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Plan for Peace or Tug of War

Allowing My Child to Love Both Parents



2

Forced to Choose

Imagine you're 23 years old and you and your partner have decided to get married. You call your parents to share the good news, but instead of matching your enthusiasm with their own, they seem disappointed in your decision. They question your choice of mate, and some of their comments could be considered derogatory. As a result, you begin to question your own judgment. You maintain your resolve, however, and continue your wedding plans. As the big day approaches, your fiancée and parents start criticizing one another openly. You feel caught in the middle.

What you looked forward to as the most wonderful time of your life has turned into a tug of war. You are questioning your decision. You feel cheated that your own happiness has been compromised and resentful that you've been put in this position.

When the situation isn't easily resolved, your stress increases. You want to love both your fiancée and your parents but find it harder and harder to do so. Every day you feel more pressure to choose between one or the other. If you choose your parents, you will undermine the love and trust of your fiancée and set your marriage on a course for failure. If you choose your fiancée, you know that you will be angry at your parents for putting you in this position. However, you can foresee a time when you would also regret losing them. Then even the presence of your chosen mate will only remind you of the loss of the two people who loved you and gave you life. It's a no-win situation: a loyalty bind.

What a Loyalty Bind Means for Children of Divorce or Separation

The situation described above is similar to that of a child with separated or divorced parents who place the child in situations where they get caught in the middle. At those times the child feels like they are in a tug of war between the two parents, both of whom want the child to pull for their team. Forcing a child to choose sides teaches them that they cannot love both parents. On paper, both parents may have equal custody, but in reality, the child feels forced to reject one of them.



This chapter will focus on the many ways children feel the stress of being caught in the middle and how you might be doing this with your own children. For example:

When one parent criticizes the other: put-downs, name-calling, and even sighs and eye rolling force the child to side with one parent against the other. It's virtually impossible for the child to stay neutral (for reasons we'll discuss later). For now, just remember what you learned in chapter 1: whenever you attack the other parent, you hurt your own child.

When one parent asks the child to deliver a note, a message, or child-support money to the other parent: if the message or note is likely to upset the parent receiving it, the child will usually be pulled into the fallout.

When the child has an activity that both parents attend, such as a sporting event or school program: should the child invite both parents, or will the stress of having them both there be so great that the child feels forced to choose only one? The position of having to choose puts the child in the middle.

When one parent plays the victim or "poor me" role: this parent uses guilt to get the child to take their side. The child is put in the middle—between a parent who's a "winner" and the other who's a "loser." The parent who talks about how sad they are, how lonely they feel when the child isn't there, and how they have "lost everything" puts an incredibly heavy burden on the child, forcing them to side with the "victim" against the "winning" parent. The child not only feels hurt but tries to make the parent feel better. The "loser" parent is manipulating the child into fulfilling their own emotional needs. Later the child's guilt is likely to turn into resentment.

When the parents concentrate too much on making things "equal" or "fair:" When the child feels like they must keep track of hugs, kisses, time, attention, and material goods in order to equalize their distribution between the parents, the child can't freely demonstrate the love they naturally feel. Every action has to be judged and measured and doled out in equal shares.

What happens when a child is caught in the middle?

First, the child experiences an increase in stress. They cannot be spontaneous; rather, they have to carefully weigh the consequences. After all, the wrong decision may make one parent angry. That thought, conscious or unconscious, is terrifying because the child is already experiencing the loss of the parent who has moved out. They also feel betrayed and trapped because someone they care for is forcing them into a position where there's no way out. They are resentful but can't express anger to their parents.

Next comes a general decrease in the child's happiness. Caught in a loyalty bind, they are not free to experience the happiness that other children take for granted. Fearful of hurting either parent, the child tries to avoid choosing sides, but eventually their own stress is too heavy to bear and they must make a decision and choose one parent or the other. "Do I hand the note to my mother as Dad asked, or do I keep it and face Dad's anger?" One parent will be pushed away at least temporarily. Regardless of who they choose, the child will bear the brunt of the result.

What if there was only one parent?

Being caught in the middle is a painful experience for a child. You might think about how much easier it would be if you were the only parent involved in your child's life. Think of the advantages: you would be a lot less stressed if you didn't have to work out so many details with the other parent. You would have less conflict in your life, and all decisions about your child would be under your direct control.

