negotiate changes with a 3rd party's help.

Guidelines for disengaged parallel coparenting (Moran 2017)

- Parents disengage and have little or no interactions with each other. Parents avoid face-to-face communication wherever possible.
- Communication between the parents is polite, businesslike, but not personal; there is a wall between the coparenting relationship and personal life of the parents; nothing personal is shared with the other parent.
- Nothing is assumed; everything is spelled out in the parenting plan.
- The schedule is written down in detail and placed on a calendar. Nothing is left open to interpretation, because loopholes breed conflict.
- In order to minimize conflict, there is no assumption of flexibility in scheduling.
- Mother and Father utilize Our Family Wizard to exchange emails and other information about the children. Telephone and text communication is reserved for time-sensitive matters such as emergencies.
- The following email guidelines are suggested:
 - o One (1) topic per email.
 - o The email should be one short paragraph, no more than five (5) sentences.
 - o The communication should be either 1) future-focused regarding an emerging problem, or 2) informative, such as providing information from a medical appointment.
 - o The content of the email must pertain to the children.
 - o Each item should be said only once (no reiteration of what was already said).
 - o No abusive, insulting, sarcastic or profane language.
 - o Parents should respond in a timely fashion, within 24 hours of when the email was sent.
 - o Each parent should initiate no more than two (2) emails per day, unless an emergency exists.

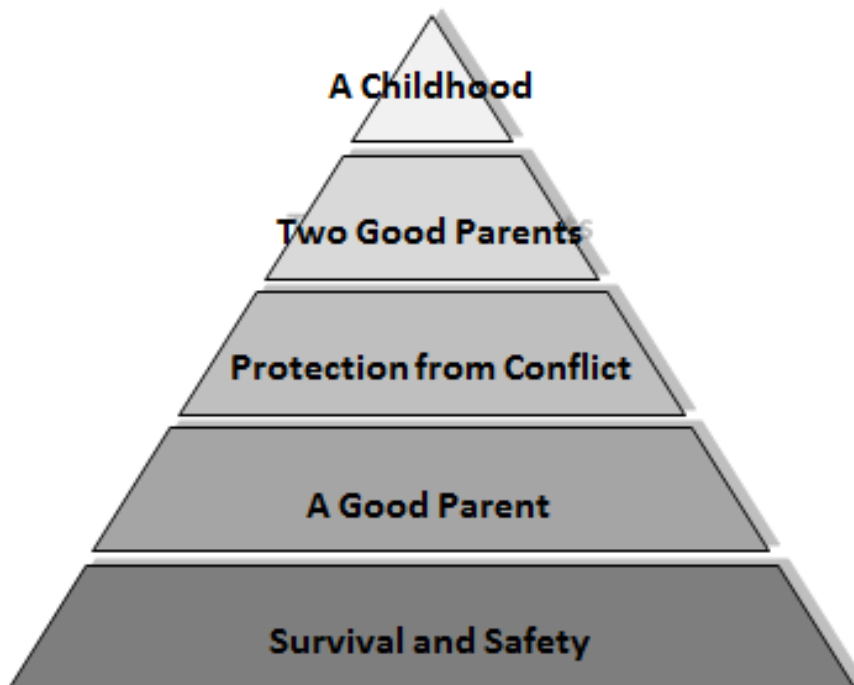
- o Emails should be between parents rather than a stepparent or other parenting figure for the children.
- Parenting time exchanges occur at school, daycare or activities to minimize parental and parental face-to-face contact with each other.
- Parents work independently for the best interests of their children.
- Each parent's household functions independently; each parent is responsible for making decisions about the children during the time that the children are in that parent's household. *Don't tell the other parent how to parent!*
- When coparents need to meet to discuss a coparenting matter, meetings are public and formal, not private, and scheduled by appointment at a mutually convenient time.
- Meetings and calls should take place during regular working hours and last no more than 30 minutes.
- Following meetings or communications, the parent initiating should send the other parent a written summary of understanding reached, and the other parent should send back a confirming understanding that includes any different understandings, if any.
- Meetings may require the presence of a third party.
- As much as possible, each parent bears the responsibility for getting information about the children; i.e., each parent is responsible for contacting the school for notice of meetings, report cards, etc.
- If any substantial deviation or change from the agreed-upon plan or order is requested, negotiations will take place with the assistance of a pre-determined neutral.

Ten Tips for Successful Parallel Parenting

1. Maintain an attitude for non-interference with your child's other parent. Neither parent has influence or say over the actions of the other parent.
2. Carry on a business-like attitude; use common courtesy and appropriate verbal and written communications.
3. Do not plan activities for the children during the other parent's time. It may be better for child to miss an event than to witness conflict.
4. Stay focused on the present.
5. Stay oriented to the task at hand.
6. Keep your children's best interests in mind.
7. Remember the goal is to keep conflict to a minimum.
8. Follow up in writing all agreements and discussions regarding the children.
9. When communication and/or negotiation is necessary, use a neutral third party to assist you.
10. Keep an open mind.

Hierarchy of Children's Needs in Two Homes

By Robert E. Emery



The base is survival and safety. Sadly, some children are unsafe in the care of one of their parents. Until that parent can protect them from danger, contact with the children needs to be carefully supervised.

The middle section includes three psychological needs: The most basic emotional need is to have one parent who loves

them and is firm but fair. Next is freedom from exposure to or entrapment in parental conflict, which can be toxic for kids. Children hate being in the middle of parental disputes, and they will play their parents against one another if given the opportunity. The third is having a relationship with both parents. Children want this, and they benefit from love and guidance from two parents who are on the same side: their child's.

But just because a parent is available doesn't mean a child's emotional well-being is set. A study by psychologists at Arizona State University identified three types of divorced fathers' involvement: very involved dads with lots of conflict with their exes; moderately involved dads with few disputes; and pretty uninvolved dads with moderate conflict.

The profile that predicted better adjustment nine years in the future? Low conflict and moderate involvement. Young people whose fathers were very involved but fought frequently were no better off than those whose dads were uninvolved.

This is why it's important that divorced parents act like parents, not like litigants or spurned lovers. They can find a way to love their kids more than they may hate their exes.

**On Parenting**

A divorce mediator answers: Can divorced parents just act like parents?

By Robert E. Emery September 8

As summer rolls to an end and back-to-school comes into focus, my divorce mediation practice grows busy.

One set of parents experimented with a trial separation over the summer, when the kids were less likely to be disrupted. Now that school is back in session, they need a real plan. Their negotiation is complicated in that the father isn't willing to truly call the marriage over. Openly, he is negotiating about time with his three kids. Beneath the surface, he doesn't really want to work out a parenting plan because that would only facilitate divorce, something he doesn't want.

Another set of parents is debating about what school is best for their rising middle-schooler. Should she continue in her current district, where Dad resides? Or shift to the marginally better school in Mom's district next door? The parents had been throwing threats back and forth all summer. Now they are looking for their 11-year-old to break the tie. But there is a problem: They each think she wants what they want.

In a third family, a 16-year-old boy says he's tired of his week-on, week-off schedule under the joint custody arrangement. Mom claims that her son has been complaining for years and that he wants to live mostly with her. But Dad doubts his son's motivations. He thinks his son wants to live with his mother because she coddles him.

Like millions of parents who raise children in two homes, these families face tricky problems. And emotional volatility greatly complicates their negotiations. The pain of lost love can propel former partners to act impulsively out of hurt, anger or spite. The fear of being manipulated can cause them to dig in their heels. And while teenagers should have a voice, adolescents don't always make the best choices for the best reasons.

When I mediate with parents who live apart, I ask them to do what I want all parents to do, married or divorced: Talk. Listen. Don't act rashly. Mull over problems and alternative solutions. Look at the issue from all sides, especially from your child's point of view. Keep an open mind. With a little time and perspective, maybe the problem won't seem so impossible to resolve. Put your children's needs (mostly) above your own feelings. Maintain a united front, even when you disagree. Be a team with discipline. Encourage your children's relationship with their other parent, even if you do not like everything that parent does. Bask in the warm glow of a child who is well loved by you both.

I want divorced parents to just act like parents, so their kids can be just kids, not "children of divorce" or "children from broken homes." I hate labels that define children by something that happened to their parents' romantic relationship.

To help explain this, I created a "Hierarchy of Children's Needs in Two Homes." It's modeled after Abraham Maslow's famous "Hierarchy of Human Needs," in which biological needs form Maslow's base, essential emotional needs fit in the middle, and at the top, Maslow placed "self-actualization."

Even after three decades working as a psychologist and an academic, I don't know what self-actualization is. But for children living in two homes, I have a goal that is close enough: getting to be a kid. If divorced parents act like parents, their kids can be kids. That is the pinnacle of my Hierarchy of Children's Needs in Two Homes.

The base is survival and safety. Sadly, some children are unsafe in the care of one of their parents. Until that parent can protect them from danger, contact with the children needs to be carefully supervised.

The middle section includes three psychological needs: The most basic emotional need is to have one parent who loves them and is firm but fair. Next is freedom from exposure to or entrapment in parental conflict, which can be toxic for kids. Children hate being in the middle of parental disputes, and they will play their parents against one another if given the opportunity. The third is having a relationship with both parents. Children want this, and they benefit from love and guidance from two parents who are on the same side: their child's.

But just because a parent is available doesn't mean a child's emotional well-being is set. A study by psychologists at Arizona State University identified three types of divorced fathers' involvement: very involved dads with lots of conflict with their exes; moderately involved dads with few disputes; and pretty uninvolved dads with moderate conflict.

The profile that predicted better adjustment nine years in the future? Low conflict and moderate involvement. Young people whose fathers were very involved but fought frequently were no better off than those whose dads were uninvolved.

This is why it's important that divorced parents act like parents, not like litigants or spurned lovers. They can find a way to love their kids more than they may hate their exes.

There are new ways to help parents living apart to work through their disputes, including mediation and collaborative law, where lawyers push settlement by refusing to represent their clients if they go to trial. Mediation helps separated parents act like parents. In the long run, this is what their children desperately want, even though mediation may seem completely wrong, emotionally, to their parents.

I know the dad I mentioned earlier doesn't want a divorce. But he does want his children to have a childhood. I have encouraged him to express his longing to his wife or to deal with his grief directly, instead of resisting divorce indirectly by obstructing negotiations over a parenting plan.

I have urged the parents disputing middle schools to listen to their daughter, like

parents do. I've asked them to really try to hear her wishes and concerns, and not just project their own desires onto her. She may desperately want to stay with her friends, or maybe she's ready for a change. Or perhaps her most fervent desire is for her parents to stop putting her in the middle.

I told the parents of the teenage boy to call a family meeting, where their son is free to express his wishes without consequences. After listening to him, together, maybe they will decide that their son's reasoning is sound. Or maybe they will discover that changing the schedule isn't the real solution. Maybe the schedule should stay the same, but Mom needs to coddle her son a little less – and Dad needs to coddle him a little more.

These parents, like all parents, will make mistakes. But if parents living in two homes focus on being parents, their kids can be just kids. And they will experience the form of self-actualization called childhood.

Robert Emery is a psychology professor and director of the Center for Children, Families, and the Law at the University of Virginia. He is the author of the new book "Two Homes, One Childhood: A Parenting Plan to Last a Lifetime."

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[How to talk about your co-parent during and after divorce](#)

[5 things to make you a better parent right now](#)

PARENTING PLAN DISCUSSION/CLARIFICATION ITEMS:

Parent Communication:

- § How: email, telephone, meeting
- § Frequency, limitations
- § Response time (e.g., respond to emails within 24 hours)
- § Transition emails (frequency, content)
- § Emergencies

Child Communication:

- § Telephone, FaceTime/Skype®, OFW
- § Timing, limitations
- § Who initiates
- § Call-back agreements, change in circumstances

Transitions:

- § Pick up and drop off days and times
- § Location
- § Rules for parental behavior at transitions, i.e., cordial, no exchange of child support, no discussion of conflicted subject matter
- § Who does the transportation, e.g., for infants and toddlers always drop off, don't pick up

Parenting Time and Changes:

- § Days and hours
- § Illness
- § Cancellation policies
- § Rescheduling/swap rules
- § Right of First Refusal (overnights only?) Holidays, Special Days, and Vacations:
 - § Monday holidays: attached to weekend or alternate even and odd years
 - § Religious holidays: alternate years? Time of transition, place of transition
 - § School vacations: how assigned, when do they begin and end (day and time)
 - § Summer vacations: number of weeks—consecutive or not, first and second choice assignments, dates of notice
 - § What happens to the usual schedule when holiday schedule ends?
- § Agreements for continuation or change in usual rotation: no parent has children three consecutive weekends
- § Child birthdays: alternate, each has a block of time, who schedules birthday party, who attends
- § Parent birthdays, extended family gatherings or celebrations
- § Mother's Day and Father's Day

Extracurricular Activities:

- § Do both parents agree? Can parent schedule if only during their “on duty” time?
- § Agreements for sports games, recitals, and special occasions related to activities especially if both parents and/or significant other are in attendance

Clothing and equipment:

- § Agreements around clothing, washing, returning
- § Agreements for exchange of sports equipment, musical instrument, bicycles, etc.
- § Agreements for lost and missing items

Day-to-Day Decisions:

- § Scheduling of routine medical and dental: who does it and is other parent notified and when?
- § Who attends?
- § How is information shared? Response time
- § Scheduling and attendance at parent-teacher meetings
- § Sharing of school information
- § Emergency contacts

Major Decisions (Health, Education, Religion):

- § How are these decided?
- § Exchange of Information, timeliness

Travel:

- § Communication agreements for taking child out of town: itinerary details, notice period
- § Notarized travel letter: when is it provided?
- § Phone access
- § Sleeping rules
- § Supervision rules
- § Who holds the passports?

General Parenting:

- § Shared routines regarding homework; communication regarding homework and school projects
- § Agreements about discipline and supervision between homes
- § Keeping children out of the middle
- § No negative comments about the other parent
- § Cordial parent behavior in front of the children
- § Making positive statements about coparent to children
- § Significant others and dating

Review and adjustment of parenting plan:

- § How initiated and when?
- § Future dispute resolution, involving PC? Without PC?

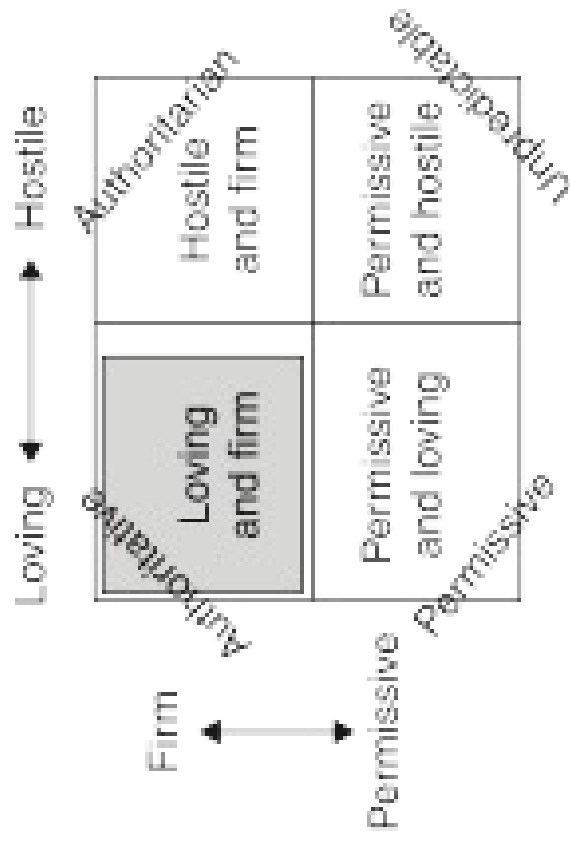


Figure 5.1 Parenting Styles.

Adapted from Daniel G. Amen, M.D. (2000), *New Skills for Frazzled Parents*, p. 19.
Used with permission.

APPENDIX

Foundational and Functional Parenting Competencies and Subcompetencies with Behavioral Anchors by Proficiency Level

FOUNDATIONAL PARENTING COMPETENCIES		
Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Cognitive Ability		
Basic knowledge of child development	Understands levels of physical care and affection needed by children according to their developmental levels; knows when to expect major developmental milestones.	Understands how to provide developmentally appropriate levels of physical care and affection, ways to promote healthy development, how intrusive actions hinder development, and how to support gradual autonomy and responsibility attainment.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Does not expect a 1-year-old to be able to potty train. • Realizes it is normal for toddlers to say no to requests and assert independence. • Understands it is normal for adolescents to separate and individuate from parents.	• Able to understand, anticipate, and facilitate attainment of normal developmental milestones. • Understands basics of adolescent brain development and how it affects behavior and decision making. • Able to act when abnormal development is noted.
Basic knowledge of healthcare	Has basic health knowledge that permits recognition of need for emergent medical help; knows how to provide basic medical care and tries to prevent injury.	Able and willing to learn about children's medical conditions; knows how to prevent injury, treat common emergencies, and when to get help.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Can care for minor injuries and illnesses. • Knows when to get care for more severe conditions. • Knows why it is unhealthy for children to smoke, drink alcohol, and use substances.	• Knows Heimlich maneuver. • Understands need to encourage healthy diet and address obesity through healthcare provider.
Basic knowledge of parenting	Knows basics of how to nurture, supervise, protect, and manage behavior in children; understands need for routines, structure, discipline, and consistency with discipline both over time and with all children.	Prepares by learning good ways to nurture, supervise, protect, and manage behavior while maintaining a strong parent-child relationship; understands need to balance structure and flexibility and discipline only when necessary.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Understands children need much affection and pleasant time with parents. • Knows basics of setting limits and consequences.	• Committed to seeking self-help or other parenting resources when unsure of what to do. • Understands parenting is difficult and is open to advice.
Basic math and reading	Demonstrates academic achievement required to function independently (or has sufficient assistance for associated tasks).	Demonstrates mathematical and reading knowledge necessary for independent living and to assist children in learning academic material.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Able to manage bank accounts. • Able to pay bills.	• Is proficient at elementary and middle school level basic material.

