Orientation Class

Handouts

Superior Court of California

County of San Bernardino

Family Court Services

CO-PARENTING DO'S

- Exchange the child at neutral locations if there is a history of parents arguing at each other's homes. Meet at a restaurant or park.
- Help child transition between homes. Set a routine so the child does a favorite activity, like watching a video.
- Establish times for the child to phone the other parent.
- Negotiate far in advance, weeks if possible, if the schedule must be changed.
- Communicate clearly. Be specific and put it in writing.
- Treat the other parent like a business partner, not an intimate friend. The business venture, in this instance, is the child.
- Establish a policy of noninterference. When the child is with one parent, that parent has full responsibility to provide care.
- Avoid "parallel parenting." A local psychologist knows of a couple that never talked to each other and discovered their child had received two sets of immunization shots.
- Separate property from parenting issues. In some cases, it's best for parents to hire lawyers to divide property but to handle parenting issues themselves.
- Set times for frequent updates on the child's health, vacation plans or other parent issues.
- Consult the other parent before enrolling the child in extracurricular activities.
- Tell the child it's okay to feel sad, and things will be better.
- Tell the child often that he/she is not to blame for the separation/divorce.
- Avoid making the child choose between parents. If you want an older child to give an opinion on where they want to live, say: "We want to know what you think will work best for you, but we will make the final decision".
- Use discretion in bathing, sleeping or showering with your child.
- Separate the way you feel from the way your child feels about the other parent.
- Give the other parent the benefit of the doubt. When the other parent is late, think first of a flat tire – not a deliberate attempt to irritate you.
- Support the child's relationship with the other parent. Do not limit contact.
- Set limits for the child. Boundaries make the child feel secure.
- Make positive comments about the other parent to the child.

CO-PARENTING DONT'S

- Don't call the child at the other parent's house just to ask if he/she is bored, not being cared for or wanting to return home.
- Don't become a "Disneyland parent" overindulging the child with gifts and outings because you feel guilty about the breakup.
- Don't tell the child to disobey the other parent; this could eventually cause chaos in your home too.
- Don't let a child continue to wait, and be ready to leave, knowing the other parent already has called to say he or she won't be coming.
- Don't withhold the child's birthday present and card sent by the other parent.
- Don't tell the child to take items from the other parent's home because you feel they belong to you.
- Don't fight to make your home the child's "real" home. Your child has TWO homes.
- Don't enroll the child in school with a different last name. And don't list your significant other as the other parent on school records.
- Don't move to a new city or state just to make it harder for the other parent to see the child.
- Don't bad-mouth the other parent or the other parent's new partner in front of the child.
- Don't use the child to deliver child support payments or legal papers.
- Don't exchange the child when he/she is dirty, hungry, or sick without explanation.
- Don't insist that the child call your new spouse "Mom" or "Dad".
- Don't deny the child contact with the other party by screening or blocking calls with a telephone answering machine.
- Don't secretly tape phone conversations. It's illegal without a court order and undermines the child's relationship with you and the other parent.

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Problems and Solutions During Divorce and Separation

	Characteristics of the Stage	How Divorce Can Cause Problems	How to Avoid Problems
0-2 Years	Establishing sense of trust. Very short memory. Infants attach to parents through consistent, loving responses such as: holding, playing, feeding & soothing	A long period of time away from the primary parent may disrupt the routine of the child.	Maintain same routines (the sleeping and feeding cycles). Avoid long periods of time away from primary caretaker. Frequent short periods of time with non-custodial parent are best.
2-3 Years	Child is beginning to separate from parents and develop independence. He/She may be clingy and fearful about unfamiliar people and situations.	If one parent leaves, child may feel fearful of abandonment rather than confident about becoming independent.	Give child an explanation he/she can understand. Arrange frequent predictable contact with the other parent. Acknowledge that the child misses the other parent. Give the child a picture of the other parent to keep in his/her room or possession.
3-5 Years	Increasing sense of separateness and independence. Emerging sexual identity. Child's world enlarges beyond family to school and peers. Gaining feelings of self-worth.	Child's anxiety is highly influenced by parent's feelings. Child can think he or she caused the divorce. Child can become very upset if parents are tense or hostile and may feel they need to "fix things."	Needs both parents, and stress-free exchanges between parents. No bad-mouthing of the other parent. Give an explanation of the divorce the child can understand and stress that it is not the child's fault. Avoid using child as messenger.
5-8 Years	A child is more involved in outside school and social activities. He/She has a better sense of time. Child has a greater ability to understand the parental conflict.	Visitation schedules may interfere with school, sports, and social activities. The child may be distracted in class and aggressive with peers. The child worries about his/her parents' conflict.	Don't cancel visits because of child's activities, but work around them or attend when you can. Don't talk about parental conflict. Make your child feel it is okay to love both parents. Get help for yourself to reduce your feelings of anger.
9-12 Years	Child has a heightened sense of fairness and justice. Child often wants to be independent from his/her parents and is becoming more attached to friends. Physical awkwardness and self-consciousness.	The child can become too involved in taking care of one parent. He/She may blame or side with one parent when conflicts arise.	Don't confide your problems with your child. Seek out adult friends or a counselor. Encourage your child to be involved with peers and activities he/she enjoys.
Adolescence	Child is focused on himself/herself. Empathy goes down. Teenagers often feel confused. They are very involved with their peer group and their own activities. Teens are involved in a battle for independence and believe they are capable of making their own decisions. They solidify their sense of separateness from parents.	Teenagers may respond to the conflict of divorce by withdrawing from the family. The opposite may happen, and teenagers who are preoccupied with family problems do not form close peer bonds. Teens may manipulate the parents' relationship.	Reduce the conflict with the other parent and keep it out of the teen's awareness. Respect teenagers' involvement with friends, other activities, and need for independence. Parents need to communicate with one another so that the adolescent cannot manipulate his/her way around the rules. Increase flexibility with share plans.

