

What is co-parenting?

Co-parenting is the shared parenting of children by their parents or parental figures who are non-married or living apart.

Co-parents may be divorced or may have never married. They don't have any romantic involvement with each other. Co-parenting is also called joint parenting.

Co-parents share not only the typical caretaking of their children, but also confer on major decisions about upbringing, including:

- education
- medical care
- religious schooling
- other matters of importance

Co-parenting is common. A [2014 review Trusted Source](#) estimates 60 percent of children in the United States live with their married biological parents. The other 40 percent live in a variety of situations, many of which involve co-parenting.

Read on to learn more about co-parenting, including tips, things to avoid, and more.

How to co-parent

Successful co-parenting benefits children in a number of ways.

Research published in the [Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science](#) found that children who are raised by cooperative co-parents have fewer behavior problems. They're also closer to their fathers than kids who are raised by hostile co-parents or a single parent.

Here's how to increase your chances of co-parenting success:

1. Let go of the past

You won't be able to successfully co-parent if you have nothing but contempt for your ex. You can still vent your frustrations with friends, family, or a therapist, but never vent about the other parent to your children.

2. Focus on your child

Whatever may have happened in your relationship in the past, remember, it's in the past. Your present focus should be on what's best for your child or children.

3. Communicate

Good co-parenting depends on good communication. Here are some guidelines:

- **Be clear, concise, and respectful.** Don't criticize, blame, accuse, or threaten. Your communication should be businesslike.
- **Be cooperative.** Before you communicate, think of how your thoughts will come across. Will you sound unreasonable or like a bully?
- **Keep texting brief.** If you're texting or emailing your communication, keep it brief, polite, and to the point. Set up boundaries with your co-parent on how many emails or texts are appropriate in a day.
- **Communicate directly.** When you go through an intermediary like a stepparent, grandparent, or significant other, you run the risk of things getting miscommunicated. You can also make your co-parent feel marginalized.

4. Actively listen

The other part of communication is listening. To help your co-parent feel understood and heard, consider the following:

- Take turns speaking.
- Don't interrupt.
- Before you take your turn to speak, repeat in your own words what your co-parent said, and ask if you understood it correctly. If not, ask the co-parent to rephrase it.

5. Support one another

Recognize that [the best parents are ones who work together](#). When you see the other parent do something you like, compliment them. Positive reinforcement is a key ingredient to positive co-parenting.

Likewise, follow through on mutually agreed-upon rules. If you've agreed on a set curfew, bedtime, or screen time limit your child has to follow regardless of which parent they're with, stick to those rules when your child is with you.

6. Plan for holidays and vacations

Holidays and vacations can be a tricky time for co-parents, but communication and planning can make these times easier. Here are some tips:

- Give as much advance notice as possible.
- Provide your co-parent with contact information of where you'll be.
- Keep children in their usual holiday routines. If before you split you usually spent Thanksgiving with your side of the family and Christmas with your ex's, keep the routine the same. Again, consistency is good for children.
- When you can't share holidays, try alternating them.
- Try not to plan a vacation around a time when the co-parent has care of the children.

7. Compromise

No parent sees eye-to-eye, whether they're together or apart. When you can't agree on an issue, try to work out a solution you can live with.

For example, if you think it's really important that your child attend church services when they're with a nonreligious co-parent, see if your co-parent would be amenable to dropping the child off at the service and then picking them up afterward. Or maybe you could agree that the co-parent will get the child to services every other time.

6 things to avoid

To co-parent effectively, keep these six guidelines in mind:

1. Don't talk negatively about your co-parent to your children.
2. Don't ask your child to take sides.
3. Don't keep your child from their co-parent out of anger or spite. The only legitimate reason to withhold a child is for their safety.
4. Don't ask your child to "spy" on the co-parent.
5. Don't be inconsistent with the mutually agreed-upon parenting plan.
6. Don't let promises fall through.

HEALTHLINE NEWSLETTERS

Sign up for free Parenthood Week by Week newsletter

<https://www.healthline.com/health/parenting/co-parenting#self-care>

Friendly support, advice, and guidance for your parenting journey, delivered right to your inbox.

How to create a parenting plan

Setting ground rules and being explicit about expectations will help ensure a smoother co-parenting experience.

If the plan you originally develop doesn't work well, don't be afraid to work with your co-parent to adjust it as needed. And remember that a plan that works well when your child is younger may need to be adjusted as your child grows older.

Here are some points to consider when developing a plan:

- Know when your child or children will switch homes, where and when they'll be picked up, and what kind of behavior is expected at each home.
- Arrange with your co-parent whether your children will call or text you when they're with the co-parent. If they will, then set a specific time.
- Make sure everyone is clear about their child care roles. For example, you might want to accept all responsibilities when your child is with you. Or, you and your co-parent may wish to split or otherwise delegate some daily responsibilities, like taking the children to school, getting them to extracurricular activities, etc.
- Follow similar routines at each respective home. For example, homework at 5 p.m. and bedtime at 8 p.m., or no television on school nights. Kids function better with consistency.
- Agree on what and how you'll discipline. Set mutual household rules, such as curfews and what chores need to be done. Display a unified front when enforcing them.

Be prepared to change and adjust your parenting plan as your children age and circumstances change.

[powered by Rubicon Project](#)

Working with a therapist

Seek professional help if you notice signs of stress in your child. These signs can appear as:

- problems sleeping or eating
- feelings of sadness or depression
- drop in grades
- moodiness
- fear of being away from a parent
- compulsive behaviors

Also get help if you're having conflict with your co-parent or you find yourself:

- feeling depressed or anxious
- making your children be a messenger for you and your co-parent
- relying on your children for emotional support
- repeatedly bad-mouthing your co-parent

What form of therapy you choose will depend on how old your child is, why you're seeking professional help, and your relationship with your co-parent.

After an initial consultation with a professional, you should be able to better narrow your choices. You can ask your friends, your doctor, [your child's pediatrician](#), or your employee assistance program for therapist recommendations.

Self-care

The loss of a relationship and the navigation of successful co-parenting can create a tremendous amount of stress. [Help yourself cope](#) with these tips:

- Grieve the relationship by talking about it with supportive friends, family, or a therapist — not your children. It may help to write your feelings down.
- Don't personalize or blame yourself for the breakup.
- Establish a routine. It will help you feel more in control.
- Treat yourself to something nice when stress gets overwhelming. It might be a bouquet of flowers, a massage, or whatever you enjoy that seems special.
- Be kind to yourself. Accept that you may make mistakes, and that's OK. Take them as a learning opportunity and move on.

The takeaway

Co-parenting can be challenging, but with the right tools you can co-parent successfully. Keys to effective co-parenting are good communication with your ex as well as a clear, thoughtfully designed parenting plan.

Like all parenting, whether it's done as a unit or not, the focus should always be on what's best for your children.