

After the Divorce is Final

A divorce does not end the parenting alliance; it marks the official beginning of your restructured relationship. As co-parents you will go forward for years in the business of caring for your children.

RULES OF PROCEDURE:

Simple rules of business procedure will help you conduct a successful co-parent meeting. The following guidelines will help all former spouses work through their worries about the children. If you both agree to use them, the rules offer a structure and basic course of action that can be turned to whenever you work together.

- Make appointments to talk with each other. Impulsive, spur of the moment conversations are not well thought out. They often stimulate anger and poor problem resolution. When you plan to meet at a certain time and place, you will be calmer and more rational.
- Be prepared to communicate with your co-parent. Make lists of concerns and decide ahead of time that you are determined to work things out. Prepare yourself for success by being specific and avoiding abstract descriptions of problems.
- Begin co-parent talks by deciding easy issues where there is already considerable agreement. Discussing harder issues will go better after success with easier ones. Most parents agree in many more areas than those in which they disagree. If you talk about some of these commonalities first you will feel much better about yourselves as business partners.
- Take turns discussing your thoughts and stay on one topic at a time. Set limits for the amount of time each parent spends on one issue. This keeps you from getting stuck and not making progress. Learn to listen accurately by summarizing each other's points of view. Try to hear the concern behind your co-parent's interest in making each decision.
- Keep past marital issues out of parental business talks. Remember, the marriage is over. The co-parent meeting is a business session that will succeed only if you maintain neutrality and mutual respect.
- Agree ahead of time to alert each other when marital issues begin to come up or when anger interferes. Use an identical signal to call a time-out when you need to. The verbal statement "time out" can work to help you calm down and re-focus on the needs of the children.
- Discuss issues one by one and consider all your options. Be specific and thorough. Then write down your decisions. Validate each other as you talk by mentioning each other's good points. Be polite and courteous, never losing business orientation.
- If you find you must be critical, target the idea or proposal instead of the other co-parent. Never attack your co-parent, even with sarcasm or "harmless" personal comments. Backsliding into personal issues will undermine your efforts and will make progress more difficult.
- Some issues won't be able to be resolved in one meeting. Agree to work on difficult items. Between co-parent meetings try to find more options and present them at the next meeting. Your list of disagreements will narrow quickly if you continue to look for new ways to address them.
- End the meeting by mutual agreement or when the allotted time has run out. Never terminate talks in anger by walking out after a frustrating set-back.