(Continued)

APPENDIX
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Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Problem solving	• Able to read books to young children. • Able to complete forms, and read medication instructions. Anticipates and identifies problems, gathers information, generates and evaluates alternative solutions, and then takes action; has some insight into own role in problems or when help is needed.	• Able to seek information needed to help children understand higher-level work or arrange for outside help. Uses deductive and inductive reasoning, and considers possible solutions and consequences before acting; has good insight into own role played in problems and strives for self-improvement; adaptable when implementing plans of action.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Is willing to use counseling or social services to help solve family problems. • Resolves conflicts without using aggression.	• Able to explain why an action was chosen to solve a problem. • Makes and executes decisions logically, calmly, and with consideration of children's welfare. • Is willing to consider modifying original decision if new information appears. • Recognizes when children are too young or inexperienced to solve problems independently.
Psychological Health		
Parenting beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions	Believes that parents should be committed to their child's welfare in a responsible and predictable manner; perceives reasonable attributions of child's behavior and parent/child roles; usually able to perceive children's needs.	Committed to taking responsibility for children's well-being; accurately perceives meanings of children's behavior and parent/child roles; consistently perceives and anticipates children's needs and desires; exhibits child-centered concerns and behaviors.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Perceives child's fussiness as normal and not a personal action against the parent. • Believes that children should not be parentified. • Is able to value children despite bad behavior or different temperament.	• Is committed to achieving best possible parenting performance. • Believes that child's well-being is most important while still providing sufficient parental self-care. • Able to consider temperament in child-care decisions.
Perspective taking	Able to consider perspectives of others without defensiveness; recognizes that children's perspectives will be different than that of adults.	Able to understand and use perspectives of others when solving problems and making decisions; able to understand and accept children's perspectives and consider them within context of child development.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Willing to consider perspectives of others (including children) when making decisions. • Does not belittle children's opinions. • Does not expect a child or teenager to think or behave like an adult.	• Actively listens to and engages children in discussions. • Considers children's perspectives when making decisions needed to support their well-being. • Able to communicate perspective to children in a nondefensive and affect-neutral manner.

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APPENDIX
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Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Psychological function and emotional regulation	Acknowledges value of psychological health and open to treatment when others express concern; uses adequate impulse and anger control; usually appropriately expresses thoughts and feelings.	Takes necessary actions to maintain psychological health; maintains impulse and anger control; consistently expresses thoughts and feelings in a healthy manner.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Seeks and complies with treatment for emotional/mental illness and substance use. • Demonstrates concern for the feelings/experiences of others. • Does not lash out in anger at children. • Manages conflict in nonhostile manner.	• Has mostly predictable moods and reactions. • Models appropriate prosocial behaviors. • Consistently monitors thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to express them in ways that do not negatively impact others.
Self-concept	Open to personal and parenting feedback and advice necessary to achieve adequate parental functioning.	Recognizes own personal and parenting strengths and weaknesses, and able to learn from mistakes.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Neither defensiveness nor low self-esteem would inhibit adequate parental functioning.	• Able to separate children's behaviors from self-worth and self-efficacy. • Able to advocate for self and children.
Self-Care		
Self-help	Recognizes need for assistance and is able to ask for it; copes with stress in ways that do not interfere with caregiving role; displays adequate hygiene for health and social interactions; seeks care for physical conditions that hinder ability to care for self and children.	Recognizes need for assistance and actively seeks it; copes with stress adaptively and pursues prevention of stressors; has healthy hygiene habits; actively seeks and complies with treatment for own conditions that interfere with ability to care for self and children.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Able to use coping strategies for stress (talking to others, relaxation, time away). • Is aware of and open to using community resources. • Actively seeks resolution of abuse/violence in the home. • Seeks and complies with treatment for substance abuse.	• Ensures that own basic needs are met in a manner that would not interfere with a parenting role. • Does not expect that children can or should assume caretaker role for parent or siblings. • Does not use drugs or drink excessive alcohol.
Social network	Forms social network of friends and/or family members who would support parental tasks and emotional needs.	Actively involved with friendships and family relationships in a mutually supportive manner.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Uses social skills that enable healthy interpersonal interactions. • Can readily identify a social support network and access it.	• Actively seeks mutual friendships with other families and uses social skills in interpersonal interactions. • Participates in school, community, hobby/interest, work-related, or religious groups allowing social interactions for the family.

(Continued)

APPENDIX
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FUNCTIONAL PARENTING COMPETENCIES		
Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Behavioral Guidance		
Appropriate discipline	Sets reasonable expectations for behavior and achievement based on child age and development; manages behavior through nonabusive practices (limit setting, consequences); does not punish with guilt induction, love withdrawal, or shame; sets limits on aggression, illegal acts, substance use, sexual activity, and media use.	Sets direct, predictable, and reasonable expectations for behavior and achievement based on child's age and development; models appropriate behaviors; uses consistent discipline (limits, consequences) to encourage and reward good behaviors more often than punishing bad behaviors; does not use abusive, coercive, or physical punishment, or psychological control; sets firm limits on aggression, illegal acts, substance use, sexual activity, and media use.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Does not use harsh (verbal lashing) or coercive (psychologically or emotionally intimidating) discipline. • Tries to be consistent in discipline with multiple caregivers. • Avoids disciplining as an impulsive, angry reaction. • Is flexible with limits due to child input and situation. • Is willing to meet with others to discuss concerns about child. • Guards against alcohol and substance use in children, and attempts to take action to stop it as needed.	• Focuses on reinforcement of appropriate behavior. • Uses mild punishment for misbehavior (e.g., time-out, loss of privileges). • Consistently disciplines in a calm, controlled manner. • Cooperates with others involved in child's care. • Able to evaluate reasons behind child behaviors. • Links limits to safety, well-being, development, and moral values. • Child knows that parent will follow through on consequences and usually sees parent's discipline as predictable and fair.
Communication and autonomy support	Able to explain expectations and describe misdeeds to child using age appropriate language; listens to child's opinions; allows child to make decisions when not negatively affecting anyone's well-being; able to explain reasons behind rules and discipline; helps child identify and obtain appropriate social supports.	Routinely explains expectations using age-appropriate language; considers child's opinions; encourages child to make decisions while considering others' well-being; routinely, clearly, and calmly explains reasons behind rules and discipline so child can understand rationale; uses open communication to resolve disputes and is open to child's perspective.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Discusses which limits and consequences will be used, allowing child input and flexibility when appropriate. • Engages in joint decision-making with child. • Assists children to solve their problems when asked.	• Does not allow child's arguments or fear of child's reaction to prevent the implementation of requisite actions to reduce risky or unhealthy behaviors. • Child has accurate perceptions of parents' intentions.

(Continued)

APPENDIX
(Continued)

Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Monitoring of activities	Monitors activities, peer affiliations, and education; tries to intervene in possibly dangerous situations or when a chance of school failure is evident; supervises to protect child from accidents, threats, and abuse, or arranges for other responsible adults to do so; tries to keep young children from being exposed to violent and sexual media.	Consistently monitors activities, peer affiliations, and education in a nonintrusive manner; guides and prohibits as needed to support well-being and adequate school success without overprotection or over involvement; supervises to protect child from accidents, threats, and abuse, or arranges for other responsible adults to do so; consistently monitors and regulates use of media to support well-being.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Limits unsupervised time with others to decrease risks (e.g., sexual or drug activity, assault, crime). • Only allows young children to be alone with well-known, trusted persons. • Engages in cocooning of child to protect safety. • Checks grades and school progress.	• Seeks contact with peers and other parents to promote general knowledge of child's activities and friends. • Engages in developmentally appropriate levels of monitoring. • Child sees monitoring as an expression of love and concern rather than control so that self-disclosure may increase.
Moral guidance	Communicates value of doing what is right or good; promotes kindness and basic human rights; encourages taking responsibility for actions instead of blaming others.	Actively teaches moral values through modeling and education; models taking responsibility for actions instead of blaming others; sets limits as necessary to reinforce values.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Intentionally converses with child about what the family and society considers right and wrong. • Instills sense of moral responsibility to help others in need of help.	• Acknowledges and models respect of attitudes and values which are different from one's own yet not hurtful to others. • Models compassion and tolerance of individual differences.
Cognitive Development Promotion		
Education	Ensures child regularly receives educational instruction; encourages and facilitates adequate progress in school.	Ensures child regularly receives educational instruction and achieves adequate success; ensures high school completion, and encourages continued education or job training; helps children learn class work without doing homework for them.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Encourages children to learn school material and do homework. • Monitors child's school progress and enlists help if child is failing. • Shows interest in school projects.	• Assists child in learning homework problem solving skills. • Assists child in obtaining basic academic achievement. • Actively monitors completion of academic tasks (e.g., homework, test prep, projects). • Child sees link between grades and future success.

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APPENDIX
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Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Learning environment	Provides space for homework, and basic tools and supplies needed for learning.	Provides distraction free space for reading and homework, and the tools and supplies needed for learning; models love of learning.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Provides age-appropriate stimulating games, toys, and materials. • Stimulates speech and play. • Allows child to direct play when safe. • Labels and explains objects for infants and toddlers, allows exploration when safe. • Regularly plays with and reads to young children.	• Takes opportunities to teach child in everyday situations. • Takes child to learning environments such as museums, zoos, plays, and libraries.
Emotional Health Promotion		
Atmosphere	Creates home environment where child feels free to play and make choices and where people often have positive interactions.	Creates pleasant home environment where child feels free to explore, creatively play, and make choices, and where people usually positively interact.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Routinely verbally welcomes child home. • Limits child's exposure to aggression and loud arguments. • Encourages and often has joint play with child.	• Child feels valued at home and routinely feels good about being there. • Parents avoid serious conversations about adult concerns (e.g., marital, financial) in front of child.
Expression of feelings and empathy	Allows child to express emotions; shows empathy for child's situations and struggles; tries to avoid directing anger or criticism toward child, or inducing guilt.	Encourages child to freely express emotions; models emotion management; teaches empathy; engages child in nonjudgmental, supportive talks about child's situations and struggles; does not display frequent criticism or anger toward child or others, or induce guilt.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Avoids frequent display of negative emotion in front of child. • Listens to child's worries and feelings, does not belittle them, and offers support. • Models empathy for others.	• Actively teaches child about feelings and how to label and manage emotions. • Helps child problem solve troubling situations and follows up until situation is resolved or child is adequately coping. • Praises child for displaying empathy for others.

(Continued)

APPENDIX
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Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Nurturance	Spends pleasant time with child, including talking; responds sensitively to the child's needs and requests for contact or help; expresses warmth, affection, interest in, and positive worth to child; doesn't belittle child's traits and ideas; provides spontaneous verbal and physical affection; is emotionally available; tries not to treat each child differently (i.e., display favoritism).	Regularly spends pleasant time with child, including talking; consistently responds sensitively to child's needs and requests for contact or help; regularly expresses warmth, affection, encouragement, worth, and acceptance, even if child disappoints the parent; consistently follows through on promised activities with child; regularly provides safe, nurturing touch; displays equal as possible affection and attention to each child.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Often verbalizes to child that he or she is loved. • Praises and listens to child without criticizing. • Uses safe touch unless child indicates discomfort (e.g., backrubs, brushing hair, holding hands, holding young children, hugs).	• Parent and child often share enjoyable interests or activities. • Child exhibits secure attachment with parent. • Fosters sense of hope and optimism for the future. • Often sincerely praises child's personal worth to parent (e.g., I am so lucky I have you).
Provision of Child's Basic Needs		
Clothing	Child has adequate clothing that is appropriate for climate.	Child has variety of clothing that adequately fits and is appropriate for situation and climate.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Clothing is cleaned when stained or has odor. • Child is not ridiculed for dirty or inadequate clothing. • Clothing is mended or replaced when function is compromised (e.g., broken zipper, worn soles).	• Clothing is cleaned regularly and replaced when doesn't fit properly. • Allows child to choose clothing when possible and appropriate.
Financial	Able or actively seeks resources needed to meet the family's basic financial obligations and support the child financially.	Financially able to provide enriching environments; works toward family financial stability, and anticipates and plans for future expenses.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Pays basic child expenses (e.g., school fees). • Consistently pays child support. • Ensures that basic utilities are provided. • When unable to pay for basic needs, actively seeks assistance.	• Provides for family vacation, recreation, and education expenses as able. • Provides income to meet child's material needs without relying on assistance, or if currently on assistance, actively engages in activities to achieve greater financial stability. • Child considers parent sources of financial support to be reliable.
Food	Consistently meets basic nutritional standards in terms of caloric intake.	Provides plentiful food in a variety of nutritious options with an emphasis on healthy eating.

(Continued)

APPENDIX
(Continued)

Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	- Ensures access to sufficient quality and quantity of food. - Provides healthy food options.	- Educates child about healthy food choices and food preparation. - Promotes a reasonably healthy diet.
Hygiene	Provides the necessary supplies and teaching to maintain hygiene adequate for health and social interactions.	Provides developmentally appropriate hygiene supplies and teaching; teaches disease prevention methods and generally monitors practices.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	- Prevents and treats infections (e.g., head lice). - Ensures child is not teased due to poor hygiene. - Encourages hand washing. - Assists young children with bathing, toileting, and tooth brushing.	- Includes good hygiene in daily routines. - Teaches child about the link between poor hygiene and infections and tooth loss. - Provides access to grooming services (e.g., haircuts).
Physical and developmental care	Seeks adequate routine medical care including timely care for significant injury or illness; provides adequate daily physical and affectionate care to young children; seeks care when child isn't demonstrating major developmental milestones.	Consistently provides for routine preventative and comprehensive health care; provides plentiful physical stimulation and affection to young children; monitors and gently assists achievement of physical and cognitive developmental milestones as child shows readiness or need.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	- Holds child's hands when first trying to walk, and provides safe space to roll, crawl, etc. - Makes appointments for possible medical conditions or when child expresses concern. - Does not expose children to second-hand smoke.	- Actively seeks resources to obtain quality health care for child's individual needs. - Encourages children to do tasks independently, but recognizes when developmentally unable to or assistance is needed.
Safety	Provides an environment that protects child from injury, human/animal assault, dangerous substances, weapons, and abuse.	Provides a familiar environment and actively protects child from injury, human/animal assault, dangerous substances, weapons, and abuse; the child routinely feels safe.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	- Ensures sufficient child monitoring and supervision to manage risks and avoid danger. - Routinely uses safety devices (e.g., smoke detectors, child safety locks, and seatbelts). - Stores guns so they are inaccessible to child (e.g., unloaded and locked up).	- Engages in developmentally appropriate levels of monitoring to prevent injury, drug abuse, and risky behavior. - Supports neighborhood safety (e.g., reports crime or suspicious activity). - Child sees parent as consistent source of protection and security.
Shelter	Provides secure, durable, and weather resistant living space that is clean enough to promote health and prevent injury.	Consistently provides stable, secure, durable, weather resistant, familiar, and clean housing large enough to allow personal and gathering or recreational spaces.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	Unhealthy items (e.g., garbage, mold, rodents, animal waste, broken glass) are removed.	Housing provides comforts and enrichments (e.g., space for self-expression and play).

(Continued)

APPENDIX
(Continued)

Subcompetency	Adequate	Preferred
Sleep	• Space offers some privacy and permits mobility. Provides environment conducive to sleeping for the amount of time recommended for age, including naps.	• Provides predictable and stable home environment where frequent moves are minimized. Provides an environment conducive to uninterrupted sleep for time recommended by age, including naps; parent follows a bedtime routine with child.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Provides safe, clean sleeping space with adequate bedding and removed from primary living area. • Environment is modified (e.g., quiet) during child's sleep.	• Child has a private area to prepare for bed. • Bed is appropriate for age. • Child has stuffed animals/comforts. • Restricts use of screen media in child's bedroom.
Socialization		
Social and friendship opportunity	Provides opportunities for child to safely interact with others; encourages friendships with peers that provide healthy influences. • Helps child join community, school, or religious groups when valued by family, culture, or context. • Tries to provide appropriate social alternatives when negative social influences are noted. • Encourages children to be active in school activities or organizations, and provides support for their participation.	Often provides opportunities for child to safely interact with others; encourages friendships with good children and facilitates having time together. • Makes home a welcoming, safe environment where child wants to bring friends. • Insists child be in a supervised activity with other children. • Helps children determine when friends are exposing them to risk. • Understands normal changes in child-peer and child-parent relationships. • Manages peer influences by choosing environments (e.g., neighborhoods, childcare, school).
Social skill instruction	Informs child of important social behaviors and cultural customs, and models them with others; available and willing to help with child's social problems.	Informs child of own cultural customs and those of others; models and teaches prosocial behaviors that help form successful interpersonal relationships; encourages child to solve relationship problems and supplies advice and help when needed.
Examples of possible behavioral anchors	• Models use of friendly greetings and initiation of polite conversations. • Models and teaches importance of respecting others' opinions and politely disagreeing with them. • Models nonaggressive responses to conflict.	• Fosters a connection with the child's cultural heritage. • Teaches nonaggressive conflict-resolution skills to use with others.

