4 KEY STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL CO-PARENTING AFTER DIVORCE

By Rosalind Sedacca

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Editor's Note: Cop-parenting is hard. If you have kids from divorced homes in your ministry (and you do), then you also have parents who may be struggling with the right way to co-parent those kids. As a children's ministry, you need to be prepared to offer advice to those parents which is the purpose of this article from Rosalind Sedacca.

While moving through divorce can seem like an insurmountable obstacle, for many parents it is just the beginning of a new and equally intimidating challenge -- co-parenting your children. Hats off to all of you who have chosen to remain in your children's lives as co-parents. It means both of you care deeply about your children and want to continue raising them in the least-disruptive possible manner.

Of course not all parents can share the parenting process in this way and for some couples it is not the ideal situation to even attempt it. But those couples who are determined to co-parent and choose to live relatively close to one another so as not to disturb the school, sports and other related schedules of their children, certainly deserve credit and acknowledgement.

This is a complex topic that can't be glossed over with a few simple how-tos. It is based on sincere levels of communication and a sense of trust between the former spouses. When handled with care, your children enjoy the security and comfort of being with their other parent when they are not with you. You are less dependent on strangers as caretakers in their lives, and that is a win-win all around.

One of the best things you can do for your children is to transition smoothly to co-parenting with your former spouse. It won't always be easy and there will certainly be challenges along the way, but here are some things to remember that will help make your new co-parenting relationship work.

- Don't bad-mouth your ex around the kids, ever! If kids ask questions, give them age- appropriate answers that are honest but not judgmental. Kids are hurt and feel guilty when the parent they love is put-down by their other parent.
- Always offer your ex the opportunity for special times with the kids – before involving a new relationship partner, i.e.: taking your teen for their drivers test or tryouts for a new sport.
- Prioritize Mom and Dad being together for special occasion: celebrating birthdays, graduations and other significant events. Be considerate of one another as co-parents to eliminate stress so your kids can enjoy a sense of family.

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- You and your ex won't agree on all things so decide to pick your battles regarding parenting issues. Determine what's worth discussing and what you can't control and need to release.

When you ignore any of these basic communication principles, you set yourself up for conflict, jealousy, stress and tension. Breaking these rules sabotages your sense of trust with your ex and that opens the door to mind games, retaliations and discord for everyone in the family. Remember: when that happens, your children are the ones who pay the price!

Be the hero in your relationship with your children's other parent. Cooperate. Collaborate. Be flexible and do favors. You are much more likely to get them back in return.

Rosalind Sedacca, CCT, is a Divorce & Parenting Coach and author of How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce? A Create-a-Storybook Guide to Preparing Your Children -- with Love! For her free book on Post-Divorce Parenting, her free weekly ezine, coaching services and other valuable resources about divorce and parenting issues visit http://www.childcentereddivorce.com. To learn more about her internationally acclaimed e-book, visit http://www.howdoitellthekids.com.

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