

NL Divorce - Parenting - BBB33123



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**DIVORCE – CO-PARENTING - PARENTING  
EDUCATION COURSE WORKBOOK**  
**Evidence of My Commitment to Lifelong Behavior Change**

NAME: \_

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**INSTRUCTIONS:** Check all of the circles indicating your understanding of the material: ✓

- **Welcome to the Parenting Education Course. Use this workbook to highlight points and take notes.**
- This online course is an interactive class that will teach you dynamics of parenting under difficult and stressful conditions and help you successfully manage parenting for the health and well-being of the children you love. It will teach you how to apply positive thinking to enhance your decision-making ability to guide your destiny building a happier, healthier parenting family unit. At the same time, you can satisfy court requirements for a Parenting Education Course of 1-5 hours or hours not specified.
- This course is designed to help you understand the profoundly dynamic relationship between co-parents and children and will give you simple yet meaningful parenting techniques to increase the well-being of both parent and child.
- Positive thoughts affect your emotional state and your decisions and each of these have a profound effect on the parenting experience. This course will teach you how your thoughts form the foundation of everything in your life and how to apply simple techniques to change your decision-making abilities and to create better things in your life as well as in the lives of your children.
- **The greatest gift any parent can give a child is their own happiness and well-being.** Through proven techniques, learn to think positively and make wise decisions that benefit the happiness and wellbeing of your family.
- **Divorce-** A divorce is the final & legal dissolution of a marriage.
- **Equitable Distribution-** The principle guiding the division of marital property upon divorce is equitable, or fair, distribution. Equitable does not mean “equal” necessarily. More than a dozen factors written into the DRL impact whether the distribution of marital property is equitable.
- **Support: Child Support-** Child support is a monetary sum paid from one parent to another for the support of the child. Parents are obligated to care for their children by

providing them with financial support. In most states there is a basic framework to determine what support a non-custodial parent is obligated to provide to a custodial parent for the support of their child.

- **Custody: Legal Custody** This concept concerns decision making about the children. The parent with legal custody makes the important decisions for the child. Very commonly parents share joint legal custody over their children. That is, each parent after divorce -just as before the divorce- has a say in the important matters concerning the child's upbringing. In a divorce mediation context, parents will define a "parenting plan" that describes the parents' roles with respect to decision-making and time with the child.
- **Custody: Physical Custody** Physical custody relates to where the children live. The parent with primary physical custody has the children more than 50% of the time. The issue is closely related to child support as the "non-custodial parent" (generally speaking the parent with physical custody of the child less than 50% of the time) can be required to pay child support to the "custodial parent". In a divorce mediation context, parents will define a "parenting plan" that describes the parents' roles with respect to decision-making and time with the child.
- **Visitation-** Child "visitation" is shorthand for describing how much time a parent will spend with the child and when. Commonly a "non-custodial" parent is described as having certain "rights" to visitation with his or her child. In a divorce mediation context, parents will define a "parenting plan" that describes the parents' roles with respect to decision-making and time with the child.
- **Best Interests of the Child** This concept is the touchstone of legal decisions relating to a child.
- **Parenting Plan-** In a divorce mediation context, parents will define a "parenting plan" that describes the parents' roles with respect to decision-making and time with the child.

## **COPING WITH DIVORCE OR BREAK-UP**

- It's never easy when a marriage or significant relationship ends. Whatever the reason for the split—and whether you wanted it or not—the breakup of a relationship can turn your whole world upside down and trigger all sorts of painful and chaotic feelings.
- But there are plenty of things you can do to get through this difficult time and move on. You can even learn from the experience and grow into a stronger, wiser person.

## **HEALING**

- Why do breakups hurt so much, even when the relationship is no longer good? A divorce or breakup is painful because it represents the loss, not just of the relationship, but also of shared dreams and commitments. Romantic relationships begin on a high note of excitement and hope for the future. When these relationships fail, we experience profound disappointment, stress, and grief.
- A breakup or divorce launches us into uncharted territory. Everything is disrupted: your routine and responsibilities, your home, your relationships with extended family and friends, and even your identity.

- A breakup brings uncertainty about the future. What will life be like without your partner? Will you find someone else? Will you end up alone? These unknowns often seem worse than an unhappy relationship.
- **Recovering from a breakup or divorce is difficult. However, it's important to know (and to keep reminding yourself) that you *can* and *will* move on. But healing takes time, so be patient with yourself.**

## **SURVIVING**

- Recognize that it's OK to have different feelings. It's normal to feel sad, angry, exhausted, frustrated, and confused—and these feelings can be intense. You also may feel anxious about the future. Accept that reactions like these will lessen over time. Even if the marriage was unhealthy, venturing into the unknown is frightening.
- Give yourself a break. Give yourself permission to feel and to function at a less than optimal level for a period of time. You may not be able to be quite as productive on the job or care for others in exactly the way you're accustomed to for a little while. No one is superman or superwoman; take time to heal, regroup, and re-energize.
- Don't go through this alone. Sharing your feelings with friends and family can help you get through this period. Consider joining a support group where you can talk to others in similar situations. Isolating yourself can raise your stress levels, reduce your concentration, and get in the way of your work, relationships, and overall health. Don't be shy about getting outside help if you need it.