Biology of Stress

- The body's stress response system is usually self-limiting. Once a perceived threat has passed, hormone levels return to normal. As adrenaline and cortisol levels drop, your heart rate and blood pressure return to baseline levels, and other systems resume their regular activities. But when stressors are always present and you constantly feel under attack, that fight-or-flight reaction stays turned on. The long-term activation of the stress response system and the overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones that follows can disrupt almost all your body's processes. This puts you at increased risk of many health problems, including:
 - anxiety, depression, digestive problems, headaches, muscle tension and pain, heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure and stroke, sleep problems, weight gain, and memory and concentration impairment

*Children are very
literal in their early
approach to
language*

Language Development in Children



Developmental Milestones

3 months

Cooing & gurgling

18 months

Knows 5 to
40 words

6 months

Babbling

12 months

First words

2 years

150-300 words, 2-3
word sentences

3 years

900-1,000 words,
asks short questions

4 years

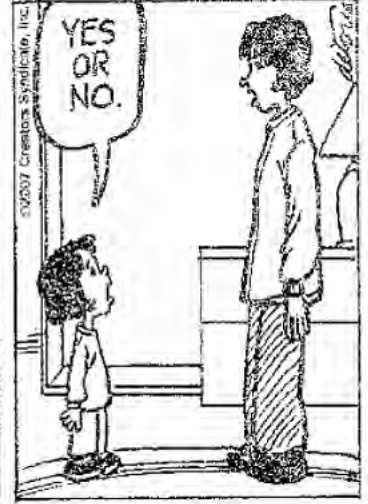
2,000 words, 5+
word sentences

5 years

Identifies letters, creates
longer sentences

- Teens – 15,000-20,000 words
- Adults – 20,000-35,000 words

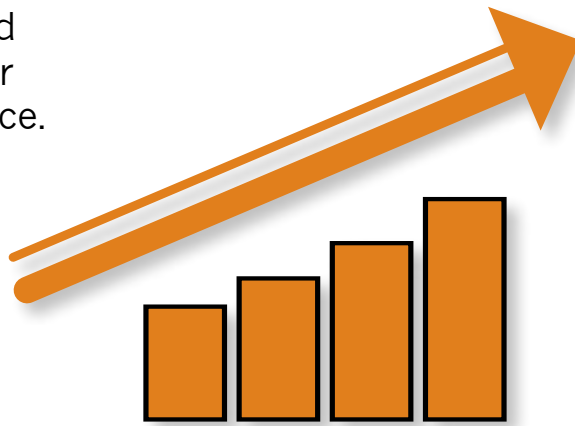
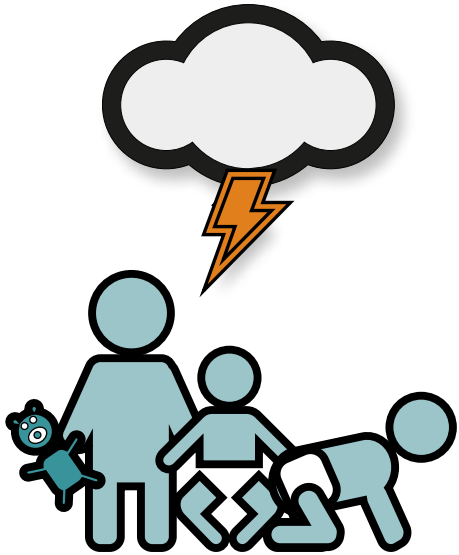
ONE BIG HAPPY RICK DETORIE



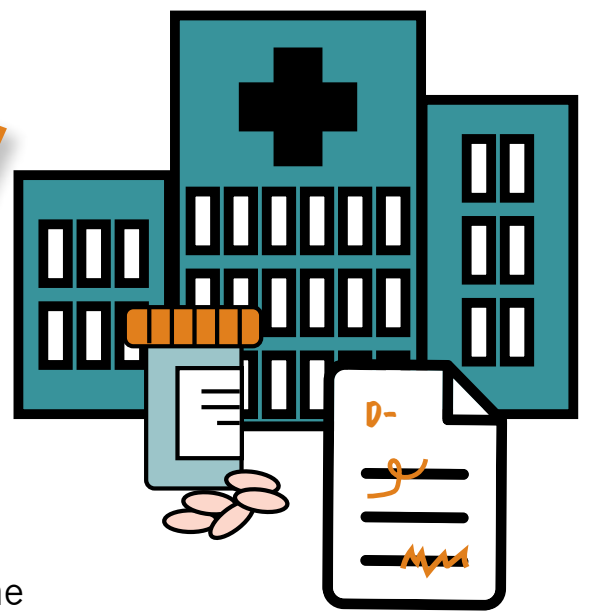
WHAT ARE ACES?

AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO TOXIC STRESS?

“ACEs” stands for “Adverse Childhood Experiences.” These experiences can include things like physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence.

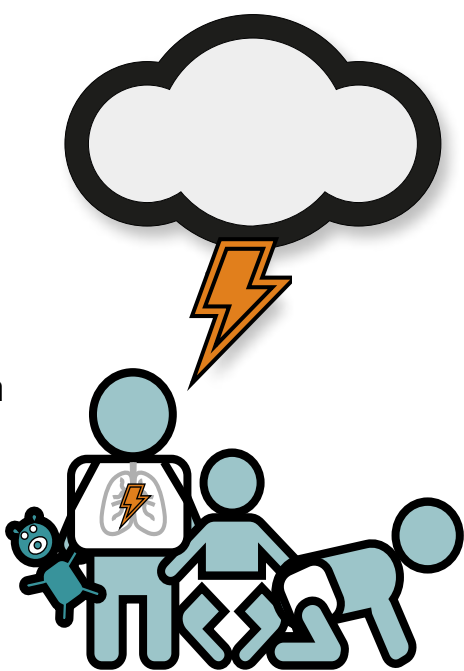


The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he or she is to suffer from things like heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement, and substance abuse later in life.



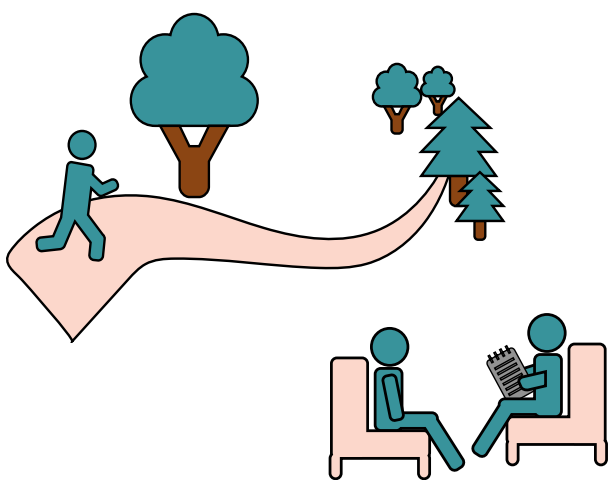
TOXIC STRESS EXPLAINS HOW ACES “GET UNDER THE SKIN.”

Experiencing many ACEs, as well as things like racism and community violence, without supportive adults, can cause what’s known as **toxic stress**. This excessive activation of the stress-response system can lead to long-lasting wear-and-tear on the body and brain.



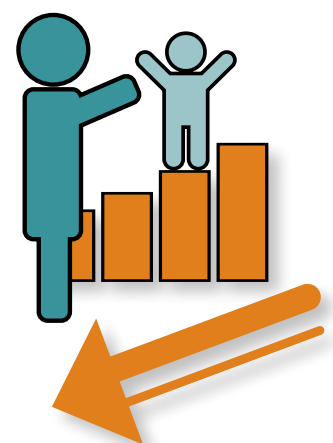
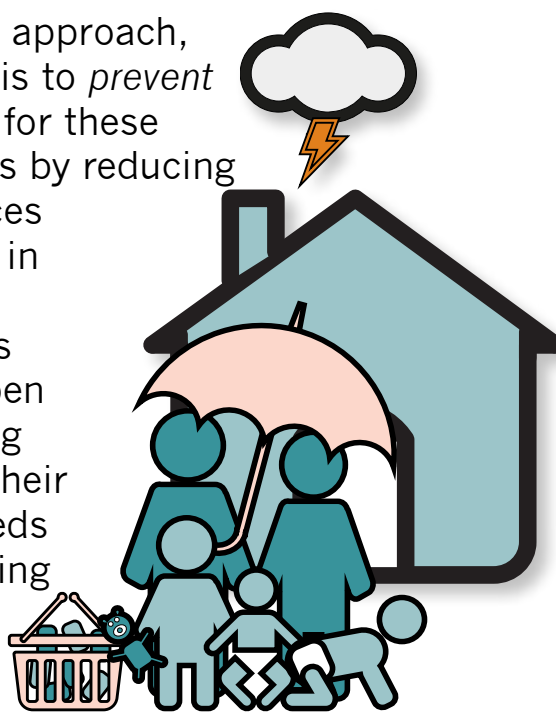
The effect would be similar to revving a car engine for days or weeks at a time.

WE CAN REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF ACES AND TOXIC STRESS.



For those who have experienced ACEs, there are a range of possible responses that can help, including therapeutic sessions with mental health professionals, meditation, physical exercise, spending time in nature, and many others.

The ideal approach, however, is to *prevent* the need for these responses by reducing the sources of stress in people’s lives. This can happen by helping to meet their basic needs or providing other services.



Likewise, fostering strong, **responsive relationships** between children and their caregivers, and helping children and adults build **core life skills**, can help to buffer a child from the effects of **toxic stress**.

ACEs affect people at all income and social levels, and can have serious, costly impact across the lifespan.

No one who’s experienced significant adversity (or many ACEs) is irreparably damaged, though we need to acknowledge trauma’s effects on their lives. By reducing families’ sources of stress, providing children and adults with responsive relationships, and strengthening the core life skills we all need to adapt and thrive, **we can prevent and counteract lasting harm.**

Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Trauma-Informed Neurology

Robin Ortiz, MD, MSHP^{1,2,3}; Rachel Gilgoff, MD^{1,4}; Nadine Burke Harris, MD, MPH⁴

Author Affiliations

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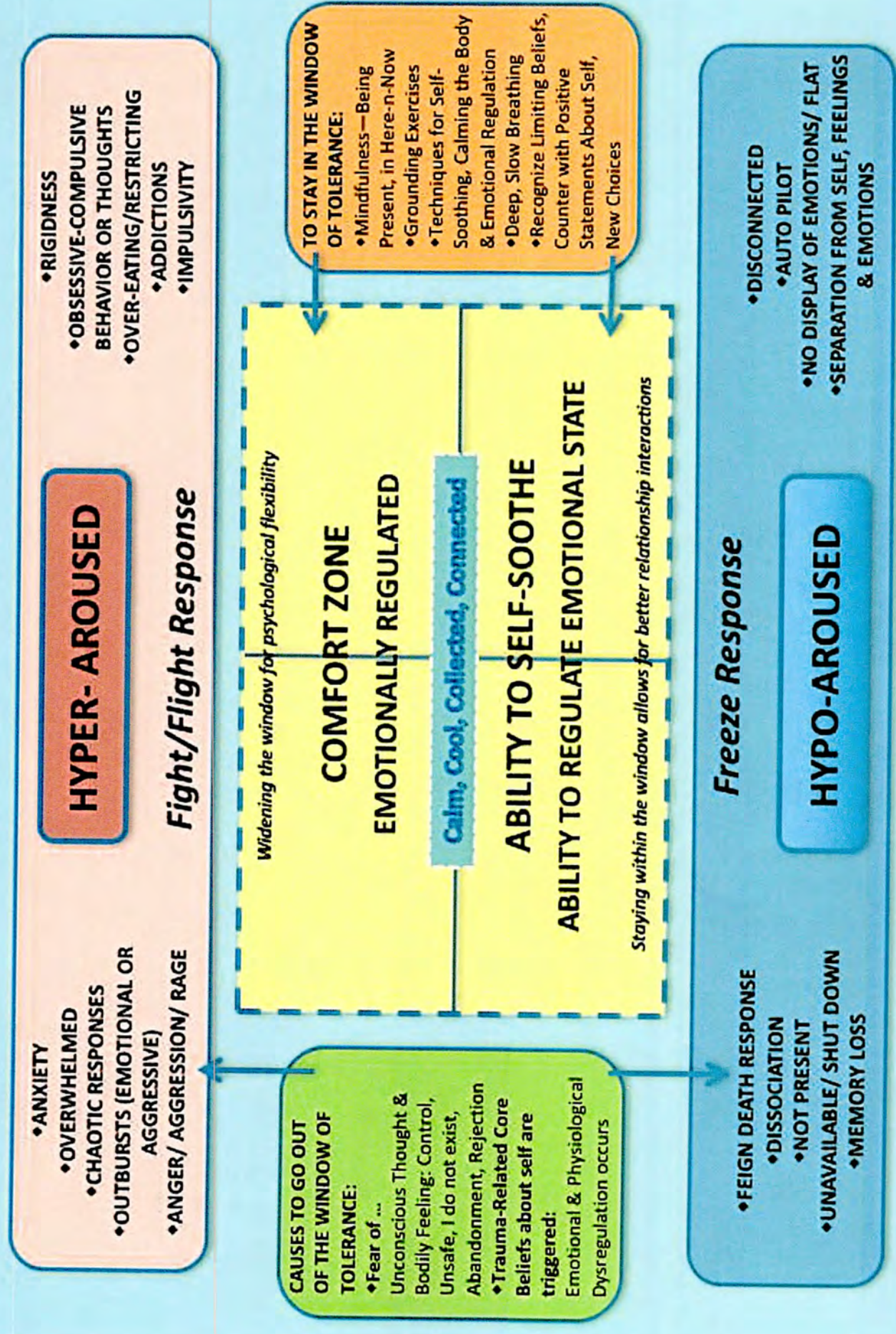
Much of what we know about how stress changes our biology comes from the body of work related to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente.

ACEs include child abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual), neglect (physical or emotional), and household challenges (household incarceration, mental illness, substance use, intimate partner violence, or parental separation or divorce) experienced by 18 years of age.

ACEs are associated in a dose-dependent way with over 60 mental and physical health outcomes and premature death, including many of the leading causes of death in the US, such as heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries, stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease, diabetes, kidney disease, and suicide.

ACEs are also associated with common neurological and neuropsychiatric conditions, including dementia and memory impairment, epilepsy or seizure disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and headaches, in addition to sleep disturbances, developmental delay, learning or behavioral problems, autism spectrum disorders, mood disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder, and chronic pain.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE- TRAUMA/ANXIETY RELATED RESPONSES: Widening the Comfort Zone for Increased Flexibility



STRESS & EARLY BRAIN GROWTH

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

What are ACEs?

ACEs are serious childhood traumas -- a list is shown below -- that result in toxic stress that can harm a child's brain. This toxic stress may prevent child from learning, from playing in a healthy way with other children, and can result in long-term health problems.

Adverse Childhood Experiences can include:

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Emotional neglect
5. Physical neglect
6. Mother treated violently
7. Household substance abuse
8. Household mental illness
9. Parental separation or divorce
10. Incarcerated household member
11. Bullying (by another child or adult)
12. Witnessing violence outside the home
13. Witness a brother or sister being abused
14. Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
15. Being homeless
16. Natural disasters and war

Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Depression
- Illicit drug use
- Heart disease
- Liver disease
- Multiple sexual partners
- Intimate partner violence
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancies

How do ACEs affect health?

Through stress. Frequent or prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress which can damage the developing brain of a child and affect overall health.

Reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.

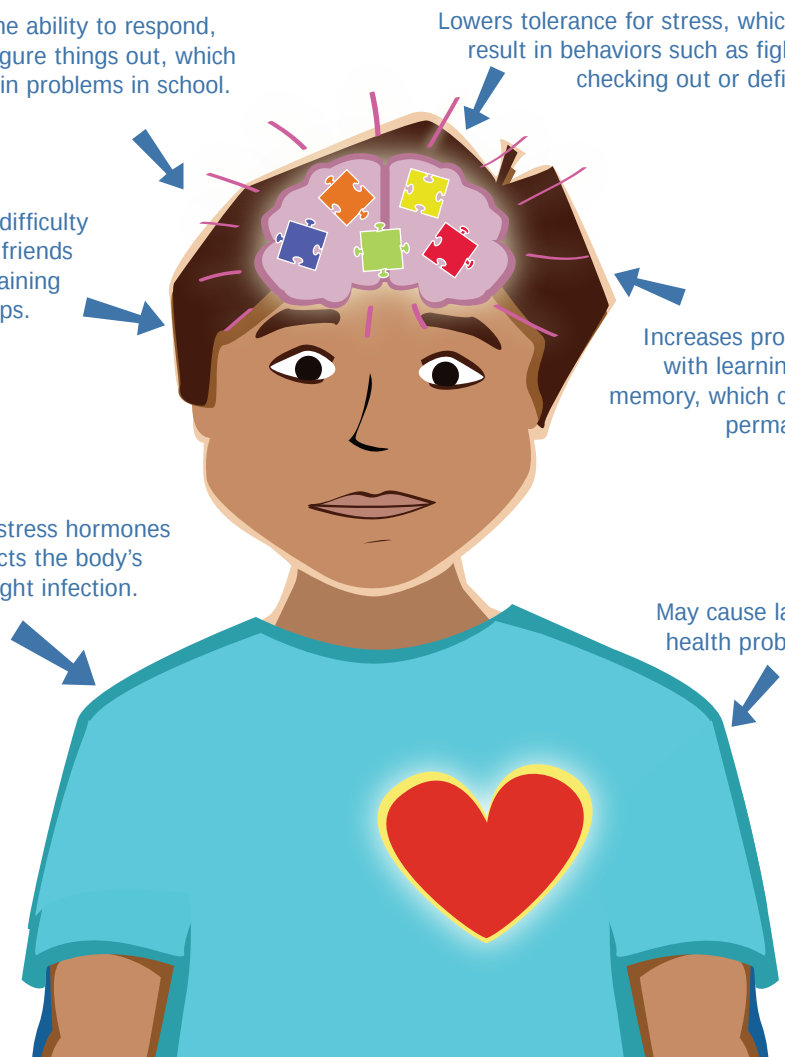
Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

Increases problems with learning and memory, which can be permanent.

Increases stress hormones which affects the body's ability to fight infection.

May cause lasting health problems.



A Survival Mode Response to toxic stress increases a child's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. Their thinking brain is knocked off-line. Self-protection is their priority. In other words:
"I can't hear you! I can't respond to you! I am just trying to be safe!"

The good news is resilience can bring back health and hope!

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to return to being healthy and hopeful after bad things happen. Research shows that if parents provide a safe environment for their children and teach them how to be resilient, that helps reduce the effects of ACEs.

