



THE KIDS COME FIRST

**Creating Emotional Safety in Two
Homes**

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INTRODUCTION

This resource is designed to support parents like you through challenging times, offering insights, strategies, and practical advice on minimizing the impact of your disagreements on your children.

At It's Not Over, we champion the power of healthy communication between parents to uplift the lives of children navigating divorce or separation. We understand the profound impact these transitions can have on children, and we believe that fostering positive communication between parents is pivotal in shaping their well-being.

Our mission is clear: to advocate for and share the significance of cultivating healthy communication strategies between co-parents going through relationship issues, separation, divorce, or post-divorce. By nurturing respectful and effective dialogue, we aim to enhance the quality of life for the children during these challenging times.

Through practical advice and expert guidance, we're dedicated to equipping parents with the tools they need to navigate the complexities of divorce or separation while prioritizing their children's emotional and mental health.

Join us on this journey of understanding, growth, and fostering healthier relationships between parents or co-parents, for the brighter, happier futures of the children we deeply care about.

CHAPTER I

UNDERSTANDING CO-PARENTING CHALLENGES

Navigating the complexities of co-parenting during conflict can be daunting. In this chapter, we'll explore the common pitfalls faced by parents in this situation. Gain insights into the challenges and complexities that arise when navigating the storm of co-parenting during conflict.

Co-parenting with the other parent during conflict will most likely present several challenges that will be emotionally stressful and exhausting for parents. It is typically a scene filled with complexities, where navigating the storm will require resilience, patience, and a deep understanding of the trials that frequently arise and your ex-spouse.

Communication Breakdowns:

When coordinating schedules and making arrangements for exchanging children, this alone can become a battleground for conflict. Miscommunication or ineffective communication can amplify tensions, leading to misunderstandings and frustrations. Here are a few examples of ways you can try and keep things positive:

- Face-to-face interactions are always best, especially when discussing matters about the kids.
- Identify shared goals or interests to create a sense of unity: "We both want this "the child" to be happy, so let's figure out how we can work together to make that happen."
- Avoid escalating the situation by maintaining a calm and composed demeanor. Take a deep breath before responding to complex statements.
- Instead of dwelling on past mistakes, look forward: "Let's learn from what happened and find a way to move forward positively."

Diverging Parenting Styles

When both parents have different approaches to discipline, routines, or even values, it can create confusion and inconsistency for the children. These divergences can escalate conflicts and make co-parenting a challenging balancing act. In these situations, the best practice would be to remember not to talk poorly about the other spouse AT ALL. You have to remember the feelings of your child ALWAYS. They can not help who their mother or father is. It will most likely affect your relationship and how they feel about YOU if they hear you talking bad about the other parent.

Emotional Turmoil and Resentment

Lingering emotions from the relationship's breakdown can spill over into co-parenting dynamics. Feelings of anger, hurt, or resentment towards the ex-partner may interfere with collaborating and making decisions together.

Power Struggles and Control Issues

Co-parenting disputes can often become battlegrounds for asserting control or power. This struggle for dominance can hinder productive discussions and create a toxic environment for both parents and children.

Lack of Flexibility and Compromise

Rigidity in sticking to predetermined arrangements or an unwillingness to compromise can hinder the fluidity required in co-parenting. Being inflexible may intensify conflicts and limit the adaptability necessary for changing circumstances.

Being flexible when dealing with a parenting plan is crucial for maintaining a healthy co-parenting relationship and ensuring the well-being of the children involved. Here are some examples of how flexibility can be applied:

- **Schedule adjustments:** unforeseen events are going to happen. If one parent has an unexpected work commitment or a family emergency, be open to adjusting the parenting schedule temporarily.
- **Child's Activities:** Your children will have activities throughout their life. Flexibility in the schedule to accommodate the child's extracurricular activities or events, even if they fall on the other parent's designated time.