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF AND LOSS
The Five Stages of Recovery

Grief, according to Dr. Kubler Ross, follows five stages: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. We do not go through these stages in order or one at a time. We may move forward and then step back into a previous stage. Grief may take years to work through. You, as the parent, are grieving the loss of the relationship, while your children are grieving the loss of the family as they once knew it.

- Denial and Isolation – The "No, Not me" stage
  - This stage is filled with disbelief and denial. You avoid talking about what happened.

- Anger and Resentment – The "Why me?" stage
  - You and your children are angry at the situation and each other. Underneath the anger is sadness and pain over the breakup of the family. The children may blame one or the other parent or themselves for this.

- Bargaining – The "If I do this, then you'll do that" stage
  - You try to negotiate to bring about change. Children have the fantasy of reuniting the family.

- Depression – The "Loss feels real" stage
  - You realize the situation isn't going to change. The separation has happened and there is nothing to bring the other parent back. Acknowledgement of the situation often brings sadness. Children may express their sadness with aggressive behavior, an 'attitude', or temper tantrums. People may experience changes in sleeping and eating patterns.

- Acceptance – The "This is what happened" stage
  - Though you haven't forgotten what happened you are able to let go and move on.

Suggestions for ways to cope

- Seek support for yourself and your children through friends and family, counseling, and support groups.
- Maintain routines. Children most likely will feel insecure and abandoned at first. Try to maintain the daily routines and special events/holidays.
- Nurture yourself and your children. Do positive things that make you feel good, such as taking a walk or listening to music.
- Allow yourself and your children to grieve and adjust to what has happened.
- Avoid long term legal decisions if you are in a very emotional state. It is better to make temporary plans until your thinking is clearer and less emotional.

Sample Parenting Plans

These are plans that have worked for some families.
You need to tailor your parenting plan to fit your children's needs.

❖ Weekday Sharing

- One specific weekday, after school – 8pm
- Several specific weekdays, 5pm – 8pm
- Every day after school – 8pm
- Weekday overnights
- Wednesday after school – Thursday before school
- Wednesday after school – Friday before school

❖ Weekend Sharing

- Can be every weekend or alternate weekends
- 1st, 3rd, & 5th weekends
- 2nd & 4th weekends
- Friday after school until Sunday 6pm or Monday am
- Saturday am until Sunday pm
- Saturday am until Monday am

❖ Shared Weeks

- Week to Week with exchanges on Friday, Sunday or Monday
- Week to Week with midweek dinner visit or overnight to non-custodial parent
- Wednesday – Saturday & Saturday – Wednesday
- 2 overnights on weekdays and alternate weekends (Friday – Monday)

LEGAL CUSTODY

Making decisions about the health, education and welfare of the children
Having access to all legal information regarding the children

Joint Legal Custody = Both parents have the right and responsibility to make legal decisions regarding the children

Sole Legal Custody = One parent has the right and responsibility to make all legal decisions regarding the children

It is most common for parents to share joint legal custody

- ✓ **HEALTH:**
  Medical records
  Treatment options such as medications, surgery, etc.
  Doctor / Dentist / Orthodontist appointments & info
  Mental health information

- ✓ **EDUCATION:**
  Public education
  Private schools
  Home schooling
  Tutoring
  Report cards / test results
  After school sports / other activities
  Conferences / field trips

- ✓ **WELFARE:**
  Residence / change of residence
  Day care
  Religious training
  Significant alteration of child's appearance (hair color, tattoos, etc.)
  Special needs

WHAT I NEED

A Child's Voice

I **need** to love many people, including my stepparents and relatives, without guilt or being made to feel disloyal. The more love I give, the more I have to give and the more love I will receive.
I **need** to have a regular daily and weekly routine, one that is **not** filled with alternating patterns and disruption.
I **need** to spend time with both of my parents, regardless of grown-up wants and wishes regarding convenience, money, or their feelings.
I **need** to be able to express my feelings.
I **need** to be able to love both of my parents since they are both a part of me and to be reassured that this is okay.
I **need** to **not** have to blame or choose sides.
I **need** to **not** have to make adult decisions.
I **need** to be a child and **not** assume my parent's duties or be an adult companion, friend, or comforter to my parents.
I **need** to **never** have to choose which parent to live with. This is a decision for adults. Having to make such a choice will always hurt someone else, and therefore, hurt me. I may feel this way even as a teenager while others wish I were able to make the decision.
I can *never* choose between my parents.

Author Unknown