Resilience trumps ACEs!

Parents, teachers and caregivers can help children by:

- Gaining an understanding of ACEs
- Helping children identify feelings and manage emotions
- Creating safe physical and emotional environments at home, in school, and in neighborhoods

What does resilience look like?

1. Having resilient parents

Parents who know how to solve problems, who have healthy relationships with other adults, and who build healthy relationships with their children.

2. Building attachment and nurturing relationships

Adults who listen and respond patiently to a child in a supportive way, and pay attention to a child's physical and emotional needs.

3. Building social connections

Having family, friends and/or neighbors who support, help and listen to children.

4. Meeting basic needs

Providing children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education.

5. Learning about parenting and how children grow

Understanding how parents can help their children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow.

6. Building social and emotional skills

Helping children interact in a healthy way with others, manage their emotions and communicate their feelings and needs.



Resources:

ACES 101

<http://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>

Triple-P Parenting

www.triplep-parenting.net/glo-en/home/

Resilience Trumps ACEs

www.resiliencetrumpsACEs.com

CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/

Zero to Three Guides for Parents

<http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/areas-of-expertise/free-parent-brochures-and-guides/>

Course Outline

- ▶ Module Overview
- ▶ Myths About Domestic Violence and Children
- ▶ Healthy vs. Toxic Stress
- ▶ Adverse Childhood Experiences

The ACE Study

ACEs and Health Outcomes

Exposure to Domestic Violence

- ▶ Domestic Violence and the Developing Brain
- ▶ Domestic Violence Over Time
- ▶ Resilience
- ▶ Conclusion

Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence

Adverse Childhood Experiences & Health

The study found that the greater the number of those Adverse Childhood Experiences, the more likely the person was to experience certain adverse health effects in adulthood, such as:

▶ Heart Disease

▶ Smoking

▶ Cancer

▶ Depression

▶ COPD

▶ Anxiety

▶ Autoimmune Disease

▶ Suicide

▶ Liver Disease

▶ Premature Death

▶ Alcohol And Drug Abuse

▶ Increased Likelihood of Becoming Victim of Sexual Assault or Domestic Violence

▶ Increased Rates Of Obesity



◀ Prev

Next ▶

THE TOXIC EFFECTS OF CHRONIC STRESS ON CHILDREN

(1) Academic Achievement

(2) Psychological Health

- Anxiety
- Aggression
- Depression
- Impulsivity
- Withdrawal

(3) Physical Health

- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Weight gain/weight loss
- Hair falling out, pulling eyelashes out
- Sleep problems

(4) Anti-social behavior

- Experimentation with drugs
- Experimentation with alcohol
- Early experimentation with sex

(5) Adult life adjustment

- Low self-esteem
- General unhappiness
- Poorer intimate relationships lifelong

Corporal Punishment

what the evidence tells us



Physical harm

thousands of children killed, injured or disabled by corporal punishment each year



Damage to education

multiple negative impacts on cognitive development; linked to lower educational achievement and increased likelihood of school drop-out



Poor mental health

strong links with behavioural and anxiety disorders, aggression, depression, low self-esteem, self-harm and suicide attempts, alcohol and drug dependency



Damage to the parent-child relationship

children feel rejected, hurt and frightened

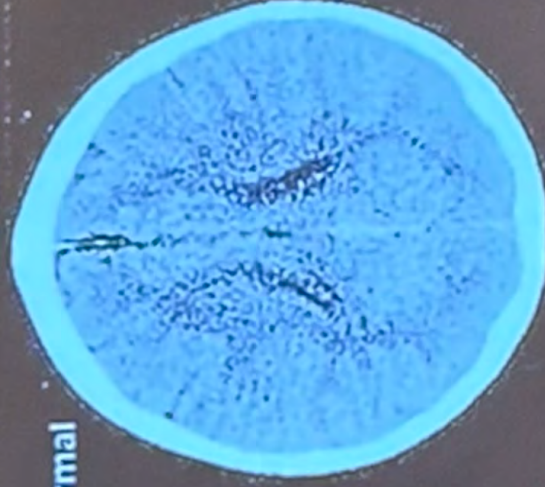
Spanked Children

- 17,404 university students from 32 different countries surveyed
- Lower average IQ in countries where spanking is more prevalent
- Linkage between decreased IQ & CP is chronic childhood stress
- Greater delay in cognitive development
- Between 2.8 – 5 points lower IQ than non-spanked children

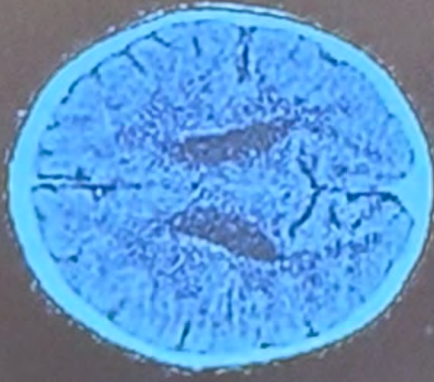
Straus, 2009

HOW STRESS CHANGES A CHILD'S BRAIN

3-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN



Normal



Extreme neglected

■ Prolonged exposure to trauma triggers physiological changes in the brain.

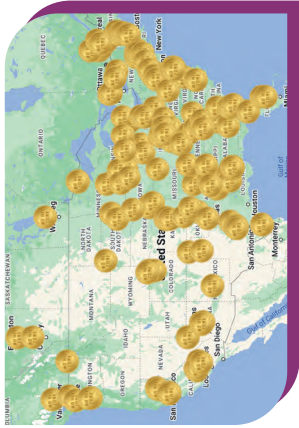
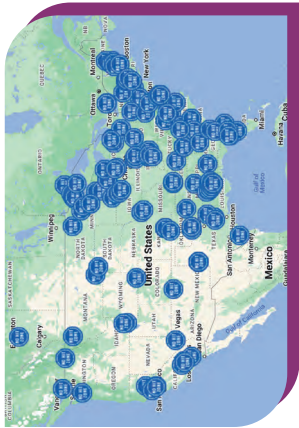
■ Neural circuits are disrupted, causing changes in the hippocampus, the brain's memory and emotional centre.

■ This can cause brain shrinkage, problems with memory, learning and behaviour.

■ A child does not learn to regulate emotions when living in state of constant stress.

■ Associated with greater risk of chronic disease and mental health problems in adulthood.

For Safety and Protection of Everyone This is No Hit Zone



Join the No Hit Zone (NHZ) Movement



Register your Organizations, Home, School or Self for FREE Today at

www.NoHitZone.com

A **No Hit Zone (NHZ)** includes clear signage and policy that prohibits hitting of any kind. Research shows that NHZs have considerable promise for changing attitudes about and increasing intervention around parent-to-child hitting. NHZ trainings help bystanders to communicate the harms of spanking with confidence, competence and without shame.



Unique No Hit Zone Users

52
States and Territories

394
Certified Advocates

487
Registered to be No Hit Zones

27,453
No Hit Zone Toolkit Users

Dear Parents,
Did you know...

Researchers at Harvard found that children who were spanked just 12 times per year and once with an object like a belt had **14-19% less brain matter** in the decision-making area.¹



Spanking harms brains and lowers IQ.

Another Harvard team found that spanking triggers brain responses to threats the **same as sexual abuse and severe physical abuse.**²

Children who are spanked have up to **5 fewer IQ points** than non-spanked children, even years later.³

Even minor spanking is associated with lower test scores and negatively impacts children's social development.

1,574 studies found that spanking is risky

Increases

Aggression
Fighting
Mental Health Problems
Negative relationships with parents

Antisocial behavior
Substance Abuse
Delinquent behavior
Risk for child abuse

Reduces

Moral Values
Cognitive Ability
Self-control
Self-esteem

Spanking is not effective and does not work long-term,

A huge study over time found that spanking had **ZERO positive outcomes.**⁵

Dozens of studies found that spanking actually **made children's behavior WORSE** in the future.⁵

Children who are spanked usually **repeat the unwanted behavior within 10 minutes.**⁶



The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children®

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Tips for Parents

Tools for Parenting

Common Behaviors	
Ages and Stages	Ages and Stages
Infants (0-12 months)   • Crying And Fussing • Won't Sleep Through The Night • Putting Everything Into Mouth • Throwing Things On The Ground • Won't Stop Crying No Matter What You Try	Preschoolers (3-5 years)   • Delayed Potty Training • Exaggerating The Truth • Talking Constantly And Asking "Why?" Frequently • Having Many Fears (The Dark, Going To Bed, Monsters, Animals) • Being Curious About Private Parts And Asking Questions • Won't Go To Bed
Young Toddlers (12-24 months)   • Danger – (Touching Stove/ Electricity/Running Into Street/ Leaving Without An Adult) • Whining • Saying "No" When You Ask Them To Do Something • Temper Tantrums • Being Aggressive • Gets Into Things	School Age (5-9 years)   • Fighting With Siblings • Bad Grades • Misbehaving At School • Being Aggressive – Hitting, Grabbing Things From Others • Connecting With Pre-Teens
Older Toddlers (24-36 months)   • Learning To Use The Bathroom • Nighttime Wetting • Won't Sit Still • Won't Go To Bed • Won't Stay In Bed • Being Aggressive	Tweens/Teens (10-18 years)   • Sexual Acts, Talk Or Text • Running Away • Illegal Activity – Alcohol, Drugs • Talking Back, Breaking House Rules • Phone Use • Inappropriate Dress

DEAR PARENTS,

Did you know spanking can harm a child's developing brain?



A **Harvard Medical School** study found that kids spanked "specifically for discipline, with parents in emotional control," & "not striking out in anger," at least 12 times a year, once with an object, but was not physical abuse, had

14-19%

less gray matter on MRIs in important decision-making areas of the brain. ¹

14.5%¹
less gray matter
dorsolateral prefrontal
cortex

19.1%¹
less gray matter
medial prefrontal cortex

Spanking is an adverse childhood experience (ACE), which causes **toxic stress**. ^{5, 6}



1,574 additional studies concluded that brain changes resulted in:

- aggression
- PTSD
- decreased IQ
- depression
- substance abuse
- lower self-esteem ^{2, 3}
- suicidal behavior
- delinquency
- future violence

16.9%¹
less gray matter
right anterior
cingulate gyrus

Dear Parents,

Did you know that –



- Spanking **shrinks brains.**

Harvard Medical School found that kids who are spanked just once a month had **14-19% smaller brains in the decision-making area.**¹ These were children who remembered being spanked at least 12 times a year and once with a belt, paddle or brush, but were not injured or spanked in anger.

- 1,574 studies found that **spanking is harmful.**

- Even ‘everyday spanking’ is **consistently associated with:**

- **More** aggression
- **More** negative relationships with parents
- **Lower** cognitive ability
- **Substance** abuse
- **More** fighting
- **Weaker** moral values
- **Delinquent** behavior
- **More** mental health problems
- **Lower** self-esteem
- **More** antisocial behavior
- **Lower** self-control²

- Spanking **lowers IQ.**

The University of New Hampshire found that American children who are spanked at ages 2-4 have **5 less IQ points** than non-spanked children, even years later. Children spanked at ages 5-9 have **2.8 less IQ points.**³

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does this mean that everyone who was spanked as a child has problems?** No, it means that spanking doesn’t help children learn what we want them to learn. Every time we spank a child, we raise the risk that the child will develop problems.
- **Why is this so?** Spanking focuses on the behavior and misses the underlying need. It might stop a child from doing something in the moment, but the child hasn’t learned how to do things differently. And it can lead to built-up resentment and hostility, and prevent some children from telling about sexual abuse for fear of further punishment.
- **But I was spanked and turned out okay?** Today, we have a tremendous amount of knowledge about how children learn and develop. We know other ways of teaching children that don’t have these risks and harms.

Prepared, designed, and disseminated by:



Endorsed by:



1. Tomoda, A., Suzuki, H., Rabi, K., Sheu, Y., Polcari, A., & Teicher, M.H. (2010). Reduced prefrontal cortical gray matter in young adults exposed to harsh corporal punishment. *Neuroimage*, 47(Suppl. 2), T66–T71.

2. Gershoff, E. T., & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016). Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(4), 453–469. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000191>

3. Straus, M., & Paschall, M.J. Corporal punishment by mothers and development of children’s cognitive ability: A longitudinal study of two nationally representative age cohorts. (2009). *Journal of Aggression Maltreatment & Trauma*, 18(5): 459. doi:10.1080/10926770903035168





Tips for Parents of Infants

(0-12 months)

CRYING AND FUSSING

Babies cry and fuss for a variety of reasons – hunger, sleepiness, need for a diaper change. Sometimes for no apparent reason at all. They need to be held and cuddled and to hear your gentle voice to help them feel safe and secure.

TRY ...

- Checking to see if baby's **diaper** needs to be changed, offering a bottle or breast to **feed** them, or just picking them up, **cuddling** and talking sweetly to them.
- Wearing baby in a sling or carrier, taking a walk outside or car ride.
- Giving baby a pacifier.
- Singing, humming, and cooing, as well as moving (gentle **rocking, swinging, walking**), which often calms baby down.

PUTTING EVERYTHING INTO MOUTH

Child is learning hand-mouth coordination or is teething and needs safe objects to chew on.

TRY ...

- Putting a **damp washcloth into freezer** for baby to chew on.
- **Child-proofing** by removing small, chokeable objects from reach.

WON'T STOP CRYING NO MATTER WHAT YOU TRY

TRY ...

- Turning on children's music with singing or ocean/water sounds.
- Placing baby safely in a crib **without** any blankets or pillows.
- Getting a glass of water, walking around, singing to yourself, making long exhales slowly – this helps your nervous system stay calm
- Taking turns being with the baby with your partner or family member.
- Driving in the car with baby in a secure car seat.

WON'T SLEEP THROUGH THE NIGHT

Babies double their birth weight by 4-6 months and triple their weight by 1 year, so they have to eat frequently. Some babies may start sleeping through the night around 4 months. Many do not.

TRY ...

- Sleeping when the baby sleeps.
- Taking turns with your partner or family member feeding your baby.
- Leaving the room to take a short break – take deep breaths.
- Feeding and soothing baby.

THROWING THINGS ON THE GROUND

It is very common and normal for an older infant to throw things on the ground every 2.5 seconds on purpose. This is how your child learns about gravity and cause and effect. Children enjoy the sound falling objects make.

TRY ...

- Distracting baby – stop the drop game by using safe tethers or rings that can't wrap around a child's neck.

REMEMBER

- Babies don't spoil when held. Denying a baby food, touch, or attention is harmful to their development.
- Shaking, hitting, or tossing a baby is harmful.
- Understand the harms of spanking and sign the pledge today.



Tips for Parents of Young Toddlers

(12-24 months)

DANGER – (TOUCHING STOVE/ELECTRICITY/ RUNNING INTO STREET/LEAVING WITHOUT AN ADULT)

Toddlers are very curious and learn by touching and exploring. Toddlers are too young to understand danger. Baby-proof home by keeping valuables and dangers such as cords, toys with small parts, medicines, cleaning supplies away from the toddler. Identify a safe location in your house where toddler can safely explore.

WHINING

Toddlers whine for a variety of reasons. Whining is an attempt to self soothe. A toddler may be bored, hungry or tired or may just want to connect with you.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY ...

“I can’t understand you when you talk like this

“Don’t make me give you something to cry about.”

- “I would like to hear you. Come, sit next to me.”
- Try distraction: “Look at this, we have [object, snack]!” OR
- “You would like for me to listen, and you sound very frustrated.”

SAYING “NO” WHEN YOU ASK THEM TO DO SOMETHING

It is normal for toddlers to say “no” a lot, even if child means “yes”. It is still important to have rules and set limits.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY ...

“Clean up this mess right now!”

“Don’t disobey me!”

- “Let’s see how fast you can put all the [toys] away!” OR Let’s clean this mess up together!
- “Let’s put all the [toys] away so we can [watch a movie].” I can tell you are feeling impatient. We’ve been waiting a long time.

TEMPER TANTRUMS

Toddlers often have temper tantrums when they are hungry or tired. Sometimes they have tantrums out of frustration when they cannot use words to say what they want. Your child needs your help to calm down and to feel heard.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY ...

“Stop crying right now!”

“You are so bad!”

“I really hate when you act like this.”

- “I know it’s hard to leave [the playground] when you’re having fun.” Or, I know you really want that [toy]. Let play with it later” OR Let’s try again. Take a deep breath.
- “I see that you are really mad because [...]” OR I hear how really angry you are.
- “Let’s go over here where it’s quieter.” OR
- “Those words and actions don’t help us find a solution. Would you be willing to...”

Sometimes the best option is to just quietly and calmly stay with your child as your child is not hurting herself or anyone else.

BEING AGGRESSIVE

Toddlers commonly bite, hit and grab things from others. Praise good behavior.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY ...

“You are so mean, don’t hit!”

“You are a bad boy/girl!”

- “When you [hit, bite] your [brother], it hurts him and he feels sad.” Saying, “It’s OK to be angry, but I won’t let you hit. We need to keep everyone safe.” OR
- “You had something important you wanted to say.”
- “Let’s find something else to play with.”
- “It’s your [sister]’s turn with the [train]. Or, “I will help you wait until it’s your turn.”

GETS INTO THINGS

A toddler learns by exploring and touching. Prevention is best. Place temptations out of sight and reach. Child-proof using cabinet latches or use distractions.



Tips for Parents of Older Toddlers

(24-36 months)

LEARNING TO USE THE BATHROOM

Potty accidents are normal. Children slowly learn what it feels like when they have to pee or poop. Children are often 3 years old or older before they can use the bathroom by themselves. Many children will have accidents even after they have been using the bathroom awhile.

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Saying, "You are so lazy!"

Making your child sit on the potty or toilet against their will

Punishing your child for accidents

- "Let's try to use the potty next time."
- Establishing comfort while sitting on the potty/toilet – read books. Avoid having a child sit on a toilet for more than 5 minutes.
- Expressing excitement when your child is able to use the toilet. When accidents happen, it just means your child's body isn't mature enough yet to consistently use the toilet.

