

CO-PARENTING

TOOLS, TIPS, & TACTICS

“To Share Or Not To Share”



**Talking to Children
About Divorce**

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What You Will Learn:

- Communicating with children during divorce
- The motive of communication
- Considerations before communicating with your children
- What children don't need to know
- Talking to your children about co-parenting conflict
- What co-parents should avoid sharing with their children
- Potential negative long-term implications on children

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Introduction

In this educational guide, we will explore the complexities of co-parenting challenges and where they intersect with the delicate fabric of children's emotional development. Through the lens of psychological insight and empirical research, we illuminate the potential implications of exposing children to the intricacies of parental discord, guiding co-parents towards informed decisions that safeguard the psychological well-being of their children.

We will explore the psychological ramifications of sharing and withholding information within the context of divorce and co-parenting. Drawing upon decades of clinical research, we dissect the nuanced interplay between transparency and protection, honesty and discretion. Every word spoken by co-parents carries with it the power to shape a child's perception, influencing their sense of security, self-esteem, and resilience in the face of adversity. Additionally, we will uncover the profound impact of parental communication on children's psychological adjustment. From the tender years of infancy to the tumultuous waters of adolescence, co-parents are urged to tread with caution, mindful of the lasting imprint their words may leave upon their children's fragile hearts and minds.

It is hoped that this guide serves as a beacon of insight, empowering co-parents to navigate the choppy waters of divorce with wisdom and compassion.

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Divorce is a significant life event that can profoundly impact children, but how they experience and understand divorce varies depending on their age and developmental stage. Co-parents play a crucial role in guiding their children through this transition by providing age-appropriate information and support. Understanding the unique needs and perspectives of children at different ages is essential in ensuring that communication about divorce is neither overwhelming nor insufficient. Let's explore the importance of considering children's age and developmental level when discussing divorce and how to tailor communication to meet their needs effectively.

To ensure that your communication is honest and sincere, the first thing to ask yourself is what are your motives? You should never share information about some aspect of the divorce just to meet your own needs, score points against your partner, place the blame, or tell your children anything that is not based on the reality of the situation. Your children certainly do not need to be put in the middle of the divorce either.

If you are communicating to help your children to understand, or to provide them with support, then you are probably doing them some good.

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1. Recognizing Developmental Differences:

Children of different ages have varying levels of cognitive and emotional development, which influence how they perceive and respond to divorce:

- **Young Children (Ages 0-5):** Young children may struggle to understand the concept of divorce but can still sense changes in their environment and routines. They rely heavily on caregivers for stability and reassurance.
- **Elementary School-Aged Children (Ages 6-12):** Children in this age group have a more developed understanding of relationships and may experience a range of emotions, including confusion, sadness, and anger. They may also have questions about the practical implications of divorce, such as living arrangements and school changes.
- **Adolescents (Ages 13-18):** Teens may have a deeper understanding of divorce and its implications, but they can also experience intense emotions and may be more resistant to parental guidance. They may seek more autonomy and independence in how they process and cope with divorce.

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2. Tailoring Communication: :

When discussing divorce with children, it's essential to provide information that is appropriate for their age and developmental stage:

- **Young Children:** Focus on providing reassurance and maintaining consistent routines. Keep explanations simple and concrete, using language they can understand. Emphasize that both parents still love them and will continue to care for them.
- **Elementary School-Aged Children:** Offer more detailed explanations about divorce, using age-appropriate language. Encourage them to express their feelings and ask questions. Reassure them that their feelings are normal and that it's okay to talk about their concerns.
- **Adolescents:** Engage in open and honest conversations about divorce, acknowledging their maturity and capacity to understand complex emotions. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings without judgment. Respect their need for privacy and autonomy while providing guidance and support.

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3. Finding the Balance:: :

Finding the right balance between sharing too much information and not enough is crucial in supporting children through divorce:

- **Avoid Oversharing:** While it's important to be honest with children, avoid sharing unnecessary details or placing blame on the other parent. Protect children from adult conflicts and disagreements that may cause distress.
- **Be Available for Questions:** Encourage children to ask questions and express their feelings, but respect their boundaries and readiness to discuss sensitive topics. Let them know that you are available to talk whenever they need support or guidance.
- **Maintain Consistency:** Regardless of age, children benefit from consistency and stability during divorce. Maintain familiar routines and rituals to provide a sense of security amid change.

