



## Co-Parenting through Separation and Divorce

# Talking With Your Child's Other Parent

*Following are some suggestions for carrying out constructive conversations with your child's other parent.*

*No matter how angry you and your former spouse may be with each other over divorce-related matters, it will be important for you to continue to communicate for the sake of your child. You will have to have conversations with each other in order to make good decisions concerning the child, and you both want to feel that your views as parents are being heard by the other partner. Here are some positive techniques that will help you keep these conversations constructive and productive.*

## Preparation

- Before the conversation, remind yourself that your goal is to achieve what is in the best interest of your child, not to seek revenge on your former spouse for injuries done to you.
- Plan a clear description of what you feel is the issue and what you feel is the best solution for your child.
- Consider other options, especially those that you can predict your former spouse might feel are in the child's best interests.
- Again: make sure, for your own sake and the child's, that you are considering your child's best interests rather than your own.

## The Conversation

- Try to use neutral, factual language as much as possible.
- Try to make statements that explain your feelings ("I feel . . .") rather than statements that accuse the other parent of wrongdoing ("You always . . .").
- Don't expect your former spouse to be able to read your mind: explain your views as clearly as possible.
- Similarly, don't assume that you can read your former spouse's mind: ask that person to explain what he/she is thinking.
- Be willing to compromise where possible.

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## ***A sample dialogue follows:***

If you are meeting in person to discuss the issue, meet on neutral ground.	“John, I’d like to meet with you at Friendly’s Restaurant next Thursday evening to talk about Sally. Would that work for you?”
If you are talking over the phone, try to pick a time that is convenient for both adults, when the children cannot overhear.	“Elaine, I need to talk with you about Sally. I know she’s at school now, and I wonder if this is a good time for a private conversation.”
Use common courtesy.	“Thanks for agreeing to meet with me on such short notice.”
Use the idea of setting a goal to introduce the topic.	“I’d like to talk with you about Sally’s summer plans.”
Start with neutral facts.	“Sally’s school vacation will run from June 20 to August 25 this year.”
If appropriate, share the child’s views with the other parent.	“Sally says she’d like to go to 4-H camp this summer.”
State your opinion or feelings about the issue.	“I think it’s a good idea.”
Ask the other parent his/her opinion, or ask whether he/she needs more information or more time to think about this issue.	“I’d like to know what you think of this plan. Would you like to look over the camp brochure and take some time to think about it?”
Identify areas of agreement and areas of potential conflict.	“I’m glad you agree that camp would be good for Sally, but we need to discuss who will pay for it.”
Be prepared to negotiate.	“Sally can contribute some of her babysitting money, and I can afford half of the remaining fee. Can you pay the other half or do you have another idea?”
Stick to the topic at hand. Don’t bring up old unresolved grievances.	“I recognize that you’re still angry about my running up credit-card bills last year, but that has nothing to do with Sally’s summer plans. Let’s please try to stick to that subject.”
Stop talking for a while if you feel an argument beginning. Schedule another meeting if necessary to conclude the discussion.	“We both seem to be getting angry about the money issue. Let’s take a break , think things over some more, and discuss the matter again on Friday. Is that OK with you?”

It requires a lot of patience and hard work on the part of both parents to engage in a conversation about children and avoid bringing up old ‘sore spots’ that will get in the way of what is best for the children. Try to focus on the end results – a child who doesn’t feel caught in the middle of anger and game-playing . . . a child who can grow up in an environment with the support of two loving parents, in spite of the fact that they are parenting apart from each other.

## **Reference:**

Mulroy, M., Malley, C., Sabatelli, R., & Waldron, R. (1995). *Parenting Apart: Strategies for Effective Co-Parenting*. University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and School of Family Studies. Excerpts used with permission of authors.

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