NIGHTTIME WETTING

Nighttime wetting may occur until children are much older. Stressful events can cause nighttime wetting even after a child has been successful.

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Punishing or shaming your child for wetting the bed or making a big deal out of it

- "Oopsy, you had an accident. Let's change your pajamas and sheets and get back to bed."

WON'T SIT STILL

Young children have a lot of energy. It is normal for a young child to have a hard time sitting in one spot for more than a few minutes. Allowing children to move helps them feel good.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

"Sit still!"

"If you get out of that chair, you will be punished."

- "Come here and sit by Mommy"
- "Let's [read] this [book]!" or "Let's play [I Spy or any other game]."

WON'T GO TO BED

A consistent early bedtime routine every day and a safe sleeping space are keys to a happy bedtime and minimize tantrums and meltdowns.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

"Go to bed right now!"

"If you get out of bed, you will be punished."

- "I'm happy to help you get in bed. Let's read a book."
- Setting up a routine of reading a book before sleep. Reading out loud to a child can help them relax.

WON'T STAY IN BED

A young child needs help to feel safe and secure. Sometimes your child may still want to be near you after bedtime. When they come to you, they are expressing a need.

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Scolding your child or locking child in room

- Helping your child feel comfortable in the bedroom by turning on a night light, remaining in the room for a short time to offer comfort, reading a story, or rubbing their forehead or feet.

BEING AGGRESSIVE

Toddlers commonly bite, hit and grab things from others. Praise good behavior.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY ...

"You are so mean, don't hit!"

"You are a bad boy/girl!"

- "When you [hit, bite] your [brother], it hurts him and he feels sad." Saying, "It's OK to be angry, but I won't let you hit. We need to keep everyone safe." OR
- "You had something important you wanted to say."
- "Let's find something else to play with."
- "It's your [sister]'s turn with the [train]. Or, 'I will help you wait until it's your turn."



Tips for Parents of Preschoolers

(3-5 years)

DELAYED POTTY TRAINING

It is not uncommon for children to still rely on diapers at night until age 7. It's common for previously potty trained children to have accidents during times of stress or change (moving, new sibling, etc.).

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Forcing your child to sit on the toilet against their will

Punishing your child or showing disappointment

- (Gently): "I notice you are holding yourself [or pacing back and forth]. Try sitting on the potty."
- If your child soils themselves, say, "It happens. It will happen less over time."

EXAGGERATING THE TRUTH

This is normal in preschoolers because of their active imaginations. Pretending and imagining are important to a child's development.

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Calling your child a liar

Punishing your child for lying

- "I wonder if you are afraid to tell me what happened."
- "I wonder if you really don't want to..." The more children are punished, the more likely they are to lie. Avoid using punishment. Talk about better solutions to their problem than using lying.

TALKING CONSTANTLY AND ASKING "WHY?" FREQUENTLY

A child's curiosity about the world helps to build concepts, vocabulary, and understanding.

INSTEAD OF...

TRY...

Labeling them as nosy and/or telling them to be quiet, hush, or shut up

Brushing your child off and not answering

- Asking your child, "What do you think?" This turns the "why" question around so your child has a chance to think and come up with their own answer.
- "Let's [read] this [book]!" or "Let's play [! You might need to let your child know that you need quiet for a little while to help you feel calm.]

HAVING MANY FEARS (THE DARK, GOING TO BED, MONSTERS, ANIMALS)

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

"Don't be a baby."

"Don't be afraid." or "You better stay in your bed or the monsters will get you."

"Big boys and girls aren't scared."

- "It's OK to have fears. Let's figure this out together."
- Mirroring your child's feelings: "You feel afraid. Maybe a nightlight would feel better." Give your child a flashlight or monster spray to help them confront or overcome fears.
- "It's hard to be scared. Tell me what scares you." or "I can see that you are afraid. I can see this bothers you. I can see being in the dark frightens you. Can I turn on a nightlight?"

BEING CURIOUS ABOUT PRIVATE PARTS AND ASKING QUESTIONS

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Shaming the child for touching their private parts

Using slang terms (e.g., cookie, bird, pocketbook)

Making your child hug and kiss when they don't want to

- Teaching your child it's OK to touch their own private parts when they are alone.
- Teaching your child about all body parts including penis, vagina, butt, breasts.
- Teaching them to offer a fistbump or handshake.

WON'T GO TO BED

A consistent early bedtime routine every day and a safe sleeping space are keys to a happy bedtime.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

"Go to bed now!"

"If you get out of bed, you will be punished."

- "Do you want to walk or tiptoe to bed?"
- Make going to bed an enjoyable experience. Learn what helps your child go to sleep. Consider their sensory needs. Do they like dark and quiet, or do they prefer light and sounds of the ocean? Do they need a heavy blanket?
- "Let's read a book."
- "It's 8 o'clock and you are in bed already, well done!" Provide a consistent and enjoyable routine every night.



Tips for Parents of School Age Children (5-9 years)

FIGHTING WITH SIBLINGS

Child is learning about power and empathy.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY...

"Stop fighting right now!"

"Let me give you both a good spanking/whooping so you stop fighting all the time."

"No TV for a month!"

- "If we play together without fighting, we get to do more fun stuff."
- "Let me set the timer so you and your [brother] can take turns."
- "Your [sister] is younger than you and doesn't understand how taking turns works yet. Can you show her/him?"
- "Let's wait. I'll hold the remote while we figure out what we want to watch."

BAD GRADES

Some children learn easily, and some need your help to get their grades up. Make sure your child is getting enough sleep in order to learn. 9-11 hours is ideal for ages 6-13. Help child learn good habits by having daily routines around homework and studying.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY...

"You are so stupid."

"You are not good at [reading] at all."

"This is so easy – why are you so bad at this?"

- "You just haven't learned [multiplication] YET, but if we work on it together, you will get better."
- "I notice the grade for this class is low. What is difficult about this class? How can I help?"
- "Do you have a friend we could ask to help you with this?"

MISBEHAVING AT SCHOOL

Listen to your child's problems. Try to understand the need underneath the behavior.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY...

"You are stupid for getting into trouble!"

"You are heading straight for jail!"

"Let me give you a whooping so you can remember to behave next time."

- "Your teacher called me about something that happened at school. I want to help. Tell me what happened."
- "If you could make school any way you wanted, how would it be?"
- "When you behave this way [whatever the behavior might be], what do you need?"

BEING AGGRESSIVE – HITTING, GRABBING THINGS FROM OTHERS

Instead of calling out child for assertive behavior, try helping them to stand up for themselves without aggression.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

"You are so mean – stop hitting!"

"You are a bad boy/girl!"

"Don't hit!"

- "When you [hit, bite] your [brother], it hurts him, and he feels sad."
- "Let's find something else to play with."
- "It's OK to be angry, but I won't let you hit. We need to keep everyone safe."
- "It's your [sister]'s turn with the [train]. I will help you wait until it's your turn."

CONNECTING WITH PRE-TEENS

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

"You finally listened to me."

"Why can't you ever do what I tell you to do?"

- "I notice that you were so kind."
- "I notice you feel really good today."
- "Your jokes make me laugh."
- "You bring me joy."
- "I had such a good time with you today."
- "It really feels good when you listen to me."
- "Thank you for listening."
- "I can see you are really engaged, and it's hard for you hear me."
- "I noticed you weren't able to do... How can I help you?"



Tips for Parents of Tweens/Teens (10-18 years)

SEXTING - Teens need your help to navigate the possibility of receiving or sending a nude photo. Ask if they know the potential consequences to assure that your teen understands that possessing nude photos of anyone underage is illegal, that photos can go viral, can be used as blackmail, and can hurt people. Read an article on sexting and discuss it together.

SEXUAL ACTS, TALK OR TEXT - Hormones rage at puberty. Help your children make educated decisions. Talk about your values and expectations instead of reacting after discovery. Instead of shaming a child for sexual interest, listen to them about what they believe is appropriate and respectful behavior and what is not. Share with them your point of view.

RUNNING AWAY - An unsafe home environment is the most common reason for running away. Provide your child with a safe and supportive environment with open communication.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

Threatening to not let them come back home.

“Do you want me to help you pack?”

“You are grounded for the rest of your life”

Locking them in their room

- “Tell me why you felt you had to run away.”
- I understand that you felt you needed to run away. I felt rejected and unappreciated. Can you help me understand what was bothering you?
- “What can I do to make you feel safe at home?”
- It scared me that you ran away. Let’s talk about how we can make living at home feel better.
- “I was scared when I didn’t know where to find you.”
- “I want you to be happy here. Can you tell me why you ran away?” Listen to why they ran away. Understand that this was a solution to their problem. Discuss better solutions.

ILLEGAL ACTIVITY – ALCOHOL, DRUGS - Peer pressure plays a big role in substance use. Help your child understand the effects of drug and alcohol use. Set a positive example around substance use at home.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

“You are heading straight for jail!”

“You are grounded!”

- “Underage drinking is a serious crime and we both can get into trouble because I’m responsible for your behavior.”
- “Being charged with a DUI is a crime that will stay on your record. It can prevent you from getting into college you want to go to or getting your dream job down the line.” Or, “Drinking numbs your reflexes and you won’t be able to make decisions as fast and clear. That puts you and others in danger.”

- **Help your child rehearse what to he/she would like to say to his/her peers:** “I’ll get in trouble with my parents if I smoke.”
- **Make a pact with your child:** “I want you to be safe. If you want to leave a situation, all you have to do is text or call me and I will pick you up from anywhere at any time without asking questions.”
- **Have a “code” text message** for when your child needs your help to get out of a peer pressure situation. Decide together what they want you to do or say when they text you the code message.

TALKING BACK, BREAKING HOUSE RULES

Have a family meeting and collaborate with your teenager on house rules. Remember, complicated decision-making parts of the brain are not fully developed. Teenagers need help solving problems and making good decisions.

INSTEAD OF SAYING ...

TRY...

“What were you thinking?”

“You are going to be punished if you are late again.”

“Don’t talk to me that way!”

- “Let’s talk about what happened and what might work better in the future.”
- “Help me understand why you were late tonight.” “If you want to go out on Friday nights, you need to be back on time.”
- “I worry when you aren’t home at the time we agreed upon. What makes it difficult to make it home on time?”
- “When you talk to me that way, it’s hard for me to listen. I want to hear you. If you lower your volume, I can listen better

PHONE USE - Work together to set some rules around phone use and decide together on consequences when those rules are broken.

INSTEAD OF ...

TRY...

Threatening a child with phone removal

Saying, “You will lose your phone if you use it during the night.”

- Calmly remind them of your agreement.
- “We agreed that phone hours are from 7:30am till 7:30pm on school nights, and 9pm on weekends.” Are you having a hard time following through? Listen to why they are struggling with the agreement.

INAPPROPRIATE DRESS - Your child is learning about his/her sexuality and needs your guidance support on how their clothing may influence others. Don’t shame or humiliate. Accept that this will be an ongoing conversation.

INSTEAD OF SAYING...

TRY...

“You look ridiculous when you wear that.”

“Are you really wearing that?”

- “Dressing in a way that shows you deserve respect is important to me and people respecting you is important to me. I’m uncomfortable with what you are wearing.” Listen to why they selected this clothing.
- Respectfully, state your concern about what they are wearing. “I notice that this outfit makes you look much older than you are. I’m uncomfortable with that.” “Tell me what you like about this outfit.”



What Happens to Kids When Parents Fight

By [Diana Divecha](#) | January 26, 2016 | [0 Comments](#)

Conflict between parents is inevitable—but it doesn't have to hurt kids. Here's how to turn a disagreement into a positive lesson.

When I was a child, my parents' fights could suck the oxygen out of a room. My

mother verbally lashed my father, smashed jam jars, and made outlandish threats. Her outbursts froze me in my tracks. When my father fled to work, the garage, or the woods, I felt unprotected.



"Children are like emotional Geiger counters," says E. Mark Cummings, psychologist at Notre Dame University, who, along with colleagues, has published hundreds of papers over twenty years on the subject. Kids pay close attention to their parents' emotions for information about how safe they are in the family, Cummings says. When parents are destructive, the collateral damage to kids can last a lifetime.

My experience led me to approach marriage and parenthood with more than a little caution. As a developmental psychologist I knew that marital quarrelling was inevitable. According to family therapist Sheri Glucoft Wong, of Berkeley, California, just having children creates more conflicts, even for couples who were doing well before they became parents. "When kids show up, there's less time to get more done," she says. "All of a sudden you're not as patient, not as flexible, and it feels like there's more

at stake."

But I also knew that there had to be a better way to handle conflict than the one I grew up with. When my husband and I decided to have children, I resolved never to fight in front of them. "Conflict is a normal part of everyday experience, so it's not whether parents fight that is important," says Cummings. "It's how the conflict is expressed and resolved, and especially how it makes children feel, that has important consequences for children."

Watching some kinds of conflicts can even be good for kids—when children see their parents resolve difficult problems, Cummings says, they can grow up better off.

What is destructive conflict?

In their book [Marital Conflict and Children: An Emotional Security Perspective](#), Cummings and colleague Patrick Davies at the University of Rochester identify the kinds of destructive tactics that parents use with each other that harm children:

- Verbal aggression like name-calling, insults, and threats of abandonment;
- Physical aggression like hitting and pushing;
- Silent tactics like avoidance, walking out, sulking, or withdrawing;
- Capitulation—giving in that might look like a solution but isn't a true one.

When parents repeatedly use hostile strategies with each other, some children can become distraught, worried, anxious, and hopeless. Others may react outwardly with anger, becoming aggressive and developing behavior problems at home and at school. Children can develop sleep disturbances and health problems like headaches and stomachaches, or they may get sick frequently. Their stress can interfere with their ability to pay attention, which creates learning and academic problems at school. Most children raised in environments of destructive conflict have problems forming healthy, balanced relationships with their peers. Even sibling relationships are adversely affected—they tend to go to extremes, becoming overinvolved and overprotective of each other, or distant and disengaged.

Some research suggests that children as young as six months register their parents' distress. Studies that follow children over a long period of time show that children who were insecure in kindergarten because of their parents' conflicts were more likely to have adjustment problems in the seventh grade. A recent study showed that even 19-year-olds remained sensitive to parental conflict. Contrary to what one might hope, "Kids don't get used to it," says Cummings.

In a remarkable 20-year-old study of parental conflict and children's stress, anthropologists Mark Flinn and Barry England analyzed samples of the stress hormone cortisol, taken from children in an entire village on the east coast of the island of Dominica in the Caribbean. Children who lived with parents who constantly quarreled had higher average cortisol levels than children who lived in more peaceful families. As a result, they frequently became tired and ill, they played less, and slept poorly. Overall, children did not ever habituate, or "get used to," the family stress. In contrast, when children experienced particularly calm or affectionate contact, their cortisol decreased.

More recent studies show that while some children's cortisol spikes, other children's cortisol remains abnormally low and blunted, and these different cortisol patterns seem to be associated with different kinds of behavioral problems in middle childhood. Other physiological regulatory systems can become damaged as well, such as the sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the autonomic nervous system—these help us respond to a perceived threat but are also the "brakes" that rebalance and calm us.

In 2002, researchers Rena Repetti, Shelley Taylor, and Teresa Seeman at UCLA looked at 47 studies that linked children's experiences in risky family environments to later issues in adulthood. They found that those who grew up in homes with high levels of conflict had more physical health problems, emotional problems, and social problems later in life compared to control groups. As adults, they were more likely to report vascular and immune problems, depression and emotional reactivity, substance dependency, loneliness, and problems with intimacy.

Avoiding conflict is not a solution

Some parents, knowing how destructive conflict can be, may think that they can avoid affecting their children by giving in, or capitulating, in order to end an argument. But that's not an effective tactic. "We did a study on that," Cummings said. According to parents' records of

Conflict Tips

Courtesy of Sheri Glucoft Wong.

their fights at home and their children's reactions, kids' emotional responses to capitulation are “not positive.” Nonverbal anger and “stonewalling”—refusing to communicate or cooperate—are especially problematic.

“Our studies have shown that the long-term effects of parental withdrawal are actually more disturbing to kids' adjustment [than open conflict],” says Cummings. Why? “Kids understand hostility,” he explains. “It tells them what's going on and they can work with that. But when parents withdraw and become emotionally unavailable, kids don't know what's going on. They just know things are wrong. We're seeing over time, that parental withdrawal is actually a worse trajectory for kids. And it's harder on marital relationships too.”

Kids are sophisticated conflict analysts; the degree to which they detect emotion is much more refined than parents might guess. “When parents go behind closed doors and come out acting like they worked it out, the kids can detect that,” says Cummings. They'll see you're pretending. And pretending is actually worse in some ways. As a couple, you can't resolve a fight you're not acknowledging you're having. Kids will know it, you'll know it, but nothing will be made in terms of progress.”

On the other hand, he says, “When parents go behind closed doors and are not angry when they come out, the kids infer that things are worked out. Kids can tell the difference between a resolution that's been forced versus one that's resolved with positive emotion, and it matters.”

How to make conflict work

“Some types of conflicts are not disturbing to kids, and kids actually benefit from it,” says Cummings. When parents have mild to moderate conflict that involves support and compromise and positive emotions, children develop better social skills and self-esteem, enjoy increased emotional security, develop better relationships with parents, do better in school and have fewer psychological problems.

“When kids witness a fight and see the parents resolving it, they're actually happier than they were before they saw it,” says Cummings. “It reassures kids that parents can work things through. We know this by the feelings they show, what they say, and their behavior—they run off and play. Constructive conflict is associated with better outcomes over time.” Children feel more emotionally secure, their internal resources are freed up for positive developmental growth, and their own pro-social behavior toward others is enhanced. In fact, many child behavior problems can be solved not by focusing on the child, or even the parent-child relationship, but simply by improving the quality of the parents' relationship alone, which strengthens children's emotional security.

