

A PARENT'S GUIDE

Co-Parenting During Divorce

How to protect your children — and your co-parenting relationship — while the divorce is still in progress.

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Please read first

This guide is general information, not legal or financial advice, and does not create an attorney-client relationship. Divorce laws, tax rules, and financial circumstances vary and change. Consult a licensed attorney and, where noted, a qualified financial or tax professional about your specific situation.

1. The Hardest Part: Parenting Through Your Own Pain

Divorce asks you to do something almost unfair: to keep showing up as a steady, loving parent at the very moment your own world feels like it's coming apart. Your children didn't choose this, and they're watching how you handle it more closely than you realize.

This guide is about the stretch of time while the divorce is still in progress before anything is final, when emotions run highest and nothing feels settled. Getting co-parenting right during this window protects your children and, not incidentally, tends to lead to better outcomes in your case.

The one thing to remember

Your marriage is ending. Your co-parenting relationship is not. The way you treat the other parent now becomes the foundation of how you'll raise your children across two homes for years to come. Play the long game.

2. What Children Need During Divorce

Children of different ages process divorce differently, but nearly all of them need the same core reassurances. Keep coming back to these.

- **That it's not their fault.** Children often quietly believe they caused it. Tell them directly and repeatedly that they didn't.
- **That both parents still love them.** Reassure them the parent-child bond isn't ending, even though the marriage is.
- **That they don't have to choose.** Never make a child feel they must pick a side or a favorite.
- **That their routine is safe.** Predictability is comforting. Keep as much of their normal life intact as you can.
- **That it's okay to love the other parent.** Give them explicit permission to enjoy their time with your co-parent.
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Age matters

Younger children need simple, concrete reassurance and routine. School-age children may blame themselves or try to "fix" things. Teenagers may act indifferent while hurting deeply, and need respect for their independence alongside steady presence. Tailor your reassurance to where your child actually is.

3. The Cardinal Rules

Never put your child in the middle

No messages passed through the child, no pumping them for information about the other parent's household, no making them the go-between. They are children, not couriers or confidants.

Never badmouth the other parent

Your child is half of each of you. When you criticize their other parent, they often hear it as criticism of themselves. Vent to a friend, a therapist, a journal — never to or near your child.

Keep adult conflict away from children

Arguments, legal details, financial stress, the reasons for the divorce — these are adult matters. Shield your children from them, including overheard phone calls and visible tension at exchanges.

Don't use your child as a spy or a weapon

Withholding time to punish the other parent, or interrogating your child about the other home, uses the child as leverage. It causes real harm and reflects badly on the parent who does it.

Instead of...	Try...
"Ask your father why the check was late."	Handle it parent-to-parent, away from your child.
"Did Mom have anyone over this weekend?"	"Did you have a good time? What did you do?"
"I can't afford that because of your dad."	"That's not in the budget right now, but here's what we can do."
"You don't have to go if you don't want to."	"You're spending the weekend with Dad — have fun, I'll see you Sunday."

4. Telling the Children and Talking as It Unfolds

If you haven't already told the children, try to do it together with the other parent when possible, with a simple, unified, age-appropriate message: we both love you, this isn't your fault, and here's what will stay the same.

As things progress

- Give age-appropriate updates about changes that affect them (a move, a new schedule) — not about the legal fight.
- Answer their questions honestly but simply. You don't owe them adult details.
- Let them have their feelings without rushing to fix or minimize.

- Watch for signs they're struggling: sleep or appetite changes, withdrawal, slipping grades, regression in younger kids.

When to bring in help

If your child seems to be struggling with symptoms such as persistent sadness, anxiety, behavioral changes, or anything that worries you, a child therapist or school counselor can help. Seeking support is a sign of good parenting, not failure. It will also matter in your case whether and how you responded to your child's needs.

5. Making a Temporary Schedule Work

Before anything is final, you'll likely operate under a temporary parenting-time arrangement — sometimes formal, sometimes informal. Treat it seriously; courts notice how parents behave during this period.

Make exchanges smooth

- Be on time. Reliability is respect, both for your child and the other parent.
- Keep exchanges brief and neutral. They are not the moment to raise disputes.
- Send your child off warmly. Your tone tells them whether it's okay to go.
- Have their things ready such as clothes, homework, medications, and comfort items.

Between homes

- Keep both homes stocked with essentials so transitions are easy.
- Share important information: school events, medical appointments, how they've been.
- Respect the other parent's time; don't over-call or interrupt their days.

6. Communicating With Your Co-Parent

During divorce, tension is highest and communication is hardest. A few disciplines keep it functional. (If you have our Co-Parenting Communication Toolkit, lean on those templates here.)

- **Keep it businesslike.** Brief, factual, civil — like emailing a coworker you cooperate with.
- **Write for a judge.** Assume every message could be read in court. It changes how you write.
- **Use the tools.** A co-parenting app (OurFamilyWizard, TalkingParents) keeps a clean, date-stamped record.
- **Stick to the kids.** Logistics, health, school, schedule. Leave the relationship out of it.
- **Don't take the bait.** If they're hostile, answer the practical question and let the rest go.

If communication feels impossible

In high-conflict situations, tools like parallel parenting (minimizing direct contact while each parent handles their own time) or a neutral third-party app can reduce friction. If there's any history of abuse or intimidation, tell your attorney. Safety comes first, and there are ways to structure communication protectively.

7. Taking Care of Yourself

This isn't a luxury, it's part of parenting well. You cannot pour from an empty cup, and children of a depleted, overwhelmed parent feel it.

- Find an outlet for your emotions that isn't your child: a therapist, a support group, trusted friends.
- Protect your basics like sleep, food, and exercise, even in small ways.
- Give yourself grace. You will not do this perfectly. No one does.
- Keep a short list of who you can call on a hard day, and use it.

8. Quick-Reference Tools

The Co-Parenting Do / Don't List

Do	Don't
Reassure them it's not their fault	Badmouth the other parent
Keep routines steady	Put your child in the middle
Be on time and reliable	Interrogate them about the other home
Keep adult conflict away from them	Use time or the child as a weapon
Support their bond with the other parent	Share legal or financial details
Take care of yourself	Make them choose sides

Weekly Co-Parenting Check-In (for yourself)

A quick self-audit. Print and revisit weekly.

- ☐ Did I keep adult conflict away from my child this week?
- ☐ Did I speak neutrally or kindly about their other parent?
- ☐ Were exchanges on time and calm?
- ☐ Did I share the information the other parent needed?
- ☐ Did my child seem okay, and how did I respond if not?
- ☐ Did I take care of myself, too?

My Support List

People I can call on a hard day:

My therapist / counselor:

My child's counselor (if any):

My attorney:

A Word From Attorney Sam Khorroosi

No one co-parents through a divorce perfectly. The goal isn't perfection — it's to keep your children feeling safe, loved, and out of the middle while the adults sort out the adult things. Every calm exchange and every kind word about their other parent is a gift to your child that they'll carry for life.

Our practice focuses on family law and custody in Minnesota, and we've worked alongside child psychologists on how divorce affects children. If you'd like guidance tailored to your family, we're here to help.



[Schedule Your Consultation](#)

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