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Keeping open lines of communication about your child's needs and any changes in their routine can help both parents stay informed and make adjustments as needed. The best thing you can do for your child is to be flexible even if the other parent isn't. Don't find yourself only doing the right thing if the other parent is doing the right thing. That is what hurts the children the most.

Legal and Logistical Challenges

Negotiating legal arrangements, navigating custody agreements, and managing logistical details like drop-offs and pickups can be overwhelming. Complex legal procedures can add stress to an already tense situation.

Navigating these challenges demands a concerted effort to rise above personal grievances and prioritize the well-being of the children. The complexities of co-parenting during conflict require a thoughtful approach, a willingness to communicate effectively, and a commitment to finding common ground despite the differences.

In the following chapters, we'll delve deeper into strategies and insights aimed at overcoming these challenges. By understanding these hurdles and equipping yourself with effective tools, you can begin to navigate the storm of co-parenting during conflict with more clarity and resilience.

A Note From Sonia



We understand that what you are going through is challenging, and it's hard to put the hurt spouse part of us aside and put our co-parent hat on, but it's important that we do so in order to put our children first. When my husband and I were separated, I wouldn't say I liked it when he called the kids and talked to them on the phone for longer than 15 minutes because I felt like he was taking MY time with the kids away from me. I was coming from a place of hurt and anger, so I tried to control the situation. I quickly realized that it wasn't okay for me to do that and that the kids need their father. I was controlling because I was hurt. I was thinking of myself and not what my kids needed.

CHAPTER II

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Discover practical tips and strategies tailored to your unique situation. Learn effective communication techniques that can transform interactions with your co-parent. Explore conflict resolution methods aimed at diffusing tensions and fostering a more harmonious co-parenting dynamic.

Communication with your spouse (ex-spouse) is the cornerstone of navigating separation or divorce when children are involved. Effective communication and conflict resolution between co-parents can significantly impact a child's ability to navigate this challenging period with resilience and emotional stability. It is in the children's best interest for the parents to communicate and find a resolution, not to come out as the winner.

Prioritize Respectful Communication

Maintaining a respectful and civil tone during interactions with your spouse/ex-spouse is crucial. Emotions might run high, but practicing restraint and civility in discussions helps create a safe environment for children.

Emotional intelligence allows individuals to approach conflicts with a more calm and rational mindset. Understanding and managing their emotions allows them to express their needs and concerns assertively rather than reacting impulsively or defensively. Moreover, by empathizing with the emotions of their spouse/ex-spouse, they can work towards finding mutually beneficial resolutions.

Focus on the Child's Needs

Shift the focus of communication towards the needs and well-being of the child. When discussing matters related to separation or divorce, center the conversation on how it affects the child and what measures can be taken to support them through the process. Again, take your emotions out of it. You may be angry at the other parent, but is being angry, hostile, and resentful best for the child(ren)?

Open and Clear Communication

Strive for clarity and transparency in communicating with the co-parent — clearly articulate schedules, plans, and any changes that may affect the child.

Misunderstandings often arise from ambiguous or unclear communication. Be specific in your communication; do not go into it with unrealistic expectations. Come up with a plan on how you are going to communicate. Some people prefer email over text. Some parents use apps to help manage calendars, appointments, and overall communication. Consistency in communication between co-parents helps create predictability for children amidst the changes. Keep the lines of communication open and transparent, providing age-appropriate information about the situation.

Use Effective Listening Skills

Practice active listening when engaging in discussions with the co-parent. Allow them to express their thoughts and concerns without interruption. Listening attentively demonstrates respect and can foster a more constructive dialogue.

- **Be Attentive:** Focus entirely on the person who is speaking without distractions. Maintain eye contact, nod occasionally, and use non-verbal cues like facing the speaker and open body language to show your engagement. Please don't be on your phone or look in another direction. When you are present and really listening to what the other person has to say, it demonstrates your interest and encourages the speaker to continue sharing. Take the emotion out of it, even if you feel angry. Focus on the solution, not the problem.
- **Paraphrase and Reflect:** Active listening is all about understanding, so summarize what the person has said in your own words and reflect it back to them. This shows that you're not only listening but also comprehending and processing their message. Use phrases like "What I'm hearing is..." or "It sounds like you're saying..." to clarify and validate their thoughts.

