

Handling Difficult Moments

Your child may share information with you about their time with the other parent that causes you to become concerned or react. It is very important to know how to respond in this kind of situation. Let's say your child remarks about a negative comment your coparent made about you. If you respond with a critical comment about the other parent, it could cause a loyalty bind and harm your child's self-esteem. On the other hand, if you respond by defending yourself, you may leave your child thinking one parent is lying, which could also cause harm.



Some parents try so hard to never say anything negative that as a result, they don't respond at all when confronted with this type of situation. They fear that a defensive answer will make the other parent look bad. This creates its own set of problems. For example, saying nothing in your defense could leave your child thinking the other parent was telling the truth.

What can you do instead of defending yourself, saying something negative, or not responding at all? Consider the following options:

Child: "Daddy says you are not a good mommy because you don't help me do my homework."

You: "I'm sorry you heard that. It's okay if we do things differently. Do I help you enough with your homework?"

Child: "Mom said you are always late with the child support check."

You: "I'm sorry you had to hear about this grown-up stuff. Mom and I see this differently, but don't worry. Mom gets help from me."

Child: "Mom says you are a Disney Dad and just get to play all the time."

You: "Mom does have the harder job with homework and midweek activities. I do get to have fun with you on the weekends. That's not such a bad thing for you. I'd love to have you with me on the other days, too, but that is not the way your schedule is set up."

Child: "Dad said the divorce was your fault because you had an affair while you were still married!"

You, if it was true: "Oh my, you should not have to hear about grown-up matters."

8 STEPS TO MY CHILD'S POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



STEP 8

Cooperation or Conflict:
Coparenting Is Forever

STEP 7

All a Winner or Winner Take All:
Negotiate Agreements

STEP 6

Defuse or Light the Fuse:
Take Control of Conflict

STEP 5

Neither Fight nor Take Flight:
Manage My Own Anger

STEP 4

Make It Better or Keep It Bitter:
Choose My Personal Path

STEP 3

Let Go or Hold On:
Change My Long-term Role

STEP 2

Plan for Peace or Tug of War:
Allow My Child to Love Both Parents

STEP 1

Child-focused or Out of Focus:
Make the Commitment to Caring

EXERCISE

Coparenting Boundaries

Is this really any of my business?

Directions: Read each item below and decide if it is an issue you should discuss with your coparent. Assume that you and the coparent have a joint legal arrangement. Remember that you and your coparent are business partners. When in doubt, assume that it is NOT your business. Place an **X** in the appropriate column for each item

ISSUE	My Business?	Not My Business?
1. Your coparent got a new job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Your coparent is dating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. You are not sure who is sitting for your child and your document requires a first right of refusal for you to be able to keep your child with you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. You are not sure how your coparent is spending the child-support money.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. You wonder how late your coparent stays out in the evening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Your coparent has been going out drinking when your child is with you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Your coparent took your child boating without life jackets.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Your coparent has changed pediatricians for your child without consulting with you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Your coparent is going on a vacation without your child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Your coparent has someone spending the night when your child is staying there.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Your coparent has arranged for your child to go to an overnight summer camp without discussing this with you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The 3 Ps

P

P

P

- **Focus on the present, not the past.** Any mention of problems or habits from the past is a sure way to start a defensive argument with your coparent, so avoid it. Start every new discussion with a clean sheet of paper and the expectation that the discussion will go well.
- **Focus on the problem, not on the person.** Use language that puts the focus on what's good for the child rather than what you don't like about the coparent. For example, instead of talking about "the things I allow at my house," talk about safety issues and homework conditions. Keep the problem at the center of the discussion and the child at the center of the solution rather than using the time to blame.
- **Focus on the one problem at hand, not the whole universe.** Don't try to change the world. Ask your coparent for an appointment to discuss a single topic. And discuss only that topic. When the conversation moves away from the topic, say, "Yes, that's important too, but right now let's focus on this topic." If you succeed in handling one topic, stop. Allow yourselves to experience success and enjoy it. If you always push for another topic until you get caught in an argument, you're cheating yourself and your child.

As a summary, fill in the blanks.

Focus on the P _____, not the P _____.

Focus on the P _____, not the P _____.

Focus on one P _____, not the universe.

When you feel the heat and respond by defending yourself or attacking back, you are agreeing to join the fight. You've accepted the invitation to argue. You've agreed to put aside your focus on your child in order to take up arms against your coparent. You've decided that entering the fray is so important to you that you leave your child to fend for themselves while you go off to fight your own fights.

How to "Help Yourself" Turn Down the Heat

You've seen the flame and felt its intense heat—maybe under your own collar. Your body says, "Prepare for attack." You know that fighting is counterproductive, but sometimes you just can't help yourself. Or can you? Here's how to cool yourself down when someone else is heating you up:

Self Control

You have the power to control your own reactions. Remember these methods:





The Seven Steps to Negotiating Agreements

**STEP
1**

Name the problem.

**STEP
2**

Give opinion; Reflect opinion.

**STEP
3**

Brainstorm solutions.

**STEP
4**

Choose the best solution.

**STEP
5**

Review.

**STEP
6**

Put the solution into action.

**STEP
7**

Re-evaluate.