

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Co-Parent Successfully



BY KIM DeMARCHI

There are numerous benefits to children when their living arrangements enable support from both parents. But, what happens if you find yourself in

the throes of a separation or divorce with your once partner? Once you sign the divorce papers, that's the end of the road, right? If you have children, WRONG! Adjusting to co-parenting brings its own challenges, such as interacting with your ex-partner on a regular basis. And let's be honest, if you two had a healthy relationship to begin with, you probably wouldn't need to be co-parenting today.

Co-parenting is when two parents are NOT in a marriage or romantic relationship with one another, they are NOT cohabitating, but they ARE working together and sharing the duties of raising a child. Co-parenting allows both parents to guide the child's development, as would be the case in an intact family. The only difference is the child lives in two houses. Each parent spends time raising the child and then allows the other parent to do the same in a separate location.

Not all sets of parents can do this effectively. Choosing to co-parent is very intentional and has some subtleties. Successful co-parenting is an option ONLY when BOTH ex-partners support the other parent and respect their right to have a good relationship with the children. Unfortunately, many people can't get past the anger, and therefore aren't able to co-parent successfully.

Besides the obvious benefits, there are some not-so-obvious benefits of co-parenting to the children specifically. They have a sense of security

having a close relationship with both parents. They learn how to cooperate by watching both parents cooperate. They have good problem solving skills because they've watched their parents resolve problems effectively over the years.

The number one key to successful co-parenting is to keep the focus on the children at all times! Parents must put their child's needs above their needs. Co-parenting can certainly be a trying time for most people. You'll have to figure out how things work best, BUT as long as your children's needs come first, you'll be on the right track. Parents need to figure out how to drop whatever bitterness they have from the split and focus primarily on doing what is best for their child.

There are times that you may really struggle to co-parent with your ex-partner. Try the following tips:

- **Stay off the phone.** Emotions can run rampant. Stick to texts and emails.
- **Don't respond to everything.** You don't have to attend every argument you are invited to.
- **Look at your ex through your child's eyes.** Empathy is a great stress reducer and this may help to shift your perspective.
- **Control yourself and your response.** That's all you can do. You may not like what your ex is doing with the kids, and let's not even talk about what he fed the kids last night, but it is out of your control.
- **Expect changes and be flexible.** Your ex wants the kids for New Years, so you get them extra hours on Christmas, which is actually more meaningful to you anyway.

There will be an adjustment period but parents can help their children live happily in two homes by doing the following six items:

1. **Reassure them that they have two parents who love them very much.**



2. **Maintain a cordial, business-like relationship with your ex.** Given the wonderful technological world in which we live in, there are lots of ways to communicate without being face to face.
3. **Help your kids anticipate changes and moving houses.** Buy duplicates or help them pack.
4. **Be consistent with the parenting time schedule.** The least changes, the better when young.
5. **Attempt to set routines for daily life in each home.** Aim for consistency with house rules at each house, bedtimes, etc...
6. **Show enthusiasm or at least be neutral about your child seeing the other parent.**

There are times when the co-parent takes a very different approach on how to handle things. There are a few things to consider before deciding to HOLD FIRM or LET GO.

- **Safety issues** - most you shouldn't let go
- **Core values** - most you can't let go...whether it's related to character, religion, or educational, you need to communicate these to your ex-partner, but remember they'll have their own core values for you to consider as well.

- **Personal preference or individual style** - this is where you need to be flexible and show compromise. When you hear "Dad lets us watch..." or "Mom lets us eat...", simply respond, "At our house,", without commentary on how it is handled elsewhere.
- **Personal life** - you are no longer in an intimate relationship so you no longer get to weigh in on their personal life. How they dress, what car they buy, and where they vacation are none of your concern. The good news: your personal life is also not up for discussion. Each of you is allowed to handle your adult life as you see fit, again, unless it adversely affects the children. Save your energy for issues that really matter and for living the life you want to live.

Kim DeMarchi, M.Ed., Certified Parent Educator and Certified Family Coach, is a Tualatin resident, married with 16 year old boy/girl twins, and has been an educator for more than two decades. Kim is trained and certified through Positive Discipline, as well the International Network for Children and Families in a program called Redirecting Children's Behavior. Kim is active in supporting her local parenting community by providing workshops, coaching families and writing articles



for our newspaper. Kim is a monthly guest on KATU's AM Northwest. She also blogs twice a month for Knowledge Universe's Kindercare online community. Kim's goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through www.EmpoweredParenting.com.