By considering children's age and developmental level when discussing divorce and tailoring communication accordingly, co-parents can provide the support and reassurance children need to navigate this challenging time with resilience and understanding. By fostering open communication, empathy, and consistency, co-parents can help children adjust to their new family dynamic and thrive despite the challenges of divorce.

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How Much Communication Is Too Much?



Communicating With Children During Divorce

Effective communication with your child is essential for their well being during the divorce process. You have to be able to break the news to them in an honest way, and offer help and support for them as far as possible. However, children do not need to know all of the details of your divorce. There are some subjects that are better left for the adults. So, how much is too much?

The Motive Of Communication:

The main reasons why you should be communicating with your children during divorce, is to help them to understand what is going on, and to help them to feel supported during the process. They have to know first of all that the divorce is happening, and they will have to know how that will effect them. Importantly, children want to know that it is not their fault.

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Some Considerations

Every situation is unique and different, and how you communicate with your child will depend very much on how old they are their temperament, and their personality. [Here are some considerations to make before we explore the specifics of what you shouldn't say to your children:](#)



Age-Awareness

As a general rule, younger children require less detail about the divorce, and a simpler explanation might be enough, along with the appropriate level of emotional support. Older children and teenagers may require much more explanation, and conversations are likely to be more unpredictable.

Share Logistical Information

Children of all ages are probably going to want to know what the divorce means for them. How often will they see each parent? Where will they live? Will they have to move school? All of this will impact their life, and it is important that you talk to them about this when you know yourself.

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Always Be Honest:

Telling lies is never a wise idea. You need to be honest and truthful at all times with your communication. If there is anything you don't share it has to be because your children don't need to know, not because you don't want to tell them.

Listen To Your Child:

Listening to your child is extremely important during the divorce procedure.

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What you communicate to your children is ultimately your decision, and will be based on some of the considerations such as age, but there are some issues that are generally best left alone where they are concerned:

Financial Aspects:

Children do not need to know about the financial aspect of the divorce, such as the division of assets, and all of the legal stuff. It just isn't often relevant to them.

What Children Don't Need To Know During Divorce?

All of the Details:

They do not need to know all of the details of your marriage, arguments, conflicts, nor do they need the full details of any affairs.

Conflicts:

Children do not need to hear all of your arguments, nor do they need to be in the middle of them. Keep your tensions and conflicts away from them, and try to create a more positive environment around them.

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Name Calling & Blaming:

It will never help the situation to try to blame your ex, whether they are around to defend themselves or not. Keep the name-calling and blaming to conversations with your friends.

False Hopes:

Getting the balance between being positive and being realistic and truthful can be tough. Be careful about promising false hopes of a better life, or hopes of re-marriage

What Children Don't Need to Know:

1. Details of Adult Conflict:

Shield children from the details of adult conflicts or disagreements between co-parents. Avoid discussing legal or financial matters in front of them, as this can create unnecessary stress and anxiety.

2. Blame or Criticism of the Other Parent:

Refrain from speaking negatively about the other parent in front of the children. Criticizing or blaming the other parent can create feelings of loyalty conflict and undermine children's relationships with both parents.

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3. Complex Reasons for the Divorce:

Children do not need to know the complex reasons behind the divorce, such as infidelity or financial struggles. Keep explanations simple and focus on reassuring them that the decision was made with their best interests in mind.

4. Adult Responsibilities or Worries:

Protect children from adult responsibilities or worries that may arise from the divorce. Avoid discussing financial concerns, legal proceedings, or other adult issues with them, as this can burden them with unnecessary stress.

5. Pressure to Take Sides:

Children should never feel pressured to take sides or choose between their parents. Emphasize that they are allowed to love both parents equally and that their relationship with each parent is separate from the other.



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Talking To Your Kids About Co-Parenting Conflict

Co-parenting conflict can be challenging to navigate, especially when it comes to discussing it with your children. However, open and honest communication is crucial for helping children understand and cope with the complexities of co-parenting dynamics. This guide provides co-parents with practical tips and guidelines for talking to their kids about co-parenting conflict and what to tell them.

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1. Choose an Appropriate Time and Setting:

Find a calm and private setting where you and your co-parent can talk to your children about co-parenting conflict. Choose a time when everyone is relaxed and free from distractions to ensure a focused and productive conversation.

2. Be Honest and Age-Appropriate:

Be honest with your children about the existence of co-parenting conflict, but tailor the information to their age and developmental level. Use age-appropriate language and concepts to explain the situation in a way they can understand.



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3. Coordinating Coparenting Messages:

Speaking truthfully but age-appropriately: Be honest with your children about the divorce and co-parenting arrangements, using language that is understandable and appropriate for their age.

