

## Co-Parenting After a Divorce—Tips from a Mediator

Co-parenting starts the day the decision is made to divorce has been made. Even the most amicable divorces need a plan for future co-parenting. Putting your children's best interests first, no matter how much you may dislike their other parent, is the key to co-parenting.

The first thing you must do is decide if you and your spouse are able to talk about co-parenting after the divorce. If you feel you can, that is great. The strongest agreements will come from the two of you. However, if you cannot talk about co-parenting, don't!! Let professionals such as mediators and therapists, assist both of you with co-parenting discussions. This is too important an issue to not be done the right way.

Here are a few tips to help ensure positive co-parenting

- 1) Plan everything in your divorce decree - Do not leave any decisions to, "We'll work it out on our own". The more thorough and detailed you are now, the better co-parents you will be. Not detailing everything for your children now almost guarantees future parental disagreements, emergency court dates and lots of attorney fees.
- 2) Limit the exchange of \$ to the bare minimum- try not to split children expenses 50/50. Instead each of you do your best to write out future expenses for the kids (possibly as part of the financial statement for the divorce) and each pick expenses they will pay for. Will this be exactly 50/50 every year, of course not. However, over the years, it will balance out. When things change, you sit down as parents and restructure who pay what, but remember, if you can't talk about, bring in a professional to help.
- 3) Plan ahead for the introduction of significant others. This is a very touchy subject, especially when the divorce is due to an affair. However, so as to limit future problems, this issue must be addressed now.
- 4) Plan meetings-whether you anticipate problems or not, it is a good idea to schedule future parenting meetings in you divorce agreement. They can always be cancelled if things are going well but are crucial when things are not.
- 5) Even though it been mentioned a number of times in this article, I cannot stress enough the use of trained professionals when any co-parenting problems arise. They can save you a lot of heartache, money and help ensure your children will continue to have the love and respect of two parents.

Lastly, co-parenting after a divorce is not easy. It takes commitment, flexibility and at times, giving in for the sake of your children. In my private practice, I have seen divorced parents come to me for the most insignificant issues. When I ask them why they cannot work it out on their own, I get three answers. (1) "It is not our divorce agreement", " We thought we could work it out and we can not talk." Being good parents is about making sacrifices and doing what is best for you children.