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# Co-Parenting Journey

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## Thumb Tactics



### Realize, Reference, Respond

I rely on written communication with my co-parent to keep track of the kids, understand changes, and to adjust schedules. I struggle with change, that is no secret. No matter how easy a change seems - I spin. I can also step in something real quick when an accusation comes my way. The truth is, confusion quickly turns to fear and that gets me in trouble. But having a record is helpful. I circle back to our messages when my co-parent pulls the rug out from under me.

I follow a simple protocol when I have to communicate with my co-parent about changes or concerns.

#### 1. Realize

I read his message. I realize what he means - meaning I read it a few times and study it. If I am the one starting the conversation, I realize what message I want to relay. I practice in my own mind what I would say.

#### 2. Reference

In my mind, I circle back to what our parenting plan is. Is this a change? I reference any verbal agreements we have made since, I do a quick search for keywords in our text conversation. I want to be clear that I know what I agreed to if we have had a previous discussion. I also do

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not want to make multiple changes and risk upsetting people or confusing the kids. I consider all input and I sit with it for a while. For me, that may be an hour or more. Some conversations do not take that long. But if I am mad or start thinking snappy, I need to keep referencing.

### 3. Respond

When I am ready to provide feedback or I need more input, I draft a message and then read it outloud to myself. I consider if my response is professional; would I send it to a client? I change words and phrasing to reflect as much neutrality as I can before I send. If I have to ask a question, I do so briefly. “What do you mean?” or “Please clarify.” Brief is best all around, but especially when your response includes questions and the word ‘no.’

Responding to aggressive comments and blaming language must be handled with a clear head. When my co-parent makes a comment I feel is blaming or accusatory, I use the same protocol. The formula is the same for me, but each step looks different with each situation. Depending on what is said, and what is at stake, you will need more time or more reference. Take what you need - most issues are not time sensitive.

- *I have not received a response to a comment or question:* “I am following up on my text on [date, time]. Please consider my request.”
- *I cannot commit to my co-parent’s request:* “I am unable to do as you have requested due to my schedule restrictions.”
- *My words were twisted or my intention was assumed:* “I disagree with your interpretation. I said, [quote previous text]. Would you like me to expand on this?”
- *A change was made without my consent or knowledge:* “I understand the kids are at a sleepover. Am I misunderstanding that this is my night?”
- *I need information and my requests have been met with arguments or avoided:* “I wish to discuss [topic].” “Before we move on...” I circle back to the question that needs a reply or the issue that needs to be discussed.
- The conversation is turning ugly: “I prefer to step back from this topic for now. I can text tomorrow and see if we have any new thoughts.”

Ultimately, I want what he wants - for my kids to feel safe and loved. We make their container. I am not trying to be right, and I am not trying to prove anyone wrong. I just want clarity, for myself and for my kids. To get there, my behavior needs to demonstrate my mission, despite what my co-parent says or does.

**Bricks in my Backpack** is a resource my daughter developed and together we are sharing our experiences to help others through similar situations. It is a free resource including downloads and templates for tough conversations.