CHAPTER II

- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage further discussion by asking open-ended questions that invite the person to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings. Avoid yes/no questions and instead ask, "How did that make you feel?" or "Can you tell me more about that?" This shows that you are interested in understanding their perspective.

Establish Boundaries and Guidelines

Set clear boundaries for communication. Determine preferred methods of communication (emails, texts, or phone calls) and establish guidelines for discussing sensitive matters. Consistency in communication methods can reduce conflicts. When communicating about matters concerning the child, aim to maintain a neutral and child-centric approach. Focus on their needs, routines, and well-being rather than personal grievances or disputes between parents.

Seek Mediation or Counseling if Necessary

If communication breakdowns persist, consider seeking mediation or coaching to facilitate discussions and find common ground. A neutral third party can often help navigate complex emotions and resolve conflicts.

Schedule with a coach [here](#) [link](#)

Avoid Using Children as Messengers

Refrain from using children as messengers between co-parents. Direct communication between adults ensures clarity and prevents children from feeling burdened or caught in the middle of conflicts. It is not fair to the child to put them in the middle. They didn't ask for this, so as adults, it is your job to communicate effectively. Again, take the emotion out of it. Ask yourself, is by doing or saying _____ best for my child, or is it hurting them? When parents use children as messengers, it adds a level of responsibility that the child does not need. Discussions and decisions should revolve around the child's best interests. Avoid placing children in the middle of conflicts or using them as messengers between parents. Shield them from adult discussions or conflicts that are not age-appropriate.

CHAPTER II

Focus on Solutions, Not Blame

Instead of assigning blame, focus on finding solutions and compromises that benefit the child. Shifting the mindset from fault-finding to problem-solving can lead to more productive discussions.

Keep Emotions in Check

Recognize the impact of emotions on communication. Practice emotional regulation and avoid discussing contentious issues when emotions are heightened. Take time to cool off before engaging in difficult conversations.

By prioritizing effective communication and conflict resolution, parents can create a more stable and nurturing environment for their children amidst the challenges of separation or divorce. Remember, the goal is to provide a safe and supportive atmosphere that allows children to navigate this transition with as much ease as possible.

Regular Updates and Flexibility

Keep each other informed about the child's activities, achievements, or any concerns that may arise. Remain flexible and open to discussing changes or adjustments in schedules when necessary.

Empower Children's Communication

Encourage children to express their feelings and thoughts about the separation or divorce. Create an environment where they feel safe discussing their emotions and concerns with both parents.

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Understand the profound psychological impact of parental conflict on children. Gain insights into how conflict affects their emotional well-being, behavior, and development. Learn crucial strategies to mitigate the impact and create a healthier environment for your children.

Separation or divorce can significantly impact children, reshaping their emotional landscape and influencing their development. Understanding the profound effects of this transition on children is crucial for parents navigating through this challenging period. In some cases, it isn't the event of the divorce that has a significant impact - it's how parents handle it that affects them.



Emotional Turmoil

Children often experience a whirlwind of emotions, including confusion, sadness, anger, and anxiety, when confronted with their parents' separation or divorce. This emotional turmoil can manifest in various ways, such as changes in behavior, mood swings, or withdrawal. It's essential that you are aware of your child's behavior and that you provide a safe space for them to express their feelings. Children can't articulate what they are feeling, so acting out can be the result of what is really going on within them.

Sense of Loss and Grief

The dissolution of the family unit can evoke a profound sense of loss and grief in children. They may mourn the loss of the family as they knew it and struggle to adapt to the new reality of separate households. Be mindful of this and create a safe environment for the children to grieve. Don't punish them for having emotions. Allow them to process as long as they need to.