But what would be the consequences for your child? Like your 23-year-old self in the scenario at the beginning of this chapter who gave up your parents when you sided with your partner, the child would miss out on a lot: the love of one of the two people closest to them, the shared memories of their early life that only two people in the entire world can provide, half of the generational process handed down from parent to child, and the sense of value that knowledge can impart.

The child would miss out on the opportunity to discuss their own childhood and eventually parenthood with both parents and the experience of growing their own independence from family ties. They would miss coming to know the qualities they share with the absent parent.

In the same way that the loss of a parent is devastating to the child, any action of parents that put their child in a loyalty bind is also devastating because they force the child to side with one parent, thus rejecting the other.

Two are better than one.

If losing a parent is detrimental, what are the advantages to having two parents involved in a child's life? A child with a relationship with both parents—except in cases of serious violence or abuse—is usually better off for a number of reasons. Children look to their parents as their first teachers and role models, so it makes sense that two teachers and two role models are better than one. A child with only one role model, might grow up thinking there is only one right way to do things. Having two models helps the child develop an understanding that people are different and there is no single “right” way.

Each parent has qualities, characteristics, and interests that are unique to them. Having contact with both parents, the child can see a greater variety of these options.

In addition, each parent offers something special to the child. One parent might be particularly patient, a good listener. Another might be good at providing information on a number of subjects. One might be skillful at car maintenance, another good at math. One might be an excellent role model for care and support, another could be a good leader and role model for assertiveness skills. One might be a good teacher for cooking or gardening skills, another might



be great at sports or playing a musical instrument. Since each parent brings their own special gifts to the parent-child relationship, having two parents doubles the chance there are good matches between the child's interests and skills and the parents'. If you think about your child's other parent objectively, you can probably come up with many characteristics and skills that he or she could contribute in a positive way to parenting. Write those qualities in the following activity.

The Other Parent's Positive Qualities

Write down four positive parenting qualities and skills that you see in your child's other parent.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now take a moment to try and see the other parent through your child's eyes. What characteristics, qualities, and skills do you see that your child might enjoy or admire? Does your child's other parent like to laugh and play silly games? Is she good at math and can help with homework, and later in life provide the child with sound financial advice? Are they creative, musical, or a talented Lego™ builder? Are they spontaneous, affectionate, organized? Remember to consider this from the child's perspective as much as possible. You may think baking cookies in the kitchen makes a huge mess but your child may think the mess is the best part! Also consider your child's view of this other parent at different ages and stages. Some parents' skills are most valued when the child is young, others not until the child is older. For example, a nurturing adult will be in their element with babies and toddlers while a good conversationalist will likely be more involved with their children later in life. With two parents in a child's life, there is a greater likelihood that the child will click with at least one of them throughout the different stages of life.

The Other Parent's Positive Qualities—through My Child's Eyes

For this activity, try to see the other parent from your child's point of view. Write down four qualities, characteristics, or skills the other parent has that your child values or admires now or will in the future. Be honest. Giving your child's other parent a compliment won't hurt you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

What can a parent do?

1. Choose when to show your emotions.

Now that you're aware of how your criticisms of the child's other parent hurt your child, you are probably feeling more motivated to control your tendencies to strike out at the other parent. Practice stopping yourself from lashing out. When a maddening situation arises, think to yourself, "If I criticize my child's other parent, I'll hurt my own child." Then pause while you slowly exhale and consider what actions you will take instead.

Remember, pausing and taking a breath doesn't mean that you stop having negative emotions. It means that you will take a brief moment to consider the consequences of your actions before you take them. It means controlling the impulse to strike first and ask questions later. It means channeling negative thoughts and feelings into constructive paths.

How can you release your anger appropriately without damaging your child? You may need to rely on trusted friends and family members who are willing to listen and let you blow off steam. Talking to them when your child is not within earshot is key. You may choose to find a support group for divorced and separated parents, who will more fully appreciate your efforts. You may want to find a good counselor, who can provide a safe place for you to work through difficult moments.

Stopping and taking a breath to help you catch yourself before acting sounds easy. It isn't. Using this technique may be one of the most difficult tasks you undertake. But it's worth the effort if it keeps your child in a safe position—out of the middle.

