

Co-Parenting 101

Getting along makes life better for everyone.

BY **SONYA CARRILLO**

For the most part, I wrote this article with my mama hat on. I have an extremely happy, well-adjusted 5-year-old son. His father and I share time, and the boy never misses a beat. It is possible!

Parenting relationships do not end with divorce; they go on for many years. Think high school football games, prom, college graduation, weddings, grandchildren, and other important milestones. The real key to effective co-parenting is to get along with the other parent. Period. (Of course, this applies to run-of-the-mill “normal” cases, absent any domestic violence or other issues.)

It’s not the end of the world if your child’s mom is 15 minutes late for an exchange. Or if the baseball belt accidentally gets eaten by your ex-husband’s dog. As a family law practitioner, I hear these stories every single day. Dad didn’t return the rain boots, mom kept the Minnie Mouse socks, child was late to soccer, dad put a cookie in the child’s lunchbox (the horror!), etc.

Litigation is time consuming, stressful, and expensive. Part of the anxiety is due to the unknown. No lawyer can guarantee what will happen at your trial. Do you really want a judge, who only gets to see a snippet of your life, to make decisions for your child? The faster two parents learn to get along and co-parent, the better life will be for everyone. And you will save a ton of money!

Relax.

You must be able to put your feelings aside and always do what’s best for the child—not what’s best for mom or dad. If that means letting the child



spend an extra day at dad’s, then do it (and go get your nails done)! The key is to get along with one another. Keep in mind that most possession orders have language that basically says the parents can mutually agree on whatever possession schedule they want, and if they can’t agree, then of course follow the court order. If the other parent calls and wants to talk to the child, let her. It takes five minutes and it makes your kid happy.

Communicate.

If a problem arises, talk to the other parent. Don’t confront, just communicate. It’s so simple to text something like: “Hey, can you send

little Timmy’s rain boots when you drop him off Thursday?” There’s no need to get all worked up about a simple nonissue.

Make big decisions together. If you happen to get the invitation to pre-K graduation, send the other parent a copy so that he or she can plan accordingly. These might seem like very simple things, but they can make a huge difference.

Remember extracurricular activities.

This one drives me nuts. If your child plays T-ball and a practice happens to fall on your day/week, take the child to practice. I cannot tell you how many parents ask me if they

have to take the child to extracurricular activities that fall on their days. Why would you want your child to miss out on his or her sport? Take it a step further and sit together at these events. No, I'm not crazy; I just care about my child's well-being.

Let it go.

Think *Frozen*. Let. It. Go. Let go of any resentment that you might have from the dissolution of your marriage or relationship. Bad things happened—the marriage resulted in a divorce. That ship has sailed. Now it's time to be an amazing parent for your amazing child.

There will be a ton of things that the other parent does that might drive you absolutely up the wall, but you must stop and ask yourself if it's worth fighting over. And by fighting, I mean screwing up your kid. Remember, the fastest way to do this

is to constantly argue, litigate every chance you get, withhold visitation, or disparage the other parent in front of the child. If you do these things, you are doing damage.

When the other parent starts dating (this is usually a precursor to the modification suit) or the other parent does something you don't like, keep your cool. Everyone has different parenting styles. It doesn't mean that either is right or wrong—they are just different.

Miscellaneous.

When your child is upset and doesn't want to visit the other parent, be encouraging. Tell the child how much fun he or she is going to have. My number one, all-time, no-excuses rule: Never talk badly about the other parent in front of the child. This is so incredibly harmful. Call up your own mother (thanks, Mom!) and

vent when your child is not around.

When you are struggling with all of the changes that are taking place, new significant others, different parenting styles, etc., remember that your child is going through all of those changes *in addition to* being bounced around from home to home. You need to remain calm and be an adult.

Lastly, don't get discouraged. Coparenting is not an easy-breezy thing to do. There's definitely a learning curve. It takes work and patience, but wouldn't you do anything for the happiness of your child? **TBJ**

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