

CO-PARENTING

TOOLS, TIPS, & TACTICS

DONT USE YOUR KIDS AS MESSENGERS



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Family Integration Therapy
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Expert Witness Services
Professional Consultation
Collaborative Divorce Coach / Neutral Facilitator
Specialized Treatment & Consultation with Court-Involved Children & Families
Court-ordered Mental Health Evaluations / Psychological Evaluations
Competency Evaluations (Juvenile & Adults)

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(no court order required)

Individual Therapy
Family Therapy
Psychological Testing
Giftedness Evaluations
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Introduction

As coparents navigating the complexities of raising children after separation or divorce, effective communication is paramount. Coparenting, ideally, should provide a nurturing and stable environment for children to thrive despite the challenges of parental separation. However, resorting to using children as messengers to relay information between coparents can lead to a myriad of problems that negatively impact both the children and the coparenting relationship.

Therefore it is imperative to address the detrimental impact of using children as messengers in coparenting relationships. This guide aims to shed light on the potential pitfalls associated with using children as messengers in coparenting and offers strategies to foster healthier communication dynamics.

Effective communication between co-parents is vital for the well-being of their children. Using children as messengers is not only a violation of your court-ordered parenting plan but it can have detrimental effects on their emotional health and overall development.

In this co-parent resource, you will learn the importance of direct communication between co-parents and the potential negative impacts on children when they are used as messengers.

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Why Direct Communication Matters:

Even though it seems so much easier to just tell the children.

1. Clear and Consistent Messages:

Direct communication ensures that both co-parents are on the same page regarding schedules, routines, and important decisions.

Undermined Coparenting Relationship**: Relying on children as messengers erodes trust and cooperation between coparents, hindering their ability to effectively work together in the best interests of their children.

Children will be comforted knowing that their parents are working together to take care of their needs and provide predictability, safety, structure, and consistency in their lives, even after divorce or separation.

"The best, most mature co-parent will tell their therapist - and not their child - how much the other parent sucks." -Unknown Author

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2. Reduced Misunderstandings:

Messages can be misinterpreted or altered when passed through a child, leading to confusion, misunderstandings, and conflict between co-parents.

Children can inadvertently maintain conflict between co-parents who rely on their child(ren) to share messages or who are asked to answer co-parenting questions, especially if the co-parents are positional about what is being asked of the child to share. Under these circumstances, the child has “two masters” and often will tell one parent what they think they want to hear and the other parent what they think that parent wants to hear.



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3. Modeling Healthy Communication:

Children learn how to communicate by observing their parents. Direct communication sets a positive example for them to follow in their own relationships.

Parents who:

- *Argue (fight) in front of their children*
- *Tell their children to keep secrets*
- *Speak negatively of each other in front of the child(ren)*
- *Display low frustration tolerance*

Will have children who copy these behaviors



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Negative Effects on Children:

1. Feelings of Anxiety and Stress:

Being caught in the middle of parental conflicts and acting as messengers places undue responsibility on children and can cause them to feel anxious and stressed, as they may worry about saying the wrong thing or upsetting one or both parents.

2. Sense of Responsibility::

Children may feel burdened with the responsibility of accurately delivering messages, which can lead to guilt, inadequacy, or fear of making mistakes or disappointing one or both parents.

3. Increased Conflict Exposure:

Acting as messengers exposes children to parental conflicts, which can be emotionally damaging and contribute to feelings of insecurity and instability.

