

The Co-Parenting Do's and Don'ts in a Family Separation



Co-Parenting is when both parents are involved in raising a child. It involves positive, effective communication, cooperation, and compromise. Co-parenting after a family separation can be a challenge but is possible and can become stronger over time, when the effort is made.

The Do's

- If possible, make a team parenting plan with the other parent about how you are going to approach co-parenting. Team parenting keeps the child's needs at the forefront, is committed and consistent, includes healthy communication and consideration for each parent's point of view, is flexible, and mutually respectful.
- Find a middle ground that provides structure and consistency for the children whilst also allowing for flexibility based on the developmentally appropriate and everyday needs of the children.
- Start with discussing what initial areas are important that you both want to prioritise in the process of family separation (e.g., routine, structure, jointly agreed rules). This will provide the children with a sense of security, and structure, whilst also minimising potential conflict. You can move onto discussing the larger items (e.g., ongoing care arrangements, discipline responses, what your new parent roles will now be, what joint family values do you both agree on).
- Work out how you will communicate with the other parent – either via email, text, or phone. If there is conflict – make a rule to limit communication to only specifically being about the children.
- Frequently reflect on what you can do to ensure that your children's needs are being met, and/or what barriers are preventing these from happening.
- Remember that an effective co-parenting relationship is going to ensure positive outcomes for your children's mental health and wellbeing.

The Don'ts

- Don't put your children in the middle of the parental relationship. As adults, we cannot expect children to take sides or to communicate or pass on messages between parents. When you need to communicate with the other parent, use a communication book or emails to share important information that involve the children.
- Don't undermine the other parent. Instead support one another and appreciate the important role they play in your child's life. After all, your children love both of you equally.
- Don't use your children to support your emotions. Children are not adult's therapists or counsellors. Instead, reach out to professionals, family, or friends.
- Don't let things like family values or house rules slide. Children need stability and consistency as it provides a sense of safety, and normalcy.
- Don't criticise the other parent or focus on what goes on in their home. Each household will be run differently. When children are put in the middle of this, they often respond by pitting one parent against the other. Explain to children that there are Daddy rules when you are with Dad and Mummy rules when you are with Mum e.g., "Daddy lets you eat on the couch at his house, but at our house, we eat at the table" "Mummy lets you play video games after school at her house, but at our house, you play for the hour before dinner".
- Don't let arguments escalate. Quickly the conversation can become less about the children's needs and more about adult issues. Keep in mind you are both still working as a team despite the separation, on the same side, with the same goal of supporting your children in the best way possible. You both want your children to thrive and be the best person they can be.