2. Allow your child to love both parents.

How can you help your child regain a sense of joy after separation? First, show acceptance of your child's two homes. Talk about how they now have a family in two locations. Rather than transport everything with the child during visits, keep some clothes and a toothbrush at each home. This gesture shows the child that they are a permanent resident in each location, not just a visitor or guest. For young children, have some toys and creativity supplies at each location, too. Teenagers will most likely decide for themselves what to leave at each home.

Make sure you create an area for your child in each home. They need their own space no matter how limited the room. A dresser or a corner will do. Let the child decide how to decorate that space if possible. Let them know it's all right to bring a picture of their other parent to keep next to their bed.

Use language showing acceptance of the other parent. You might tell a friend where you child can overhear something like, "Kayce is



a real math whiz; he got that from his mom.” Or you can direct a comment to your child like, “You’ve really got your father’s green thumb.” You’ll see the pleasure in your child’s eyes not only from the praise but also from the acknowledgment of hearing something positive about their other parent.

You’ll find that giving your child’s other parent a compliment can’t hurt you. Instead you’ll be proud of what you’ve done for your child’s self-esteem. And that meets your goal.

Earlier you listed some of the other parent’s characteristics or qualities that can be seen as positive, both from your own perspective and through your child’s eyes. Review those lists now. Find an opportunity to weave a comment about one of these characteristics into your conversation with your child. “You sure have fun with your dad. You and he laugh a lot.” Or “You and your mom have a special relationship. She’s a really good listener, isn’t she?” Remember, you don’t have to like everything about the person to make a positive comment about them. You don’t have to hate everything about the person you divorced or separated from either. Even if you’re resentful about the person’s actions toward you, separate those actions out and pretend you’re putting them in a mental “box”. Put the positive characteristics in a separate mental box. Use the contents of this second box when you’re with your child. Not only is it valuable for your child to hear you compliment the other parent but your action will also strengthen the bond between you and your child. You’ll show your child that you’re on their side.

3. Keep your child out of the middle.

Do not interrogate your child or ask too many questions about their time with the other parent. When you and your child see the other parent in public, make sure to suggest your child go and speak with their other parent. Furthermore, do not ask your child to pick between the two of you in any way, directly or indirectly.

It is not only the parents who place the child in the middle of parental confrontations. Children will consciously or unconsciously choose to place themselves in the middle of their parents’ battles too. Therefore, it is important not to jump to the conclusion that the other parent is at fault for every situation. Your child may in fact be the manipulator. Your child may create a situation, such as a problem at school, to get their parents talking. It is the child’s attempt to reunite his parents. Sometimes the child takes a “middle” position because it has the power to get a parent upset. This is very empowering for a child; they learn to manipulate a situation just to see the expected result.

Example A:

The child says, “Mommy says you don’t love her anymore, but she still loves you.”

How would you respond? Can you think of a way to respond that doesn’t directly comment on the other parent’s words, but instead focuses on the child’s message?

Here’s one way you could respond: “I don’t love your mother like couples who live together love each other. It seems as if you would like us to get back together again. That is not going to happen. But you will still see both of us. We still love you very much.”

Example B:

The child says, "Daddy said you should spend more time with me and not go out with your friends."

Think of how you would respond:

Here's one way a parent could respond: "What do *you* think?" Based on your child's response, you can reflect the feeling back to them. For instance, if the child says, "I want you to spend more time with me," you could say something like, "It sounds like you would like more of my attention. What can we do together?" Then you can talk about the options and agree on an acceptable solution.

Example C:

The child says, "Mommy lets me have candy before dinner."

Maybe it's true; maybe not. It's better to deal with the content of the message rather than focusing on the parent part of the message. You might say, "At our house, our rules are different. We don't eat a snack right before dinner."