Addressing difficult questions: Prepare yourself to answer challenging questions your children may have about the divorce, such as why it's happening or who is at fault, with honesty and sensitivity.

Avoiding oversharing: While honesty is important, refrain from divulging unnecessary details or disparaging remarks about your former spouse that could cause confusion or distress for your children.

Presenting a united front - Work collaboratively with your co-parent to ensure consistency in the information shared with your children, presenting a united front despite any differences between you.

Agreeing on boundaries - Establish clear boundaries with your co-parent regarding what information is appropriate to share with your children and what should remain private between adults.

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Handling disagreements - If disagreements arise between you and your co-parent about what to share with your children, address them respectfully and consider seeking guidance from a mediator or therapist to find a resolution.

4. Supporting Emotional Well-Being:

Acknowledging and validating feelings - Encourage your children to express their emotions openly and validate their feelings, reassuring them that it's normal to feel sad, angry, or confused during this time.



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5. Emphasize the Importance of Love and Support:

Reassure your children that they are loved by both parents, regardless of any conflicts between you and your co-parent. Emphasize that your love for them remains unchanged and that they can always count on your support.

6. Maintain a Neutral and Respectful Tone:

Encourage your children to express their feelings and concerns about the co-parenting conflict openly. Listen attentively and validate their emotions, offering comfort and reassurance as needed.

Avoid speaking negatively about your co-parent in front of your children, as this can create unnecessary tension and confusion. Instead, model respectful communication and demonstrate a willingness to work through conflicts peacefully.

Encourage your children to maintain a positive relationship with both parents, emphasizing the importance of respect, cooperation, and compromise in co-parenting relationships.

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7. Provide Reassurance and Stability:

Reassure your children that they are not responsible for resolving the co-parenting conflict and that it is okay for them to feel upset or confused about the situation.

Maintain consistency and stability in your co-parenting arrangements to minimize disruptions and reassure your children that they can rely on a predictable routine despite the conflict.

8. Seek Professional Support if Needed:

If you are unsure how to approach the topic of co-parenting conflict with your children or if they are struggling to cope with the situation, consider seeking professional support from a therapist or counselor who specializes in family dynamics.

A mental health professional can provide guidance, resources, and strategies for helping your children understand and navigate co-parenting conflict in a healthy and constructive manner.

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Some Examples of What Co-Parents Should Avoid Sharing With Their Children

While co-parents should strive to maintain open and honest communication with their children, there are certain topics and information that may not be appropriate or beneficial to share.

1. Adult Conflicts:

Co-parents should refrain from discussing details of adult conflicts, disagreements, or legal matters with their children. Exposing children to adult conflicts can create unnecessary stress and anxiety, and may lead to feelings of guilt or loyalty conflicts.

2. Negative Remarks About the Other Parent:

Criticizing or speaking negatively about the other parent in front of the children can be damaging to their emotional well-being and can strain the parent-child relationship. Co-parents should refrain from making disparaging remarks about the other parent, regardless of their personal feelings or disagreements.

3. Financial Issues:

Discussions about financial matters, such as child support payments, alimony, or financial struggles, should be kept between the co-parents and not shared with the children. Children may feel burdened or anxious if they are aware of financial difficulties within the family.

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4. Intimate Details of the Parental Relationship:

Co-parents should avoid sharing intimate details or personal information about their relationship with their children. Children do not need to be privy to the romantic or intimate aspects of their parents' relationship, and such disclosures can be confusing or uncomfortable for them.

5. Adult Responsibilities:

Co-parents should refrain from burdening their children with adult responsibilities or emotional support beyond their developmental capacity. Children should be allowed to focus on their own growth, development, and well-being, rather than feeling pressured to take on adult roles or concerns.

6. Parental Conflict with Extended Family:

Discussions or conflicts with extended family members, such as grandparents or siblings, should be kept separate from interactions with the children. Children should not be drawn into disputes or disagreements involving extended family members.

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7. Legal Proceedings or Court Orders:

While it's important to inform children about changes in custody arrangements or visitation schedules in an age-appropriate manner, co-parents should avoid discussing legal proceedings or court orders in detail with their children. This information can be confusing or overwhelming for children and may lead to feelings of insecurity or instability.



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Understanding the Impact on Children:

Children are highly impressionable and vulnerable to the emotional turmoil caused by adult conflicts.

Exposing children to adult discussions can lead to anxiety, confusion, and feelings of guilt or responsibility.