Even if parents don't completely resolve the problem but find a partial solution, kids will do

1. Lead with empathy:

Open the dialog by first letting the other person know that you see them, you get them, and you can put yourself in their shoes.

2. Give your partner the benefit of the doubt:

Assume the best intentions and help yourself remember that you love each other by adding an endearment.

3. Remember that you're on the same team.

Deal with issues by laying all the cards on the table and looking at them together to solve a dilemma rather than digging in on opposing sides. Then problem-solve with one another.

4. Constructive criticism only works when your partner can do something about what happened.

If the deadline for soccer signup was already missed, remedy the current situation as best as possible and talk about how to do it better next time. Blaming won't fix anything that's already happened.

5. Anything that needs to be said can be said with kindness.

Disapproval, disappointment, exasperation—all can be handled better with kindness.

fine. In fact, their distress seems to go down in proportion to their parents' ability to resolve things constructively. "Compromise is best, but we have a whole lot of studies that show that kids benefit from any progress toward resolution," says Cummings.

Both Cummings and Glucoft Wong agree that children can actually benefit from conflict—if parents manage it well. "Parents should model real life...at its best," says Glucoft Wong. "Let them overhear how people work things out and negotiate and compromise."

However, both also agree that some content is best kept private. Discussions about sex or other tender issues are more respectfully conducted without an audience. Glucoft Wong encourages parents to get the help they need to learn to communicate better—from parenting programs, from books, or from a therapist.

My own parents' conflict no longer has the hold on me that it once did, thanks to careful work and a loving marriage of my own of thirty years. Our two daughters are now in their twenties and secure in their own loving partnerships, and I hope that the lessons of their childhood hold. When they were preschoolers and interrupted our disagreements with concern, my husband and I would smile and reassure them with our special code: I held my fingers an inch apart and reminded them that the fight was this big, but that the love was this big—and I held my arms wide open.

About The Author

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What to Tell the Kids About a High-Conflict Co-Parent

© 2013 by Bill Eddy, LCSW, CFLS

Many parents have asked us about how to raise a child or children with a co-parent (whether a spouse, former spouse or unmarried partner) who is “high-conflict.” In other words, the co-parent frequently exhibits some or all of the following:

- *preoccupied with blaming others (often those closest to him/her, like the child or the other parent – or both)*
- *extreme behaviors (like yelling, hitting spouse or child, making false allegations, spreading rumors, hiding money, and so forth)*
- *all-or-nothing thinking (solutions to problems have to be all their way; they see some people (including themselves) as all-good and others (including you) as all-bad; may see one of his or her children as all-good and the other as all-bad)*
- *unmanaged emotions (screaming, crying, pleading) – but some don’t show this.*

If you are a parent who is asking this question, it is very important to avoid being accused of “bad-mouthing” the other parent, by speaking negatively about him or her to the children and providing too much information about adult issues, such as a court case. On the other hand, you want to protect your children from the blaming and uncontrolled behavior of the high-conflict co-parent, and to provide the children with coping skills and help them not blame themselves.

This article discusses one way parents can deal with both concerns, while helping your children to be resilient throughout their lives.

Teach Four Big Skills

Rather than talking to the kids about the “high-conflict” co-parent (and you should never use that term around the children), talk about “four big skills for life.” These skills are:

- flexible thinking
- managed emotions
- moderate behaviors
- checking ourselves to see if we’re using these skills regularly

Tell your kids that these are four big skills that will help them with friends, help them get a good job someday, and may help them be community leaders someday, if they want. These four skills help in any relationship, whether it’s someone you like or someone you don’t like. You can explain this to a child of almost any age, starting at least at age four, if you put it in simple terms.

Then, in daily life you can ask them if they noticed other people who used these skills in solving problems, or if you used any of these four skills in solving a problem. For example: “Did you notice how that guy at the store was frustrated, but he stayed calm and listened to the clerk tell him where to find what he wanted? Would you say he was managing his emotions?”

“Did you notice how that guy on TV was just yelling at a store clerk. Would you say he was managing his emotions? Did he seem to get what he wanted? No, he didn’t. How do you think he could have used managed emotions to help solve his problem?”

An example you could share about yourself: “Today I was real frustrated by sitting still in a traffic jam. But I told myself to think about things I was looking forward to this week – like your birthday party, and seeing my sister, and a movie I want to see someday. I used my flexible thinking and managed my emotions. But it wasn’t easy. I kept having bad thoughts about the other drivers in front of me, but then I chose my happy thoughts again. Did you have any frustrating times today that you dealt with by using your flexible thinking?”

Help Your Child Cope with Friends

Once you’ve started to have these casual discussions with your child, you can teach these skills when they have a conflict with a friend. For example: “Mom/Dad, this kid at school says he hates me! I feel like punching him in the nose! He/she used to be my best friend!”

Then, you could say something like: “Oh, that’s too bad. I remember when that happened to me. I can understand how angry you must have felt. But I’m glad you didn’t punch him/her in the nose. Have you thought of what you can do instead? Maybe you can talk with him/her, after you’ve both calmed down. Try to use your flexible thinking to come up with ideas of what went wrong and how you can solve it.”

You can also do this when conflicts come up between siblings, and especially praise them when they solve their own problems. You could say: “I’m really glad that you both were able to solve this problem on your own. You’re pretty good problem-solvers, especially when you use your flexible thinking like you just did.” Catch them when they’re doing well. (You get more of what you pay attention to.)

Help Your Child Cope with Your Co-Parent

Now, since you have taken an educational approach to teaching these four big skills, you can start using them when things happen with your co-parent. Suppose he or she was unreasonably angry at your child, and the child came to you to complain. Rather than saying that your co-parent is a jerk, you could say: “Remember, some people have a harder time managing their emotions than other people. When you’re ready, let’s do some flexible thinking about ways you might deal with situations like that in the future. In the meantime, we can manage our own emotions, even though some other people can’t.”

By speaking in this “teaching skills” way about the other parent, you avoid “bad-mouthing” him or her, while giving your child skills for resilience. This way, you can’t be blamed for saying anything specifically about your co-parent. Instead, you have kept it as a general lesson and still provided a discussion about what to do in the future in “situations like that.”

By teaching the four big skills for life, your child can learn lessons that will last into adulthood, even during the most difficult times of childhood – including separation and divorce.



COLLATERAL SOURCE INFORMED CONSENT

I have been court-appointed to serve as a Parenting Coordinator for the ///// family. My task is to work as an educator, communication facilitator, coach, mediator, and when needed as an arbitrator. I have been told that you may have information that would be useful to me in preparing my recommendation and/or binding decision on a child related matter where agreement between the coparenting partners has not yet been reached.

Accompanying this Informed Consent are two Authorizations to Release Information, one each signed by both parents which authorize us to communicate with one another either orally or in writing.

Because we may speak or communicate from time to time, I want you to be aware that if you agree to talk with me, notes will be taken. It is likely that the information provided by you either through your written responses or verbal communications will be shared orally and in writings that both parents, and perhaps others, will read. You must also be aware that if information provided by you is utilized, you will be identified as the source of that information. And, if my recommendation or decision is appealed by one or both coparents, it is also possible that one or both of them may ask you to testify about the information you provided to me.

Working with coparents in situations such as this is an extremely difficult task. I am to some degree dependent upon the willingness of people such as you to share information with me. I recognize that sharing information is difficult. I ask, nevertheless, that you recognize that the best interests of these children are served by a thorough inquiry that is based upon truthful information obtained from people such as yourself.

Please understand that what you communicate, *is confidential* [I will not discuss what you write or speak about it outside of the presence of those involved directly in the Parenting Coordination process] BUT *it is not privileged* [I can and will speak about it, report it, and/or use it with those of us who are engaged on the Parenting Coordination process]. So, if there is something you do not want to be attributed to you or repeated please do not talk or write about it in the first place. Thank you for your time and thoughtfulness.

You are encouraged to consult with an attorney if you have any questions or concerns with regard to the information provided in this consent form.



Thank you for your participation. I look forward to communicating with you.

Cordially,
Tony Pelusi

By signing this agreement in the space provided below I acknowledge having read this document and attest that I further understand and agree to all of the conditions contained herein.

Signature of Collateral Resource

Date: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

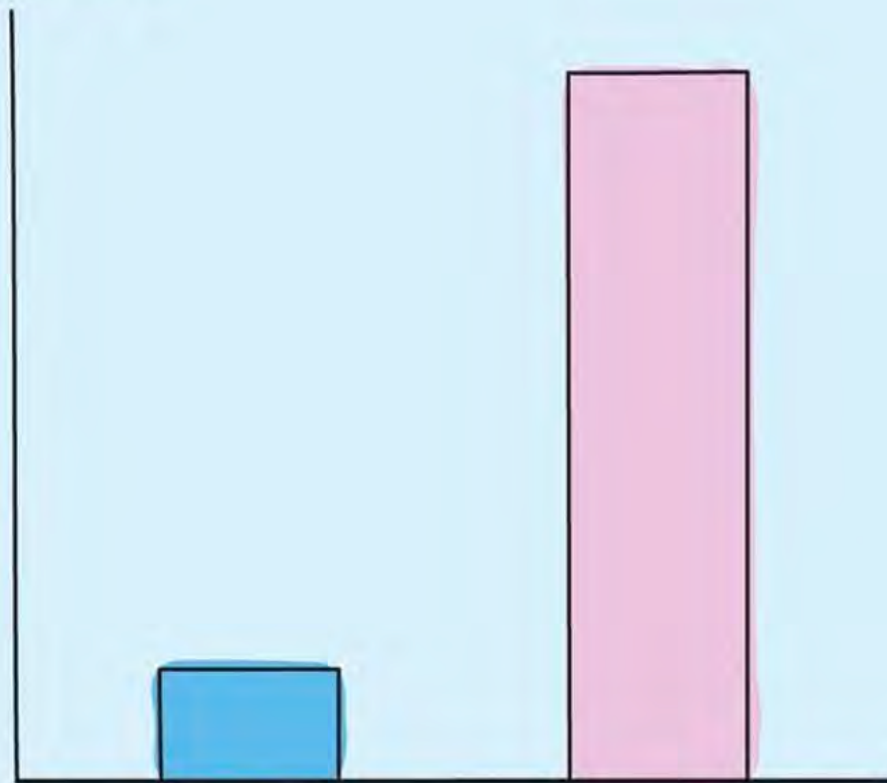
ULYSSES CONTRACT

Particularly when learning new behaviors one parent or the other may act in a way that is not in conformity with a provision of the parenting plan, an agreement between the parents, or a decision of the PC. Considering the Spiral Theory of Change, in fairness to both parents, and to support the efficacy of the PC process it is helpful to allow each parent to have input and to determine *in advance* what the possible consequences for such behavior could look like.

Both parents are invited to propose terms for this Ulysses Contract. Here are some example of actions that have proved effective at gaining compliance that have been used in other engagements:

Discuss	• PC talks with noncomplying parent about violation and to explore reasons – only noncomplying parent pays for PC time
Warnings	• Delivered verbally by PC to one parent individually or in the presence of their CPP • Delivered in writing via OFW – only noncomplying parent pays for PC time • Delivered in writing to the parent as part of a formal decision • ADD OTHER AGREED UPON WARNINGS, IF ANY???
Possible Sanctions	• Shifting driving or other responsibilities for child transitions • Contribution to an education fund for the benefit of the child(ren) in the amount of \$/// per violation • Contribution to a charity of the CPP's choosing • Reallocation of fees for PC services related to issue • ADD OTHER AGREED UPON SANCTIONS, IF ANY???
Natural Consequences	• When a timely response is not provided, the requesting parent may be permitted to make a unilateral decision on the matter at hand – subject to PC discretion • Compensation to ones CPP for child care services and/or other out of pocket expenses when one parent is out of compliance with parenting plan, agreement, or decision • You get taken to Court – and risk paying all fees for both parents!

HOW MUCH
CONTROL
YOU HAVE

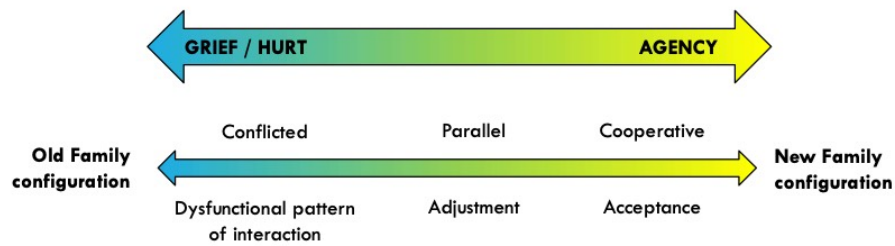


THEIR
ACTIONS

YOUR
RESPONSE



@LIZ AND MOLLIE



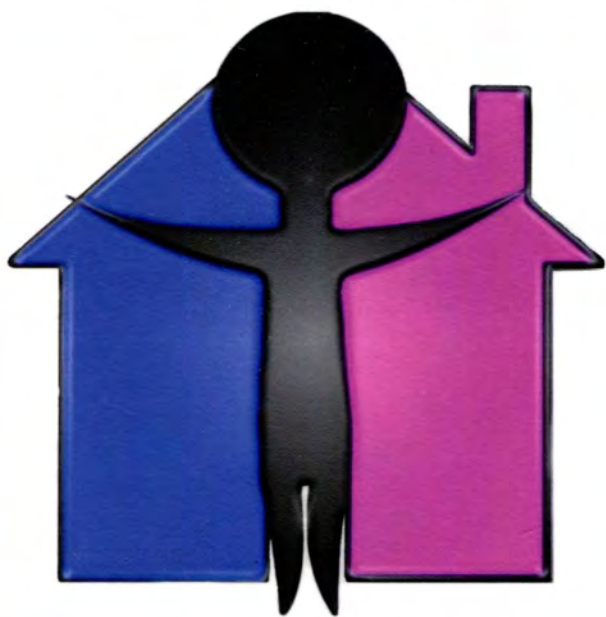
There are 3 parallel processes occurring:




 For the individual, for the parent, and for the child

MAY THERE BE NO MORE OF THIS TYPE OF THINKING:





Between Two Homes

A Coparenting Handbook

"A great tool for helping families raise children between their two homes." — Jennifer Leister, LPC, Author of *Meet Max: Learning about Divorce from a Basset Hound's Perspective*

**Bradley S. Craig
LMSW-IPR, CFLE**

relationships is because of Sam and her experiences with him.

Pride can cloud the mind and interfere with your ability to see the reality of situations. Because pride is self-focused, it is easy to ignore the needs of your child when your thoughts are distorted and your amygdalae are firing off adrenaline.

Let's say your child is out on the soccer field sweating up a storm. The coach calls a break, and you reach into the cooler to pull out a bottle of water for your child. On the other side of the cooler, your coparent arrives with his or her new girlfriend or boyfriend. How should you respond?

No, the answer is not, "The water bottle becomes a projectile."

When you meet the new girlfriend or boyfriend, reach out your hand and say "Hi, I'm _____."

Why do this? Hopefully, you got the answer right...

"For your child."

If you instead start an argument or just ignore that person, your behavior will put your child in a very difficult, uncomfortable, and embarrassing situation. Five years later, your child might not even remember that other person, but your child will remember how embarrassing your behavior was at the soccer game.

By feeling one way but putting your pride aside and acting differently, you protect your child from your unhealthy emotions. You role model for your child healthy interactions and send the message, "You are important to me."

Obstacle 7: New Relationships

When should you introduce your child to a new significant other? I recommend you don't if you are still married. Bringing new relationships into the picture too quickly can negatively affect the coparenting relationship and put emotional strain on your child. Going through a

divorce is a transitional period for both parents, as well as your child, and new relationships can introduce a new set of problems.

Prior to separation, your child relies on you not only as a parent but also sees you and your coparent as a couple and a united front: "my parents." Once both parents separate, your child will benefit from having time to form an attached relationship with just you single parenting them when he or she is with you in your home.

One concern of exposing your child to a new relationship before you are divorced is that you are teaching him or her that it is okay to have affairs, which may not be a precedent you want to set for your child's future. By jumping quickly into a new relationship, you may teach your child that he or she *needs* to be in a relationship at all times. This lesson may increase the child's likelihood of becoming codependent and may encourage him or her to jump between relationships, instead of learning how to be independent and take time to heal between relationships.

It is understandable that after a separation, you may feel lonely or desire the company of someone you find attractive. However, if you bring a significant other into your relationship with your child too soon, you may be giving your child the message that he or she is not your priority. Most children need individual attention to help them adjust to transitions such as separation, having two homes, and divorce. Your desire to get immediately involved in another relationship may signal to your child that his or her needs are not that important to you.

Many children have reconciliation fantasies and hope that someday there will be one home instead of two, with both parents living together again. Seeing one of his or her parents dating soon after the separation can be very confusing and frustrating to a child.

One of the biggest complaints parents have after a separation is how little time they spend with their child. Most of us did not have a child so that the child could spend almost half of his or her life growing up in another home. A better time to be involved in intimate relationships

is when you are not with your child, rather than during your parenting time. In other words, if you see your child on the first, third, and fifth weekends of a month, then if you choose to date, do so on the second and fourth weekends, or on days of the week that do not involve your parenting time.

Remember, you are one of the role models for your child's future relationships. During the divorce and for several months following the divorce is a time to focus on healing yourself, distancing yourself from codependent behaviors, and meeting the needs of your child during the time your child is with you.

You may think it is time to move on, but think about your child, who is not in the same place you are. Remember the stages of grief? Your child experiences them too, but somewhat differently than you do. How children experience and react to grief is discussed in Part 2, Chapter 6, and it's important to understand what's happening to your child during this process.

Your child's family and living circumstances are changing dramatically. It takes time for your child to adjust, to heal, and to feel secure in his or her new living circumstances. Your child needs you to role model that you are capable of single parenting alone. Your child also needs you to help him or her let go of any dreams of having both coparents in one home again. You can teach your child:

- That you are a capable parent who can care for him or her without needing to have a lover by your side during this transitional period.
- To be independent rather than codependent.
- That love takes time, healing, and patience. That listening to your head is more important than listening to your heart or the rush of your hormones.