4. Don't burden your child with your needs.

You are hurting and you want to be honest. Your child is the only one around and is a willing listener. You're lonely without your former partner. You're worried about the bills. You're afraid of the future. You're concerned with how the divorce will affect your child's life. You're nervous about starting to date again. So it is natural that you are tempted to share your deepest emotional concerns with your child. **STOP.**

You do have a right to experience, understand, and release your own feelings. You do need support during this difficult time. You are human and you have emotional needs that require fulfillment. You need a place where you can receive the support you need. However, your child is not the place. Please, call your friends. Make new friends. Go to support groups for parents who are divorced or separated. Attend singles functions. Talk to a religious or spiritual advisor. Contact family members with the greatest ability to listen. Make an appointment with a therapist. Go to the local mental health center. Please, please do reach out and obtain the emotional support you need. Do not depend on your child for fulfilling your emotional needs.

Your child is already dealing with their own emotional turmoil. They are experiencing their own grief from the breakup of their family, concerned that their non-custodial parent doesn't love them

anymore, worried about what their friends will think. Or your child may be unsure how to talk to your new partner, unclear where their loyalties lie, torn between wanting to love both parents and feeling like a traitor every time they show either parent love. Your child cannot handle your additional burdens. This is too much to ask.

Your child may not seem like they're hurting; they may appear to "have it all together." But it's just as likely that though they look unaffected, on the inside they feel barely able to hold it together. Don't be fooled by appearances. Your children need to have the opportunity to be children, preparing themselves for handling adult concerns later on. Some children who are burdened with adult emotional responsibilities early in life are hugely affected throughout their lives. Don't take this risk with your child.

One of the worst kinds of emotional burden a parent can place on a child is to play the role of the victim. This parent says things like, "I'm so lonely when you're not here," and, "Your mother got everything, son; I'm left with nothing." The victim is putting the child in the middle through the use of guilt, effectively saying that it's all the other parent's fault. The other parent should feel guilty for doing that to "poor me." The child, of course, feels guilty by association.



Remember, children do not separate themselves from their parents. Therefore, if one parent plays the role of victim, the child is at risk of feeling responsible for the victim-parent's feelings. The child is put in the unfortunate position of fulfilling the parent's emotional needs. They have gone from being a child to being the parent of their parent. It is too great a responsibility and the child can suffer damage under the weight of its burden.

Once you've begun to use your support system to fulfill your emotional needs, then you can set to work improving the situations that are causing your greatest concerns. Put your effort into improving your financial position, making new social contacts, and developing healthier habits. Enjoy time with your child and share the best of your emotional experiences with them. Your child will be the beneficiary of your wise decisions.

5. Recognize the importance of communicating between homes.

Divorce or separation may sever the romantic ties between two adults, but it is not meant to dissolve the parenting relationship between them. Developing an effective coparenting relationship after separation or divorce is essential, particularly when you are trying to create a smooth transition from one to two homes for your child. If you avoid communicating with the other parent, inevitably

your child will have to relay messages between the two of you and wind up in the middle of your conflict. But when you and your coparent work together as a team, you can shield your children from unnecessary conflict and help provide a structured and stable environment in which they can grow and thrive.

Building a strong parenting partnership during and after separation requires regular communication. When you and your coparent communicate on a weekly basis you can address your child's needs more effectively. Accepting the importance of communication is the first step to developing a better coparent relationship for your child.

A Note About Joint Legal Custody

Most states prefer giving joint legal custody to both parents; however, in some circumstances a parent may be granted sole custody. This is not the same as joint physical custody. Joint legal custody is about access to records and how important decisions are made for the child. It means that both parents will have equal access to the child's legal, medical, and educational records. Both will be listed on these records as the child's parents, and both will be able to speak to doctors, teachers, and other professionals working with the child. When you share joint legal custody with your coparent, you will be expected to consult with them on important non-emergency decisions for your child, such as those involving the child's education, child care, medical and psychological matters, activities, and religious matters.

The Benefit of Regular Coparent Communication

Agreeing to a regular communication with your coparent helps to keep information flowing between your two households and provides order in a situation that can often feel overwhelming. Remember that each parent is the parent-in-charge on their custodial days. Respect their ability to make decisions without your input. Even if you have final say on parenting disputes, it is still a good practice to consult with your coparent before making a decision.

Typical coparent topics that should be addressed in your weekly coparent communications include:

Education	Health issues (physical and mental)
Extracurricular activities	Special needs
Behavioral difficulties	Safety concerns
Dilemmas with peers	Requests to exchange parenting time

Topics that should be off-limits include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Blaming your coparent | Making accusations |
| Coparents' significant others | Making threats |
| Child support issues | Legal matters |

Schedule your coparenting communication.