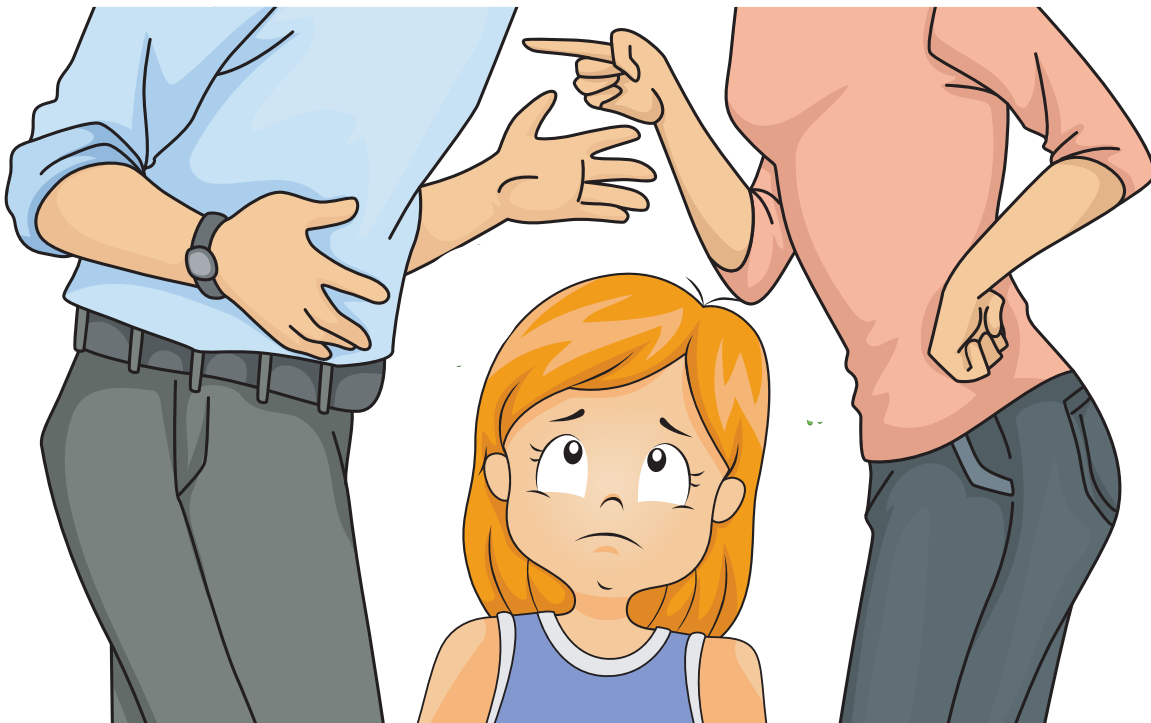
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4. Damage to Parent-Child Relationship:

Children may resent being used as messengers, which can strain their relationship with both co-parents and erode trust. It could also be confusing for children who may misinterpret the intentions of a parent sharing adult information with him or her.

For example, I worked with a child who told me that the parent sharing adult information and messages to be passed on to the other parent was doing it because they trusted them, and the other parent who was maintaining appropriate parent-child boundaries, didn't trust them.



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5. Impact on Mental Health and Well-being:

The cumulative effect of being used as messengers can have long-term consequences on children's mental health and overall well-being, potentially leading to issues such as depression and low self-esteem.



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Effective Communication Strategies:

- 1. Utilize Technology:** Use email, text messages, or co-parenting apps to communicate important information efficiently and directly.
- 2. Schedule Regular Meetings:** Set aside time for face-to-face or virtual meetings to discuss co-parenting matters, ensuring that both parties are fully informed and involved.
- 3. Establish Boundaries:** Agree to refrain from using children as messengers and commit to communicating directly with each other.
- 4. Seek Mediation or Counseling:** If communication barriers persist, consider seeking the help of a mediator or counselor to facilitate productive conversations and improve co-parenting dynamics.
- 5. Focus on the Child's Best Interest:** Remember that prioritizing the well-being of your child means prioritizing effective communication with your coparent.

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In conclusion, it is evident from both psychological research and clinical experience that using children as messengers in coparenting relationships is highly detrimental to the well-being of the child.

As psychologists, we understand the profound impact that parental behavior has on a child's emotional development and overall mental health. By refraining from using children as messengers, coparents can create a more supportive and nurturing environment that prioritizes the child's needs and promotes healthy family dynamics.

By fostering direct communication between coparents, we not only mitigate the negative effects on the child but also model effective conflict resolution and communication skills that serve as invaluable lessons for the child's own future relationships.

Let us, as coparents and professionals alike, commit to prioritizing the best interests of the child and cultivating an environment that fosters their growth and well-being.