Impact on Relationships and Trust

Witnessing conflict between parents or being caught in the middle of disputes can erode a child's sense of security and trust. It might affect their ability to form and maintain relationships, impacting their social and emotional development. Be honest with your children (age appropriate). Your child may have lost trust in one parent or both because their sense of security has been compromised. It's important that you work towards maintaining and or improving your relationship with your child. Change starts with you and your children are seeing your behaviors and actions.

Academic and Behavioral Changes

The stress and emotional upheaval resulting from parental separation or divorce can influence a child's academic performance and behavior. They may exhibit changes in concentration, motivation, or school engagement. Be proactive and reach out to your child's teacher and school counselor. Inform them of what is happening at home so they can be supported outside the home.

Long-Term Psychological Effects

Research indicates that children of divorced or separated parents might be more susceptible to long-term psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, or self-esteem issues. These effects can persist into adulthood if not addressed. Seek help by finding a therapist or counselor for your child.

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Despite the challenges, many children demonstrate remarkable resilience. Providing them with support, stability, and healthy coping mechanisms can bolster their ability to navigate the changes and adapt to the new family dynamic.

Recognizing and addressing the emotional needs of children during this transition is paramount in helping them navigate this period with resilience and emotional well-being.

A Note From Erin



One of the first emotions your kids are going to feel when faced with their parent's divorce is fear. Especially if they are already coming from a high-conflict home. One of the most important things you can do is to create a safe environment for them. Work towards having cordial conversations with the other parent and avoid relationship talk. Only talk about the kids. It's also important to be aware of the conversations you are having when your kids are present. They can hear you. I recently worked with a client whose spouse didn't want her to take the kids out of town for the holidays. The kids overheard the conversation and knew their father would be upset about it. She ended up taking the kids out of town, and the kids were so uneasy about it because of what they had heard. The kids felt like they did something wrong. This is an example of unnecessary stress that the kids don't need to feel.

CHAPTER IV

COPING MECHANISMS FOR KIDS

Separation or divorce can be a challenging and emotional experience for children. Equipping them with coping mechanisms tailored to their age and understanding is crucial in helping them navigate this difficult transition with resilience.

Encourage Expression of Emotions

Create an open and supportive environment where children feel safe expressing their feelings. Encourage them to talk about their emotions, whether it's sadness, anger, confusion, or fear.

Provide Reassurance and Stability

Reassure children of your love and support. Emphasize that the separation or divorce is not their fault and that both parents will continue to care for them. Maintain stable routines and familiar activities to provide a sense of stability amidst changes.

Age-Appropriate Explanation

Offer age-appropriate explanations about the separation or divorce. Use simple and understandable language that suits their level of comprehension. Be honest, but avoid burdening them with unnecessary details.

Promote Healthy Outlets for Expression

Encourage children to express their emotions through creative outlets such as drawing, writing, or storytelling. Art, play, or journaling can serve as therapeutic ways for them to process their feelings.

Maintain Consistent Communication

Keep communication channels open and consistent between both parents. If possible, ensure children feel connected and secure by facilitating regular communication and visits with the non-custodial parent.



Empower with Choices and Control

Offer children choices within reasonable limits. Empower them with a sense of control over certain aspects of their lives, such as choosing activities or making simple decisions, to instill a sense of autonomy.



Provide Support Systems

Offer access to supportive resources such as counseling, therapy, or support groups if needed. Professional guidance can assist children in navigating their emotions and coping with the changes.



Model Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Demonstrate healthy coping strategies by managing your own emotions constructively. Show resilience and positive coping mechanisms in dealing with stress or challenges, serving as a role model for children.



Reinforce Positivity and Resilience

Encourage a positive outlook by focusing on moments of joy, resilience, and growth. Highlight their strengths and achievements, fostering a sense of optimism about the future.



Be Patient and Understanding

Understand that children may take time to adjust to the new circumstances. Be patient, empathetic, and validate their emotions throughout the process.

