

The Three C's of Co-Parenting Your Children

Continuity

- Children need continuity between their old life and their new one. The fewer transitions a child has to make at once, the better, so think about living arrangements, school placement, friends, toys, food, church and routines. How can you, as co-parents, work together to ensure that your children are in familiar territory most of the time?
- Children need continuity of rules. It would be helpful to have a meeting with your co-parent on the subject of limits and priorities. If possible, make a written list of things like bedtimes, dessert guidelines, homework policies, online restrictions, forms of discipline, etc. and make a copy for both households. Discuss this list with your children, too.
- Children need continuity in their surroundings. If your child has two rooms and two homes, they don't have to be decorated the same way, but keep baby pictures, favorite games, snacks and books in each home, and make sure their security object (e.g., blanket or stuffed toy) and school books travel safely back and forth. Stable, similar bedtime routines, faith practices, treats, clothing and activities all play a role in making your children feel secure.

Communication

- You and your co-parent must keep the lines of communication open. If you have difficulty communicating in person without conflict, use phone, text or email to keep each other up-to-speed on your kids. Never skip telling the other parent about a child's health, school or emotional issues out of resentment. Never use your child to pass messages to your co-parent.
- Compromise WILL be necessary. Flex when you can for the sake of your child.
- When conflict occurs between you and your co-parent, do not allow it to impact your children. If you must have a difficult discussion, postpone it until a time when your children are not around. If you cannot postpone it, keep it calm and objective. Try keeping your eyes focused on your child rather than the other adult(s). Walk away quietly if you must.
- Do not speak ill of your co-parent as a general rule, but especially with your kids. Try to maintain a business-like relationship; you are in the 'business' of raising children together.

Childhood

- Divorce can steal the joy and freedom of childhood. Don't let it happen in your family. Whenever possible, try to maintain the child's previous, general standard of living, even if yours falls. Make opportunities for them to be with both parents – they need each of you. Despite the extra time spent changing households, make sure your children can play, maintain relationships with their friends and chill at home sometimes.
- In every conversation about divorce or separation, tell your child it is not his or her fault. Although kids may not voice this question, it is always present. Make sure your children don't end up carrying unnecessary guilt.
- Treat your children like children. Don't treat them like a surrogate partner. Don't confide in them, ask their advice or expect them to pick up the responsibilities of the absent parent. Laugh, wrestle, play, read to and snuggle with them instead.