First determine which day of the week you and your coparent will exchange your weekly information. Hopefully the two of you can agree on this. If not, you can choose a day yourself and just proceed.

Agreeing to a weekly communication typically helps parents who feel harassed by too many questions as well as parents who do not share enough. Parents save their issues until their designated communication day. On the days in-between, a coparent will only communicate if an urgent matter comes up, meaning an emergency or new information that must be acted upon that day and cannot wait until the designated communication date.

Determine your communication method.

You will also need to agree on the method you and your coparent use to communicate. Some coparents agree on a method from the outset and stick with it. Others develop a system gradually, by trial and error, as they learn what works for their family. If you have a fairly conflicted relationship, it may take time to establish a workable communication method.

Whatever method you choose for communication, try it for at least four or five weeks so both you and your coparent can determine what is working and what is not. If either of you feels uncomfortable with face-to-face meeting or phone contact then you change your method to one of the written forms of coparenting communication.



WARNING: If your situation includes any of the following, we do not recommend in-person coparenting meetings:

- A power difference that puts you at risk of being bullied
- History of violence or abuse
- Current alcohol or drug abuse
- Protective Order or criminal charges

Instead consider using email, texting, or a parenting app. For high-conflict coparents we recommend that you seek the services of a neutral third party trained in conflict management and mediation such as a parenting coordinator.

Methods of Communication

1. EMAIL

Email is one of the most effective and efficient means of communication.

Advantages:

- Reaches the other parent almost instantaneously
- Provides a record of your discussions and decisions
- Allows you to take your time and exercise impulse control in responding to your coparent rather than fuel conflict with careless words spoken in the heat of the moment
- Enables you to write a draft that you can send to a friend to review before it goes to your coparent
- Makes it easier to be businesslike when following the format illustrated in chapter 8
- Allows you to make your point without being interrupted by the other parent



Disadvantages:

- Because emails don't convey tone of voice, body language, and other emotional cues, there is a greater risk that they will be misread with a negative tone. This is another good reason to have an objective third party proofread any sensitive emails you write.

2. TEXT MESSAGES

There are many advantages to using text messaging in certain situations.

Advantages:

- Useful when you need to exchange brief information quickly
- Ideal for emergencies and other urgent situations such as, "On our way to ER for stitches. Not serious. Meet us there if you can" or, "I can't pick up Brady at practice. My car has a flat. Can you pick him up?"

Disadvantages:

- Not suitable for longer discussions, detailed problem solving, or more complex topics
- If you don't keep your messages short, questions and important points can get lost.
- May be delayed by weak cell signals or uncharged phones
- Comes with the temptation to respond impulsively rather than think through the best response. This could increase the chance of conflict.
- May be intrusive and distracting during the workday if used too often
- May be misread in a negative tone, and sarcasm may be misread as hostility.

Texting tips:

- Do not send lengthy texts; keep them brief and businesslike.
- Do not send a text when the situation is not urgent unless this is what you both prefer.
- Do not respond to an inappropriate text.
- Do not respond to a text when you are emotionally charged or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

3. TELEPHONE CALLS

Talking on the telephone can be an effective means of communication when both coparents are child-focused and demonstrate minimal conflict.

Advantages:

- Ideal for both emergencies and planned situations
- Allows parents to speak naturally to one another
- When done without conflict, models cooperation to your child

Disadvantages:

- Not recommended for conflicted coparents
- May not be effective if conflict and tension erupt
- May increase the likelihood of poor impulse control and eruptions
- May increase the likelihood of your child overhearing your conversation.
- Difficult to document or record, therefore not recommended if you are discussing important information or making an agreement.

Tips for phone communication:

- Keep your calls to your coparent separate from calls to your child.
- Make sure your child is not within earshot when you speak with your coparent by phone.
- When necessary, schedule an appointment for a phone call with your coparent.
- Limit your discussion to one or two topics per call.
- Follow up the call with a summary email documenting the discussion and any agreements that were made.

4. FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

In an ideal world, coparents would be able to communicate effectively in person without conflict. In reality, it often leads to heated discussions and risks exposing children to conflict. The more conflicted your relationship, the more you should avoid phone calls and face-to-face interactions, especially when your child is present.

Advantages:

- Allows you to speak naturally, particularly when the two of you are getting along well
- Provides an opportunity to show your child that you are both working towards a collaborative relationship

Disadvantages:

- Can easily fuel conflict. Not recommended for coparents who don't get along.
- If your child is present (which is likely), they might be at risk of hearing or feeling the coparenting tension.

5. INTERNET TOOLS

Some parents prefer using social media apps and other Internet sites and tools to communicate between homes and some even create their own secure websites for this purpose.

Advantages:

- Provides a useful structure (such as a timeline or calendar) for scheduling and organizing your child's parenting schedule, activities, medical appointments, etc.
- Provides documentation of coparenting agreements and other written communication
- May include payment services that enable you to send and receive funds with your coparent online (for reimbursement of expenses between homes)
- May allow children to have their own passwords to view child-specific information

Disadvantages:

- Some websites and apps are more reliable and reputable than others. Some charge fees. Read reviews and/or ask friends for recommendation to help you choose one.
- Sharing personal information online
- Requires both coparents to agree to use the same site or system

Internet tool tips:

- Divorcing parents may have an internet-based method of communication mandated in their final court document as their required communication system, and their online interactions are expected to be businesslike and courteous.
- Use the camera on your cell phone to document and assist with your coparenting communication process. It can be used to capture and send pictures, medical receipts, progress reports, artwork, and more.

6. PARENTING LOG

If you have an infant, a very young child or a child with special needs (non-readers), you and your coparent will have far more than average communications and details to cover. This is where a parenting log can be a great choice for coparent communications.



Advantages:

- Inexpensive (You can simply use a spiral notebook.)
- Helps to shield your child from parenting discussions (if they are not yet reading)
- Provides a place to record and track a young child's daily routines and other important daily information such as naps, new foods, and developmental milestones
- Travels with the child from one home to the other in a travel bag or diaper bag, replacing much of the need for coparents to communicate directly
- Parents can use the log to document questions to each other and record important details, eliminating much of the need to use email or texting.
- A child with special needs benefits from the extensive details and documentation.

Disadvantages:

- May be lost or damaged
- Requires a commitment from both coparents in order to keep a complete and accurate record for your child
- Parents may remove pages to document an issue for the purposes of legal action (though on its own, a parenting log may be ineffective in dealing with time-sensitive concerns.

Parenting log tips:

- The use of a parenting log is best when children are non-readers. As your child gets older and starts to read, you should find a new means of coparenting communication.
- Parenting logs can also be a good choice for coparents with children who have special developmental or medical needs.
- The log should remain in your child's travel bag or diaper bag and go with them to each home and day care.
- Write important phone numbers on the inside cover of the parenting log to include both parents' work/cell numbers along with day care and medical contacts.
- On the first pages of the parenting log, list communication guidelines and the topics that will be covered there. (See topic list below)
- When you first pick up your child, give them your full attention before reading the log. Your child should never have to worry about your reaction after reading the parenting log. Keep your reactions private. Even if children can't understand the words, they can often understand tone of voice and body language.

Topics to cover in a parenting log include:

- Sleeping schedule
- Diet
- Health
- Medications
- Discipline
- Activities
- New skills and experiences
- Developmental changes/milestones .
- Heads up (distress, bumps and bruises)

Your Legacy

What legacy do you want to leave your child? A legacy is defined as a gift or bequest, we hand down from one person to another. A parent's conduct in this life leaves behind an imprint on their children that remains long after they are gone. Consider how you would like to be remembered by your child and the values you would like to be remembered as demonstrating. For example, do you want to be remembered as the parent who could overlook minor issues or the parent who always said hello at transfers despite the fact that the other parent ignored you? Fill in the blanks below.

I hope my child remembers me as someone who was:



Truth or Consequences: Ways I Create a Loyalty Bind for My Child

Directions: It is time to take the lead and own up to the truth about your behaviors. **Put an X** on the number that indicates a behavior you have exhibited in the past but not anymore. **Circle** the number that indicates those behaviors you are currently choosing to do even though they hurt your child.