You may ask: How long should I wait before introducing or reintroducing my children to a new relationship post-divorce?

- a. Right away to see how your lover responds to your

- child and how your child responds to him or her.
- b. After three to six months of actively dating.
- c. Depends on the situation.
- d. After you have asked your child if it's okay.

The correct answer is B. I recommended that you actively date at least three to six months prior to exposing or reintroducing your child to a new relationship. Active dating is *not* chatting on the Internet or talking on the phone; it is being physically in the presence of that person on a regular, ongoing basis so that you can closely observe and truly get to know that person. Anyone can appear wonderful online or on the phone or even pretend to be someone that they're not.

So why wait? At one extreme, suppose the person is great with children and your child grows attached to that person and/or his or her children. Unfortunately, you didn't take the time to get to know that person well, and the relationship soon ends. Now your child has just lost someone else he or she cares about right after going through the pain of a divorce.

At the other extreme, suppose the person you want to introduce to your child is a pedophile, a batterer, or has other serious problems that he or she is able to mask temporarily. Unacceptable traits typically don't come to light during the first three months of dating because everyone is on his or her best behavior.

Consider three reasons a person might want to meet your child too quickly:

- He or she wants to abuse your child and you look like you might allow that to happen.
- He or she wants to use your child to win you over.
- He or she doesn't have malicious intentions, but doesn't understand how quickly your child can become attached and doesn't understand the impact it will have on your child if the relationship falls apart.

It's always in the best interests of your child to not

introduce someone new until you have thoroughly vetted that person and are certain that the relationship will be a lasting and healthy one.

After the divorce is finalized, you may meet the right person not only for you, but for your child. A new relationship does not have to be an obstacle to the coparenting relationship. Stepfamily members can be wonderful, supportive additions to the family.

Your child can never have too many emotionally healthy people who love him or her, and a stepparent, stepgrandparents, and stepsiblings can be a huge bonus to the family. Stepparents can be an asset to the home and the coparenting relationship.

If you and your significant other focus on your child's interests, a stepfamily can present great opportunities. However, realize that if you choose to remarry or share a home with someone, you are not creating a new family. You are instead adding to your child's already existing family. The core family for your child is his or her parents, and anyone else who comes along can either be a great extension to the family or can create more chaos and conflict.

Bottom line: Look for someone who not only meets your needs, but who also complements your child's already existing family.

Unfortunately, new relationships and stepparents can sometimes be a huge obstacle to the coparenting relationship and to your child's best interests. Be alert to new relationships or stepparents who encourage dividing the maternal and paternal parts of a child's family, and recall the previous sections regarding "ears" and "mouths," the coparenting supporters and coparenting detractors.

If you are selective, you will find relationships and even possibly a stepparent who values your relationship with your coparent, values your child, and does not want to replace your role or the other parent's role. Such a person will be secure enough in his or her relationship with you to encourage you to work directly with your coparent and will see himself or herself as part of the team in helping the coparenting relationship thrive.

There are plenty of fish in the sea, but once you have a child and are coparenting, you need to be careful where you cast your net and extra choosy when deciding which fish to keep and which to toss back.

Obstacle 8: Special Topics

Substance Abuse

It is important for children to be safe when under the care of a parent. Abuse of alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription medication impairs a parent's ability to make timely and appropriate decisions during his or her parenting time, regulate his or her emotions (Barnard and McKeganey 2004), and effectively coparent with the other home.

If substance abuse is an issue for one of the coparents, a parallel parenting arrangement may serve the children better. If a case goes to trial, the court may order supervised parenting time, or other safety measures may be put in place to protect children from witnessing substance abuse or suffering from the impaired parenting of a parent under the influence.

Substance abuse may prohibit a successful coparenting relationship. It is important that the parent abusing substances get help and that his or her coparent understand the complex issues related to substance abuse.

The following links may be helpful:

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

www.helpguide.org/topics/addiction.htm

Mental Illness

Mental illness takes many forms, affects individuals differently, and appears in various degrees of severity. However, a severely mentally ill parent places a child at

Exercise 19: New Relationships

From Chapter 3

One concern of exposing your child to a new relationship before you are divorced is that _____, which may not be a precedent you want to set for your child's future. By jumping quickly into a new relationship, you may teach your child that he or she _____.

This lesson may increase the child's likelihood of becoming _____ and may encourage him or her to jump between relationships, instead of learning how to be _____ and take time to heal between relationships.

Your desire to get immediately involved in another relationship may signal to your child that _____.

Your child also needs you to help him or her let go of any dreams of having both coparents in one home again. You can teach your child:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How long should I wait before introducing or reintroducing my children to a new relationship post-divorce? The book recommends:

- a. Right away to see how your lover responds to your child and how your child responds to him or her.
- b. After three to six months of actively dating.
- c. Depends on the situation.
- d. After you have asked your child if it's okay.

The correct answer is ____.

So why wait? At one extreme, suppose the person is great with children and _____

Unfortunately, you didn't take _____
and the relationship soon ends. Now your child has just _____.

At the other extreme, suppose the person you want to introduce to your child is a pedophile, a batterer, or has other serious problems that he or she is able to mask temporarily. Unacceptable traits typically don't come to light during the first three months of dating because everyone is on his or her best behavior.



Consider three reasons a person might want to meet your child too quickly:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Notes: _____



Marriage as a Third Entity

I often introduce clients to the idea of the 'Third Entity' that self-constructs whenever two [or more] people enter into relationship. Something that most people miss is the reality that, just like in any relationship there are three entities in a marriage relationship: in gender normative language they are: a husband, a wife, and the marriage; three distinct realities.

The unnoticed truth is that the children of a marriage clearly relate to all three entities of that relationship – the mother, the father, and the relationship. The children can easily tell when their mother is speaking to them as mother ["please help me carry the groceries into the house."], and when she is speaking to them on behalf of the parental "we" ["your father and I do not want you to stay out that late tonight."]

When a divorce occurs, the children grieve the loss of that Third Entity, the relationship that raised them. After the divorce, the mother may say to the children, "I love you just as much as I have always loved you." The father may say to the children, "I love you just as much as I have always loved you." Yet the children still grieve. *They grieve because the parental relationship, the Third Entity that they have related to and loved all of their lives, has died and is henceforth lost to them. The parental "we" [the marriage itself] no longer can express its love, support, and care for them.*

A therapist who works with children discovered how this model could be quite useful as a therapeutic tool with children.

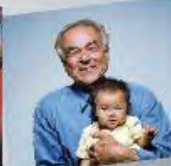
I will be using this model to help a teenage boy deal with his parents' very nasty divorce, even though their divorce was finalized years ago. His loss of the "we" of his parents truly does represent the loss of his foundation and base of security. He is now conflicted about his alliance with them. We are working on the idea that it is ok for him to develop separate relationships with each, and how each relationship can enhance and enrich him in new and different ways.

Once you begin to see a marriage as a Third Entity, you realize how it so often goes unrecognized and unacknowledged. And how important it is for divorcing parents to be acutely attentive to the impact of their decision on their children

Adapted from *Teilhard de Chardin On Love: Evolving Human Relationships* by Louis M Savary and Patricia H. Berne



ASSOCIATION OF
FAMILY AND
CONCILIATION COURTS



eNEWS

VOL.10 ISSUE 2

Ten Tips to Save Money Using Your Parenting Coordinator

Annette Burns, JD, Phoenix, Arizona

A PC is assigned to your case and you've paid a substantial amount of money to get started with that person. Between you and the other parent, you have brought somewhere between two and ten issues to the PC. How can you save some money *and* get the most out of your parenting coordinator to get those issues resolved?

1. Pick your battles. Just as you do with your children, decide if an issue is really something to fight about. Have a serious conversation with yourself about whether you want to spend money and time arguing over an hour of parenting time here or there. There's nothing wrong with first raising an issue with the PC, discussing it a bit, and then saying, "Never mind, let's remove that one from the list."

2. Determine if your position is logical and reasonable. If your position is that the other parent should do 100% of the driving for the children 100% of the time, ask yourself: is that logical? Is it reasonable to think that a PC and, later, a judge will have one parent do all of the driving? Is it logical that the judge will give one parent every Christmas Day with the children and deprive the other parent of ever having a Christmas Day?

3. Make sure the fight isn't costing you more than the issue. Although parenting coordinators don't usually handle financial things, some issues creep into money matters. If the parents are arguing about whether Johnny's baseball glove is at Mom's or Dad's house and who failed to get the glove to the practice field, involving the PC in those discussions will easily cost more than the glove (or tennis shoes, or school book). Asking the PC to get involved in issues of clothing left at the other parent's house will eat up money even more quickly. This is a variation of "pick your battles." Determine whether it's cheaper to buy a second school book or pair of shoes, rather than spend the money on the PC.

4. Use trusted friends to discuss the things above. Don't pick a friend or family member who will agree with you on everything. Choose someone whose opinion you trust and who you would consult with about an important decision like changing

neighborhoods or jobs. Choose someone who has stayed neutral between you and the other parent. Bounce your ideas off of that person: is this a battle I should continue? Is my position logical and reasonable? Ask for real, truthful feedback.

5. Communicate with the other parent about the issue at hand in brief informative emails, or with brief questions about the issue. BRIEF is the key component here. If the other parent asks for something that infuriates you, go ahead and write your scathing, outraged, three-page response—but don't send it to the PC or the other parent. Send it to yourself, or that trusted friend, or even your mother, but keep it in your small circle. ~~Sending it only to the PC is an option, but it's an option that will probably cost you money.~~ After writing the full outraged response, sit down (a few hours or a day later) and edit it down to: "I don't agree to give up my parenting time on Fathers' Day this year," and stop. Saying more isn't helpful and will cost you money.

6. If you can't stop yourself from writing and sending the long, drawn-out emails that re-hash what happened last Easter and state what an inconsiderate bum the other parent is, **then carefully review the bills you receive from the PC.** Make a point of adding up how much those emails cost you. If you realize that sending those emails cost you as much as a two-day admission to Disneyland, or enough to have your car repaired, or enough to pay for a nice children's birthday party, it may give you incentive to change your behavior.

7. Read your parenting plan and all court orders that might cover the issue. An amazing number of parenting coordination clients simply haven't read their court orders. Getting the PC involved means that you are paying someone to read your documents to you. If the issue is where the children will be for Thanksgiving this year, you need to find and read every court document that might mention Thanksgiving. These documents could be your parenting plan (sometimes called a joint custody agreement or joint legal decision-making agreement), or it could be in an order issued directly by the court. Read everything, thoroughly, before involving the PC.

8. Make sure your parenting coordinator has all your court orders and parenting plans. If you've been back to court several times, there may be several orders or modifications or a single order that mentions only one issue, like summer vacations. Organize all your parenting plans and orders and list them by date for the parenting coordinator to make sure they have everything. The court does not usually provide the parenting coordinator with everything, and having the PC track down multiple orders is an unnecessary expense.

9. Create a calendar. If the issues between you and the other parent involve a certain period of time, such as summer vacation, or the weeks from mid-November through the re-start of school in January, create a calendar showing who the children are with each

of those days. That's what your PC is going to have to do, eventually, and if you start with one, it simplifies the process and may even end it. ~~Pull up Google Calendar, or your own calendaring program,~~ and fill in your understanding of the schedule for the weeks in question, including all exchange days and times, and list all holidays and special days. Then propose that specific calendar to the other parent and ask, "Do you agree with this? If you don't, tell me what parts you don't agree with."

10. If the calendar and exchange of emails does not resolve the issue without the PC's help, then organize everything for the PC. Telling the PC "My position is stated in all the earlier emails" is an expensive statement, because now the PC has to go through many emails to find your position. That is done at your cost. To reduce that cost, briefly re-state your position in one organized email. If the issue involves a long period of time, use a calendar to re-state your position. Refer the PC to the specific dates of the emails and court orders and the specific sections of a parenting plan that should be reviewed by the PC in making this decision. The more specific you are, with page and paragraph numbers, the less time your PC will spend looking for information.

Annette Burns has practiced law in Arizona since 1984, specializing in family law, and focusing on acting as mediator, arbitrator, family law master and parenting coordinator in family law cases. Her background and experience includes over 28 years of client representation in divorces, property valuations and divisions, and actions involving spousal maintenance, child custody and parenting time, paternity, and child support. Since 1994, she has been a certified family law specialist in Arizona. Annette is a Fellow of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (AAML), and is a board member and secretary of the AFCC Board of Directors. This piece was originally published January 14, 2015, as [Nine Tips to Save Money Using Your Parenting Coordinator](http://www.heyannette.com) on her blog www.heyannette.com.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

Chapter 1

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.

~ Portia Nelson ~

I CAN

Leave a marriage
Engage with my coparent
Serve our children's best interests
Commit to being flexible
Change for the better
Heal from my past
Outgrow someone
Rest and recharge
Grieve

AND STILL

- + appreciate the good things about it
- + maintain healthy boundaries
- + accept that my CPP does as well
- + not see it as 'defeat' or 'giving in'
- + still have work to do
- + wish things were different
- + still want the best for them
- + be productive
- + welcome joy

FORGIVENESS

- Defining forgiveness
 - *Decisional forgiveness* is renouncing hostility against the offender, not seeking revenge or punishment, not ruminating about the injustice of the offense(s) and placing blame; giving up an entitlement to hold resentment.
 - *Emotional forgiveness* is giving out undeserved compassion and generosity, feeling that your emotions have become less negative and more positive toward the person who offended or harmed you.
 - *Unforgiveness* is chronic anger, hostility, resentment, bitterness, fear, and sadness; a grudge carried in response to the hurt.

Mistaken Ideas about Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is a religious rather than psychological phenomena.
- Forgiveness is not complete if the forgiver does not have emotional peace.
- Forgiveness means that you return the relationship with the offender to the pre-offense state.
- Forgiveness means acting in a weak manner.
- Forgiveness is limiting assertiveness or giving up control.
- Forgiveness is reconciling with someone who shows no motivation to change hurtful behavior.
- Forgiveness means informing someone they are being forgiven.
- Forgiveness is not a moral virtue centered on justice. Justice solves problems. Forgiveness deals with the sometimes awful aftermath of injustices.

Forgiveness is *Not*

- Acquiescing—allowing harmful actions to continue
- Condoning—not recognizing any harm or unfairness
- Forgetting—people rarely forget; rather, they reframe memories
- Denying, or excusing, what happened
- Reconciling—possible but not essential
- Overlooking the consequences or giving up on justice
- Ranting amnesty or pardon; or
- Resigning oneself to what cannot be changed.

Why Forgive?

- Health: Less physical stress, better immune system functioning, and less risk of heart problems.
- Mental Health: fewer negative feelings; more feelings of control and freedom.
- Relationship: no grudge intrudes in the relationships; able to work toward rebuilding trust and relationship repair.
- Relationships always include conflict and hurt; forgiveness is a learned skill for healing relationships.
- Self-Concept: I want to be a kind, loving person.
- Forgiveness is learning how to cope with life's injustices and unfairness.
- Compassion and forgiveness are important spiritual practices.

Who Are Your Forgiveness Heroes?

- Jesus
- Buddha
- Mahatma Gandhi
- Nelson Mandela
- Mother Theresa 
- In your family
- Among your friends

Fly Loose

The Rev. Cameron Trimble is an author, pastor, and leader in the United Church of Christ. As a pilot, she honed her wisdom for navigating the turbulence of transitional times:

“We are going to hit some turbulence ahead,” [my flying instructor] went on, “and you will learn something about your airplane.... If you tighten your grip on the yoke, you reduce the aerodynamics of your aircraft. You, as the pilot, actually make the flight less safe, steady, and stable. So, remember: When the going gets rough, fly loose....”

Our world today is nothing if not swirling, turbulent wind tossing us around. [Recently], we have experienced economic meltdown, climate countdown, racial throwdown, political breakdown, technology showdown, and religious letdown. [*Tony here: and in the case of my clients the arduous dissolution of a marriage.*] We are living through the breakdown and breaking open of much that has defined modern [*Tony again: read “our/my” life*] life.

In the face of such extraordinary transition, it is natural to look for solutions to our problems.... We tightly grip the yoke of our families, businesses, government, and communities, trying to regain control of people and systems that feel broken and dangerous to our safety and survival. Of course, no amount of control will create the conditions needed to traverse these rough winds of change.

The best course of action then is to “fly loose.”

May this be helpful.

Tony

Taking Things Personally

BY [MADISYN TAYLOR](#)

Try not to take everything personally, things that people say and do don't always have anything to do with you.

Every time you interact with others, you have the choice to listen to, acknowledge, and let go of their words, or you can take what they are saying personally. Taking things personally is often the result of perceiving a person's actions or words as an affront or slight. In order to take something personally, you must read negative intent in an individual's words or actions. But what people do and say has no bearing upon you and is usually based on their own experiences, emotions, and perceptions. If you attempt to take what they do or say personally, you may end up feeling hurt without reason.

If you are tempted to take a comment or action personally, creating some distance between yourself and the other person can help you. Try to determine what is at the root of your feelings. Ask yourself if the other person's words or actions are just reinforcing some insecurity within you or if you can really be sure that an offense was intended. You may even want to ask them what they meant. Finally, put yourself in the other person's shoes. Instead of taking their words as the truth, or as a personal affront, remember that whatever was said or done is based on their opinion and is more reflective of what is going on inside of them, rather than having anything to do with you. You may have been an easy target for someone having a bad day, and their comments may have been offered with no ill intentions.

When you recognize that what anyone says or does doesn't necessarily have anything to do with you, you will no longer feel hurt or attacked. While it's easy to take things personally, you should never let anyone's perceptions or actions affect how you see yourself or your worth. Your life is personal to you, and it is up to you to influence your own value and sense of well-being.