Court-related issues can overwhelm children with stress and uncertainty, affecting their emotional and psychological development.

Co-parenting problems can create a tense and hostile environment for children, hindering their ability to feel safe and secure.

Bad-mouthing the other parent can damage the child's self-esteem, identity, and trust in relationships.



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Strategies to Shield Children:

Maintain an age-appropriate level of communication with your children, avoiding details of adult conflicts or legal proceedings.

Create a safe space for children to express their feelings and concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal.

Seek professional support, such as counseling or therapy, to help children cope with the emotional impact of divorce or separation.

Develop a co-parenting plan focused on the child's best interests, prioritizing their emotional well-being over personal grievances.

Positive Communication Practice:

Encourage open and respectful communication between co-parents, fostering a cooperative and supportive co-parenting relationship.

Use neutral language when discussing the other parent, refraining from negative comments or criticism in front of the children.

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Focus on highlighting the positive aspects of the other parent's relationship with the children, promoting a sense of security and stability.

Resolve conflicts away from children's ears, ensuring they are shielded from adult disagreements and tensions.

Model healthy conflict resolution skills, demonstrating to children the importance of communication, compromise, and empathy.

Children raised in a supportive and nurturing co-parenting environment are more resilient and adaptable to life's challenges.



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Impact of Positive Co-Parenting:

Positive co-parenting fosters a sense of belonging and security, promoting healthy emotional development and self-esteem.

Children learn valuable life skills, such as effective communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution, through the example set by their parents.

By prioritizing their children's well-being, co-parents can cultivate a strong and enduring bond with their children, enriching their parent-child relationships.



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Long-Term Impact on Children

As co-parents, it's essential to be mindful of the long-term impact our actions and conversations can have on our children. Research provides valuable insights into the consequences of discussing adult matters, court-related issues, co-parenting problems, and bad-mouthing the other parent to children. This guide aims to explore the findings of research studies and offer practical advice for promoting healthy co-parenting dynamics.

1. Adult Conversations and Court-Related Issues:

- Research shows that exposing children to adult conversations, especially those related to conflict and legal matters, can lead to heightened stress and anxiety.
- Longitudinal studies have demonstrated a correlation between exposure to parental conflict and poor mental health outcomes in children, including depression and anxiety disorders.
- Children who are involved in court-related issues, such as custody battles or litigation, may experience feelings of insecurity, mistrust, and instability, which can persist into adulthood.

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2. Co-Parenting Problems:

- Studies indicate that children raised in high-conflict co-parenting environments are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, academic difficulties, and social impairments.
- Long-term research has linked ongoing co-parenting conflicts to decreased parent-child relationships, reduced self-esteem, and increased risk of emotional and psychological disorders.
- Co-parenting problems can have lasting effects on children's emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and overall well-being, shaping their attitudes and behaviors into adulthood.

3. Badmouthing the Other Parent:

- Research consistently demonstrates the harmful effects of parental alienation and negative communication about the other parent.
- Children who are subjected to bad-mouthing or denigration of the other parent may experience loyalty conflicts, identity confusion, and self-esteem issues.

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- Longitudinal studies have shown that children exposed to parental alienation tactics are at higher risk of developing attachment disorders, low self-confidence, and difficulty forming healthy relationships in the future.

4. Practical Recommendations:

- Avoid discussing adult matters, court-related issues, or co-parenting problems in front of children, shielding them from unnecessary stress and conflict.
- Focus on maintaining a positive co-parenting relationship, prioritizing the child's well-being and emotional stability above personal grievances.
- Seek professional support, such as family therapy or mediation, to address co-parenting conflicts and improve communication strategies.
- Encourage children to express their feelings and concerns in a safe and supportive environment, validating their emotions and offering reassurance.

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In summary, as co-parents, it's our responsibility to shield our children from the negative impact of adult conflicts and to provide them with a nurturing and supportive environment to thrive. Co-parents should exercise discretion and sensitivity when sharing information with their children, focusing on maintaining a supportive and nurturing environment that prioritizes the children's emotional well-being and developmental needs, co-parents can help their children navigate the complexities of co-parenting dynamics and reassure them of your love and support despite any conflicts that may arise.

Co-Parent's understanding of the long-term effects of discussing adult matters, court-related issues, co-parenting problems, and bad-mouthing the other parent, co-parents can take proactive steps to promote their children's emotional well-being and resilience.

Let's commit to nurturing healthy co-parenting relationships for the sake of our children's happiness and resilience.