1. I make negative comments about the other parent or use a negative tone or body language, like eye rolling in front of my child when referring to the other parent. I allow relatives and friends to do this, too.
2. I refer to my child's other parent using their first name instead of "Mom" or "Dad."
3. I forget my child is present when I get into a conflict with my coparent.
4. I discuss the character defects of my coparent when my child can overhear. This includes information that will cause my child to see them in a negative light.
6. I intentionally never mention the other parent in my home, almost as if they do not exist.
7. I ask my child questions about their visit with the other parent.
8. I say negative things about someone my child cares for.
9. I discuss child support when my child can hear.
10. I "join with" my child when they complain about the other parent in some way.
11. I discuss legal or other adult information with my child.
12. I ask my child to keep secrets or do things that might feel like spying.
13. I blame the other parent for our family breakup or any other circumstances.
14. I refuse to let my child take important personal items to the other home.
15. I imply that I am the better parent.
16. I make my child think I am a victim because of the actions of the other parent.
17. I encourage my child to tell me negative things that happen at the other home.
18. I send child support checks or messages for the coparent through my child.
19. I say and do things that encourage dependency and make my child feel responsible for my emotional needs.
21. I imply that my child is not safe in some way when they are with the other parent.
22. I refuse to let my child sit with their coparent at joint activities when it's "my time."
23. I block or screen my child's contact with the other parent.
24. I refuse to speak or to make eye contact with the other parent.
25. I pressure my child to choose to live with me.
26. *I refuse to allow the other parent in my home so my child can show them his room.
27. *At our child's events and activities, I refuse to sit on the same row with the other parent.

**May not apply in situations of domestic violence or supervised visitation.*

EXERCISE

Commitment to Prevent Loyalty Binds

I admit that I have allowed my anger and my hurt to interfere with good parenting. I now understand that some of my behaviors have been selfish and damaging to my child. This is difficult to admit, and it causes me pain. However, I am committed to being a good parent even when it requires difficult impulse control, hard work, and maturity. No matter how I feel about

_____ or _____,

I will remember that both of us are important and loved by our child. I will honor our child's relationship with the other parent at any emotional expense to myself. My current and future decisions will reflect good parenting. As of this moment, I will give up the following destructive behaviors:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

I will also encourage our child to let me know if I do any of the above behaviors. When given feedback I will **STOP** immediately and apologize to my child.

Signature of a loving parent

Allowing My Child to Love Both Families

Directions: Plan to do two or more of the following behaviors during the week. Add one each week until you have practiced all ten.

1. Allow your child to spend time with extended family members on both sides of the family.
2. Leave out framed pictures of your child with both sets of their grandparents or extended family members.
3. Mention positive qualities of members of your child's extended family. Find a way to value what they have to offer to your child.
4. Recognize and comment on qualities that your child has received from extended family members, such as, "You have Grandpa's talent for drawing."
5. Encourage your child to remember extended family members' birthdays, anniversaries, and other holidays with cards or phone calls.
6. Make sure your child responds appropriately to members of the extended family when they send gifts.
7. If a member of the extended family calls to speak to your child and you answer the phone, try to say a few pleasant words. Remember, your child is listening.
8. Separate your negative feelings about your former partner from your feelings for their family members, even if they have sided together.
9. Do not assume that the extended family is speaking negatively about you.
10. Correct any inappropriate comments that you may have made in the past with regard to the extended family. You might say, "I used to be upset with them, but I'm not as upset anymore. It's getting better all the time."



Dear Mom and Dad,

Thanks for making sure I know that it's OK for me to love both of you. I don't like it when I am pulled in two directions. It really makes me anxious and I worry at night. I never want to hurt your feelings. I really just want to love you both.

Your torn child,

XXXXXXXXXXXX

CHAPTER REVIEW

1. In what ways have you put your child into a loyalty bind in the past? What are you currently doing that might create a loyalty bind for your child?
2. How does valuing your child's other parent help you? How does it help your child?
3. What are some things you can do to encourage your child to love both parents?
4. Why is it important to allow your child to love extended family?
5. Why is it inappropriate to get emotional support from your child?
6. Why is it important to communicate with your coparent on a regular basis? How will this benefit your child?