Helping children develop coping mechanisms tailored to their needs is fundamental in supporting their emotional well-being during separation or divorce. By providing them with tools to navigate their emotions and fostering a supportive environment, parents can empower children to cope and thrive amidst the challenges.

CHAPTER V

GUIDANCE

Co-parenting during and after a separation or divorce requires a concerted effort from both parents to prioritize the well-being of their children. Implementing effective co-parenting strategies can create a supportive and stable environment for children amid the changes.

Put Children's Needs First

- Center co-parenting decisions around the best interests of the children. Prioritize their emotional, physical, and developmental needs in all aspects of co-parenting discussions and arrangements.

Establish Clear Communication Channels

- Maintain open and respectful communication with the co-parent. Establish consistent and reliable communication channels to discuss matters related to the children, such as schedules, education, and health.

Create a Co-Parenting Plan

- Develop a comprehensive co-parenting plan outlining custody arrangements, visitation schedules, holidays, and decision-making processes. Having a structured plan minimizes confusion and conflicts.

Be Flexible and Cooperative

- Remain flexible and willing to accommodate changes when necessary. Cooperation between co-parents is crucial in adapting to unexpected situations or accommodating children's needs.

Respect Each Other's Parenting Styles

- Acknowledge and respect each other's parenting styles, even if they differ. Consistency in discipline and routines across both households provides stability for children.

Avoid Negative Communication About the Co-Parent

Refrain from speaking negatively about the co-parent in front of the children. Avoid involving children in adult conflicts or discussions about the other parent.

Transition Smoothly Between Households

Ensure transitions between households are smooth and stress-free for children. Maintain consistency in routines and provide them with items that offer comfort and familiarity during transitions. Don't drill them or ask questions about what they did at the other parent's house. Allow the child to open up on their own.

Coaching and Support

Consider seeking the assistance of one of our coaches to navigate co-parenting issues effectively. A neutral third party can facilitate discussions and offer guidance in resolving conflicts.

Encourage a Positive Relationship Between Child and Co-Parent

Foster a positive relationship between the child and the co-parent. Encourage regular and meaningful contact to maintain the child's bond with both parents.

Prioritize Self-Care and Emotional Regulation

Take care of your own emotional well-being to be a more effective co-parent. Practice self-care and seek support or counseling if needed to manage emotions related to the separation or divorce.

Effective co-parenting requires dedication, patience, and a commitment to creating a nurturing environment for children. By fostering cooperation, effective communication, and a child-centered approach, co-parents can mitigate the impact of separation or divorce on their children and promote their well-being.

A Note From Sonia



I am not proud of the things I did when my husband and I were separated and I didn't do the best job at putting the needs of my children first. I often acted out of selfish behavior and from pain and anger. We created this e-book as a guide and a reminder why it's so important to put the kids first. We understand what you are going through is hard and feels unfair. We are here as your support system because we've been there and we know what it feels like to navigate this storm. Your spouse or ex-spouse may never be your friend and that's okay, but what you will always be together are parents. It's important that you are a united front and that you both put the well-being of the children first.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, parenting during conflict is a challenging journey, but by applying effective communication, conflict resolution strategies, and prioritizing your children's well-being, you can navigate this storm. Empower yourself with the tools and insights provided in this handbook to create a more stable and nurturing environment for your family.

This handbook serves as a comprehensive guide, offering practical advice and actionable strategies to navigate the complexities of co-parenting during conflict. Embrace the journey of fostering a positive co-parenting relationship and creating a healthier, happier environment for your children.

Why did we put this guide together? Because we've been there. We understand what it's like to go through the pain of separation/divorce. We wish we would've had the guidance and support when navigating our own storms.

No matter how strained things feel between you and your co-parent, your children still have a chance to grow up in peace, stability, and love, and you have the power to help make that happen. You don't have to walk this road alone.

Join our group coaching community, where you'll find support, guidance, and real strategies to navigate co-parenting with more clarity and less conflict. Together, we'll work toward creating healthier homes, for you and your kids.

[Learn More About
Group Coaching](#)