These Eight Constants originate from the domain of Quakers

First. The individuals, individually, and the group, collectively, must share a common intention.

Second. The individuals and the group may have goals, but they may not have cherished outcomes.

Third. The individuals in the group must accept that their goals may not be reached in their lifetimes and be okay with this.

Fourth. The individuals in the group must accept that they may not get either credit or acknowledgment for what they have done and be authentically okay with this.

Fifth. Each person in the group, regardless of gender, religion, race, or culture, must enjoy fundamental equality, even as the various roles in the hierarchy of the effort are respected.

Sixth. The individuals in the group must foreswear violence in word, act, or thought.

Seventh. The individuals in the group and the group itself must make their private selves consistent with their public postures.

Eighth. The individuals in the group and the group collectively must always act from the beingness of life-affirming integrity



SALMON

What if I told you that the humble salmon is the greatest teacher when it comes to fresh beginnings?

Read this story all the way to the end and see if you can spot the hidden lessons.

Let's begin...

The salmon faces a seemingly impossible and frightening journey into the unknown.

Driven by a desire to push on and on, the salmon bursts forward with all its might, fighting the current upstream.

At the end of the stream is a calm, shallow pool, the perfect sanctuary for laying eggs and starting anew.

To make it to the pool, the sanctuary for the fresh start, the salmon must overcome unknown obstacles in its path...

Seemingly never-ending, powerful currents of water...

Launching into the unknown over waterfalls...

Relying on innate "gut feelings" and faith to propel them forward throughout the journey...

One of two things happen to the salmon as it begins this journey to this sanctuary pool.

Either it freezes up, is paralyzed with indecision, doesn't act in time, and remains stuck in the murky currents where the river collides with the sea...

Or the salmon sees that the timing is right, the water is high, and **now** is the best time to make a move for the journey up river to the sanctuary pool.

With persistence, focus, and a clear picture in its mind's eye, the salmon overcomes all odds and makes it all the way there, arriving peacefully, beginning its fresh start in the serene, safe, and tranquil waters.

So how does the salmon relate to your fresh beginning?



The salmon is facing a seemingly endless and impossible journey, alone, and navigating unknown waters, but there's a serene sense of drive, hope, and clarity fueling the salmon forward.

Heading toward a peaceful end — and a new beginning.

A fresh start that is essential to surviving and thriving.

And the journey, no matter how challenging in the moment, that was well worth the upstream battle to get there.

All it took was for the salmon to spot the opportunity to start the journey.

We are about to begin working together in a parenting coordination relationship. It is our shared desire to work in the best interests of the innocents, your children. You will be exposed to many new and different thoughts as I support you in transitioning yours into a respectful business-like coparenting partnership.

Like the salmon you will only reach your goal with desire, commitment, and faith. Your willingness to *CHANGE* by adopting the policies, guidelines, and procedures you will be introduced to is *essential to your success*. And, you must be prepared to radically accept that your coparent is neither ready nor willing to match your efforts. So What! You are doing this for the well-being of you and your children anyway.

But, don't believe me!

The choice is yours....you can reject this proposition, that which I have to offer, and stay stuck and suffering.....

Or,

You can bravely experiment with what is being offered to you and...let your experience be your guide.

Thank you for your willingness to swim up this stream in partnership with me.

Unlike the salmon, you do not need to make this journey alone.

Tony

Talking to Grief

Ah, grief, I should not treat you
like a homeless dog
who comes to the back door
for a crust, for a meatless bone.
I should trust you.

I should coax you
into the house and give you
your own corner,
a worn mat to lie on,
your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been living
under my porch.
You long for your real place to be readied
before winter comes. You need
your name, your collar and tag. You need
the right to warn off intruders,
to consider
my house your own
and me your person
and yourself
my own dog.

--Denise Levertov

WORKING TOGETHER

We shape our self to fit this world
and by the world are shaped again.

The visible and the invisible working
together in common cause,
to produce the miraculous.

I am thinking of the way the intangible
air passed at speed round a shaped wing
easily holds our weight.

So may we, in this life trust
to those elements we have yet to see or imagine,
and look for the true shape of our own self,
by forming it well to the great
intangibles about us.

David Whyte

What are we to do at such a threshold moment?

In moments of transition, we are simply to *be*.

We are to pause
and acknowledge
that a transition is taking place.

Instead of seeking to abruptly pass through a threshold, we are to tarry.

A new reality is emerging, but we cannot see beyond the threshold.

All we know is that we exist in this moment,
where everything is in transition.
We may experience a new way of being, but
we cannot yet sense what it will look like.

~ Brandan J. Robertson

Between stimulus and response there is space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

- Viktor Frankl

What's the Hard Part?

A useful way to get in sync.

“What’s the hard part” is a question that each partner should be able to answer. But you won’t find the answer until you ask the question.

You might discover that one person may think the hard part is directly related to what *they* do all day. And you might discover that the other insists that the hard part has nothing to do with what they do all day – even if it does.

What is the difficult work that, if it went well, would transform the impact of this coparenting partnership for the benefit of your children?

Where are the behaviors worth focusing on, the things that would be difficult to overcome if they are not changed?

It’s up to each CPP to be clear about what the hard part really is – the solvable problem that if it were solved would make a significant difference for the partnership.

Almost all the cycles involved in creating and building something aren’t particularly difficult. They are important, certainly; we can’t ride the bike unless it has wheels. But wheels aren’t hard to find and purchase at a fair price.

Each CPP’s awareness and focus on the hard parts dramatically shifts the probability of your children having the opportunity to enjoy their childhood and adult lives.

Books:

Carter, D. K. (2015). Coparenting After Divorce: A GPS for Healthy Kids. BookBaby. ISBN-13: 9781936268887.

Pedro-Carroll, Joanne. (2010). Putting Children First: Proven Parenting Strategies for Helping Children Thrive Through Divorce. Avery. ISBN-13: 978-1583334010.

Pruett, Kyle D. (2000). Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for your Child. Free Press. ISBN-13: 978-0767907378.

Pruett, K. & Pruett, M.K. (2010). Partnership parenting: How men and women parent differently-Why it helps your kids and can strengthen your marriage. Perseus. ISBN-13: 9780786745982.

Ricci, I. (2012). The coparenting toolkit. California: Custody & CoParenting Solutions. ISBN-13: 978-0-9827295-0-2.

Sullivan, M., Moran, J., & Sullivan, T. (2015). Overcoming the co-parenting trap: Essential parenting skills when a child resists a parent. BookBaby. ISBN-13: 978-0692407998.

Website Information and Tools:

Postdivorce

Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (<http://afccnet.org>).

Our Family Wizard (<http://ourfamilywizard.com>).

For Dads Especially

Life of Dad (<https://www.lifeofdad.com>).

National Center For Fathering (<http://fathers.com>).

For Moms Especially

MOMS (Mothers Offering Mothers Support) Club (<https://www.momsclub.org>).

Divorced Moms (<https://www.DivorcedMoms.com>).

Parents as a Team

The Center for Parenting Education (<https://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/focus-parents/partners-parenting-working-together-team/>).

Related (<https://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-together>

<https://soundcloud.com/parent-lab/sets/kit-21-co-parenting-raising-happy-kids-between-two-homes/s-pignL>).

The Parent Lab (parentlab.com).

COVID - 19 Resources for Parents

Child Mind Institute (<https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>)

Child Trends (<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>)

Prevent Child Abuse America (<https://preventchildabuse.org/coronavirus-resources/>)

EGO

- **I am my opinions,** thoughts, + beliefs
- People are good/bad, right/wrong
- I am “right”
- I compare, compete, + perform for validation
- I am reactive from a space of defensiveness + fear

HIGHEST SELF

- **I observe my opinions,** thoughts, + beliefs then question them
- People are coping in the ways they know how (Including me)
- I have limited perspective based on my past experiences
- My worth does not need to be proven
- I can pause, observe, + have choice in my response

ADVICE FROM THE BEATLES



CHALLENGE
POOR
BEHAVIOR.

PROTECT
YOUR TIME
AND SPACE.

MAKE
MISTAKES.

SAY NO.

**You can be
kind person
and still:**

BE HONEST.

Disagree
with people.

Stand up for
yourself.

Set
boundaries.

Unknown | @Projecthappiness_org

embrace
imperfection

7 Types of Listening Noise



Physical Noise

External sounds or environmental distractions.

Alarms, traffic, construction, loud music, people talking in another room.



Physiological Noise

Body-based interference that disrupts attention.

Hunger, headaches; exhaustion, needing to pee, temperature discomfort.



Psychological Noise

Mental distractions and internal preoccupations.

Looping thoughts, money stress, anxiety, "I should be doing something else."



Semantic Noise

Confusion caused by language itself.

Lyrics in songs, jargon, euphemisms, different meanings across cultures.



Relational Noise

Tension in the relationship between, speaker and listener,

distrust, judgment, unresolved conflict, fear of being misunderstood.



Narrative Noise

The internal story shaping your interpretation: "I've already dealt with this,"

"This must mean I'm failing." "This is probably nothing," "I'm doing this wrong."

How Celtics owner Wyc Grousbeck's family situation inspired a new NBC sitcom

“Extended Family” is a fictional take on the amicable, post-divorce parenting relationship between Grousbeck, his wife, Emilia Fazzalari, and her ex-husband George Geyer.

By [Matt Juul](#) Globe Staff, Updated December 21, 2023, 5:51 p.m.



From left: Finn Sweeney as Jimmy Jr., Sofia Capanna as Grace, Jon Cryer as Jim, Abigail Spencer as Julia, and Donald Faison

Audiences will get their first taste of "Extended Family" this weekend, a new NBC sitcom that was inspired by the real-life relationship between Celtics owner [Wyc Grousbeck](#), his wife, Emilia Fazzalari, and her ex-husband George Geyer.

The premise of the Boston-set series — which debuts Saturday at 8 p.m. before moving to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays starting Jan. 2 — revolves around divorced couple Jim and Julia, played by "Two and Half Men" star Jon Cryer and "Timeless" actress Abigail Spencer, based on Geyer and Fazzalari. The pair continues to have an amicable relationship as they co-parent their two kids, but instead of the children trading places between mom and dad's houses, it's the parents who alternate living in the same home, or "nest."

Further complicating matters, Spencer's character gets engaged to Trey, a fictionalized version of the Celtics owner played by "Scrubs" star Donald Faison, adding another wrinkle to the equation. The "Brady Bunch" meets "Modern Family" dynamic is loosely inspired by how Grousbeck, Fazzalari, and Geyer navigate their actual family situation.

"When George and I were getting divorced, we decided one thing, and that was to put [their two] kids first," Fazzalari told the Globe. "That meant don't disrupt them. That meant don't move them back and forth between houses. That's how the whole idea of the nest came about and then the show."

"Having seen other divorced families and other divorced couples with kids, the real pain point for the children is having to go back and forth," Geyer added. "If you can remove that, we thought it'd be a lot easier on them and the pain would be on us instead of them."



Wyc Grousbeck and Emilia Fazzalari attended the The Earthshot Prize 2022 at MGM Music Hall at Fenway in December 2022. MIKE COPPOLA/GETTY

Unlike most portrayals of divorce, “Extended Family” puts a positive spin on conscious uncoupling, with the characters of Jim, Julia, and Trey all getting along relatively swimmingly, which is how their real-life counterparts interact.

“He welcomed me into the family,” Grousbeck said of the friendly reception he received from Geyer when the Celtics owner “fell in love with Emilia.” Grousbeck and Fazzalari got [engaged in 2016](#) and wed in 2017. Geyer and Fazzalari had divorced in 2015.

“Wyc really fit in seamlessly,” said Geyer. “There have been very, very few rough edges, at all.”

The repartee among the trio is what sold Red Sox chairman and television producer

[Tom Werner](#), who is “very good friends” with Grousbeck and Fazzalari, on turning that relationship into a show. Werner’s interest was piqued by their approach to parenting and divorce, but he knew it would take more than a few funny stories to create a sitcom.

“I really put them off for a long time, but every time I would see Emilia, she would tell another funny story about George,” Werner said. “At one point, it was almost like, ‘OK, let’s take the next step.’ ”

One moment that influenced Werner to move forward on the project occurred during a dinner between him, Grousbeck, and Fazzalari while they were on vacation.

Fazzalari, the cofounder of Cincoro Tequila with Grousbeck and NBA legend Michael Jordan and the company’s CEO, couldn’t help but laugh after receiving a call from Geyer about their kids.

“I had taken a phone call from George, and I was cracking up,” Fazzalari said. “I hang up the phone and Tom looks at me and he goes, ‘I thought you were going to have a conversation with your ex-husband?’ I go, ‘No, that was my ex-husband.’ ”

From there, they asked Werner what they had to do to make the series a reality, and he told them to write a treatment. Werner’s office sent the trio previous treatments for shows like “Friends” and “Seinfeld” for inspiration.

“We studied these, and the three of us wrote a 27-page, single-spaced treatment, bound it in red leather, and handed it to Tom three months later,” said Grousbeck. “Tom read it for two days and came back and said, ‘Here are my comments.’ He was very gentle with his comments because he really thought that there was something there.”



From left: Donald Faison as Trey, Abigail Spencer as Julia, and Jon Cryer as Jim in "Extended Family." CHRIS HASTON/NBC

The treatment led to NBC and Lionsgate picking up the series. Grousbeck, Fazzalari, and Geyer have been heavily involved in all aspects of the show — the three are executive producers on the series — from casting and writing to costume and set design, with Geyer now spending two weeks out of every month as part of the “Extended Family” writers room in Los Angeles. He’s “even managed to have gotten a few jokes in the show.”

Boston native Mike O’Malley was brought in to serve as the series’ creator and showrunner. He was intrigued by the show’s premise and was eager to work with Werner again; they had previously teamed up on the 2014 comedy-drama “Survivor’s Remorse.”

“We’re trying to show what happens when a couple splits up but they still want to be

great moms and dads and they don't want to have an antagonistic relationship with their ex, and how do you do that?" said O'Malley.

In addition to highlighting the family dynamic and featuring Boston icons like comedian [Lenny Clarke](#), the show also doesn't shy away from giving the city's love of sports air time. Grousbeck and company had to get permission from the NBA to use the Celtics name and logo, which factor heavily into the series. Werner said NBA commissioner Adam Silver gave his support to Grousbeck, as the league "is looking for its own 'Ted Lasso.' "

As the series evolves, Grousbeck teases the possibilities of Celtics stars past and present making cameos on the show (former Celtic Rick Fox appears in the pilot). Werner believes the Boston sports angle of "Extended Family" will "really resonate" with local fans.

"There's no city in America that lives and dies with its sports team more than Boston," said Werner.

Grousbeck, Fazzalari, and Geyer have big aspirations for the show, with the Celtics owner "hoping for an Emmy some day." They're grateful for the opportunity and believe that working together on the show has deepened their bonds.

"It's been a surreal process, but it's been a lot of fun," said Fazzalari. "In a strange way, I think it's kind of actually brought all three of us closer together."

AS A CHILD ENTERS THE WORLD

As I enter my new family,
May they be delighted
At how their kindness
Comes into blossom.

Unknown to me and them,
May I be exactly the one
To restore in their forlorn places
New vitality and promise.

May the hearts of others
Hear again the music
In the lost echoes
Of their neglected wonder.

If my destiny is sheltered,
May the grace of this privilege
Reach and bless the other infants
Who are destined for torn places.

If my destiny is bleak,
May I find in myself
A secret stillness
And tranquility
Beneath the turmoil.

May my eyes never lose sight
Of why I have come here,

That I never be claimed
By the falsity of fear
Or eat the bread of bitterness.

In everything I do, think,
Feel, and say,
May I allow the light
Of the world I am leaving
To shine through and carry me home.

~ John O'Donohue ~

THE GOLDEN RULE (It's true in all faiths.)

BAHA'I

Blessed is he who prefereth his brother before himself

BRAHMANISM:

This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.

~ Mahabharata 5:1517

BUDDHISM:

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

~ Udana - Varga 5:18

CHRISTIANITY:

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

~ Matthew 7:12

CONFUCIANISM:

Surely it is the maxim of lovingkindness: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.

~ Analects 15:23

HINDUISM:

Do not to another what is disagreeable to yourself.

ISLAM:

No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

~ Sunnah JUDAISM:

What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

~ Talmud, Shabbat 31a

NATIVE AMERICAN

In the beginning were the instructions. They are to love and respect all living creatures and Mother Earth.

TAOISM:

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

~ T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien

ZOROASTRIANISM:

That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.

~ Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5

~ courtesy of Elizabeth Pool

Glossary of abbreviations (I'm big on these)

BIOC	Best Interests of Child(ren)
CP	Communication Protocol
CPA	Coparenting Agreement to be Read to Children
CPP	Coparenting Partner, Coparenting Partnership
ECA	Extra-Curricular Activities
EOD	End of discussion
IIS	Initial Individual Session
IJS	Initial Joint Session
OFW	OurFamilyWizard
ONP	On Duty Parent – The parent children are sharing time with
OFP	Off Duty Parent – The parent without the children
RR	Retainer Report
SO	Significant other
NVC	Nonviolent Communication
BIFF	Brief, Informative, Friendly, Firm
SWYP?	So, What's Your Proposal
T/C	Telephone call

Children Learn What They Live



If a child lives with
CRITICISM, he learns
to CONDEMN. If a
child lives with HOSTILITY,



he learns to FIGHT. If a child lives with RIDICULE,
he learns to be SHY. If a child lives with SHAME, he
learns to FEEL GUILTY. If a child lives with
TOLERANCE, he learns to be PATIENT. If a child
lives with ENCOURAGEMENT, he
be CONFIDENT. If a child lives with
he learns to APPRECIATE. If a child lives
FAIRNESS, he learns JUSTICE. If a child
with SECURITY, he learns to have FAITH.



a child lives with APPROVAL, he learns to
LIKE HIMSELF. If a child
lives with ACCEPTANCE
and FRIENDSHIP, he learns
to find LOVE in the world.



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