



Children thrive when parents have the support they need to be the parents they want to be. For parents going through separation, it can be like sailing in rough waters.

Counselling, parenting support, and Family Dispute Resolution, can give parents the lighthouses and safe harbours that they need. This booklet talks about some different ways parents parent after separation and what that is like for children. If you read about a type of parenting you would like to know more about, please contact our service.

Adapted from Joan B Kelly's article "Parents with Enduring Child Disputes" *Journal of Family Studies*, Vol 9, No 1, April 2003, pp51-62.

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CO-PARENT AFTER SEPARATION

Looking forward, how would you like your co-parenting relationship to be?



Co-operative co-parenting

Parents have dealt with the hurt and anger of the separation and are able to take a joint approach to parenting.

What does co-operative co-parenting mean for the children?

- Children thrive in a cooperative parenting model, because the parents conflict is managed
- Children have one set of rules and routines to follow
- Children see their parents have a healthy and respectful relationship
- Children are encouraged to have a meaningful relationship with both parents

Parents do not have to be good friends to make this model work, but respect for one another and good communication are essential. Children do best when parents have the support they need to be the co-parents they want to be.

What does co-operative co-parenting look like?

- Low conflict with the other parent
- Communication is focused on the children
- Treat each other with respect
- High effort by parents to work together to keep the focus on coordinating the children's lives
- Coordination of household rules, discipline and child-rearing practices
- Provide support to each other when needed
- Some flexibility in arrangements to accommodate each other's and children's needs
- Jointly planned important events and aspects of children's lives

Parallel co-parenting

This way of co-parenting after separation is similar to a formal business partnership.

What does parallel co-parenting mean for my children?

Parallel parenting is not quite as good for children as cooperative parenting, but children can adapt to it and can thrive if each parent provides good enough parenting in each household, and if each parent respects the parenting approach taken by the other parent. Children must not be put in a position where they are pressured to choose which household they prefer.

What does parallel co-parenting look like?

- Low in conflict
- Low in communication about the children
- High in independent action
- Parents do not share many personal emotional reactions or details about their personal lives
- Focus is exclusively on the child and
- Guided by a written agreement
- Disagreements are worked out by negotiation or ignored where possible

What can be the disadvantages to parallel co-parenting?

- Can be hard to coordinate aspects of children's lives
- Can be hard to monitor areas such as homework and medical issues
- Can be hard to adapt to a child's changing needs or other new situations

Continued conflictual co-parenting

Parents experience ongoing conflict, feelings of hurt and anger, and poor communication. Parenting can be impacted by these emotions.

What does conflictual co-parenting mean for children?

- Children are at high risk of depression, difficult behaviour and low self esteem.
- Children may fear they are the cause of conflict.
- Children may be anxious when their parents are together, and confused about the mixed messages they are receiving.
- Children may feel torn between the parents and often grow up to have a poor relationship with either or both parents.

What does conflictual co-parenting look like?

- High hostility and conflict between parents
- Poor or erratic communication
- Focus is on parents, not the children
- No co-operative, co-ordinated routine for children
- Parents want to know details about the other parent's personal life
- Children are asked to pass on messages to the other parent
- Children are asked questions about what is happening in the other parent's life
- Parents criticise each other in front of the children

What are the disadvantages of conflictual co-parenting on children?

- Long term harmful impact on children's mental health
- Fails to separate the parent-child relationship from the parent-parent relationship
- No coordination or cooperation between households
- Children don't get the help they need to thrive