## **ALLOW YOURSELF TO GRIEVE THE LOSS OF THE RELATIONSHIP.**

- Grief is a natural reaction to loss, and the breakup or divorce of a love relationship involves multiple losses:
- Loss of companionship and shared experiences (which may or may not have been consistently pleasurable)
- Loss of support, be it financial, intellectual, social, or emotional
- Loss of hopes, plans, and dreams (can be even more painful than practical losses)
- Allowing yourself to feel the pain of these losses may be scary. You may fear that your emotions will be too intense to bear, or that you'll be stuck in a dark place forever.
- Just remember that grieving is essential to the healing process. The pain of grief is precisely what helps you let go of the old relationship and move on. And no matter how strong your grief, it won't last forever.

## **TIPS FOR GRIEVING A DIVORCE OR BREAK-UP**

- **Don't fight your feelings** – It's normal to have lots of ups and downs, and feel many conflicting emotions, including anger, resentment, sadness, relief, fear, and confusion. It's important to identify and acknowledge these feelings. While these emotions will often be painful, trying to suppress or ignore them will only prolong the grieving process.
- **Talk about how you're feeling** – Even if it is difficult for you to talk about your feelings with other people, it is very important to find a way to do so when you are grieving. Knowing that others are aware of your feelings will make you feel less alone with your pain and will help you heal. Journaling can also be a helpful outlet for your feelings.

- **Remember that moving on is the end goal** – Expressing your feelings will liberate you in a way, but it is important not to dwell on the negative feelings or to over-analyze the situation. Getting stuck in hurtful feelings like blame, anger, and resentment will rob you of valuable energy and prevent you from healing and moving forward.
- **Remind yourself that you still have a future** – When you commit to another person, you create many hopes and dreams. It’s hard to let these dreams go. As you grieve the loss of the future you once envisioned, be encouraged by the fact that new hopes and dreams will eventually replace your old ones.
- **Know the difference between a normal reaction to a breakup and depression** – Grief can be paralyzing after a breakup, but after a while, the sadness begins to lift. Day by day, and little by little, you start moving on. However, if you don’t feel any forward momentum, you may be suffering from depression.
- **Reach out to others for support through the grieving process** Support from others is critical to healing after a breakup or divorce. You might feel like being alone, but isolating yourself will only make this time more difficult. Don’t try to get through this on your own.
- **Reach out to trusted friends and family members.** People who have been through painful breakups or divorces can be especially helpful. They know what it is like and they can assure you that there is hope for healing and new relationships.
- **Spend time with people who support, value, and energize you.** As you consider who to reach out to, choose wisely. Surround yourself with people who are positive and who truly listen to you. It’s important that you feel free to be honest about what you’re going through, without worrying about being judged, criticized, or told what to do.
- **Get outside help if you need it.** If reaching out to others doesn’t come naturally, consider seeing a counselor or joining a support group. The most important thing is that you have at least one place where you feel comfortable opening up.
- **Cultivate new friendships.** If you feel like you have lost your social network along with the divorce or breakup, make an effort to meet new people. Join a networking group or special interest club, take a class, get involved in community activities, or volunteer at a school, place of worship, or other community organization.

## **MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES AFTER DIVORCE/BREAK-UP**

- Eat well, sleep well, and exercise. When you’re going through the stress of a divorce or breakup, healthy habits easily fall by the wayside.
- You might find yourself not eating at all or overeating your favorite junk foods. Exercise might be harder to fit in because of the added pressures at home and sleep might be elusive.
- But all of the work you are doing to move forward in a positive way will be pointless if you don’t make long-term healthy lifestyle choices.
- Avoid using alcohol, drugs, or food to cope. When you’re in the middle of a breakup, you may be tempted to do anything to relieve your feelings of pain and loneliness. But using alcohol, drugs, or food as an escape is unhealthy and destructive in the long run. It’s essential to find healthier ways of coping with painful feelings.

- Stick to a routine. A divorce or relationship breakup can disrupt almost every area of your life, amplifying feelings of stress, uncertainty, and chaos. Getting back to a regular routine can provide a comforting sense of structure and normalcy.
- Take a time out. Try not to make any major decisions in the first few months after a separation or divorce, like starting a new job or moving to a new city. If you can, wait until you're feeling less emotional so that you can make better decisions.
- Explore new interests. A divorce or breakup is a beginning as well as an end. Take the opportunity to explore new interests and activities. Pursuing fun, new activities gives you a chance to enjoy life in the here-and-now, rather than dwelling on the past.

### **SELF CARE AFTER DIVORCE/BREAK-UP**

- A divorce is a highly stressful, life-changing event. When you're going through the emotional wringer and dealing with major life changes, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The strain and upset of a major breakup can leave you psychologically and physically vulnerable.
- Treat yourself like you're getting over the flu. Get plenty of rest, minimize other sources of stress in your life, and reduce your workload if possible.
- Learning to take care of yourself can be one of the most valuable lessons you learn following a divorce or breakup. As you feel the emotions of your loss and begin learning from your experience, you can resolve to take better care of yourself and make positive choices going forward.
- Make time each day to nurture yourself. Help yourself heal by scheduling daily time for activities you find calming and soothing. Go for a walk in nature, listen to music, enjoy a hot bath, get a massage, read a favorite book, take a yoga class, or savor a warm cup of tea.
- Pay attention to what you need in any given moment and speak up to express your needs. Honor what you believe to be right and best for you even though it may be different from what your ex or others want. Say "no" without guilt or angst as a way of honoring what is right for you.

### **HOW TO GO FORWARD AND MOVE ON**

- How did you contribute to the problems of the relationship? Step back and look at the big picture. Were there red flags from the beginning that you ignored? Recognize them and move on.
- Do you tend to repeat the same mistakes or choose the wrong person in relationship after relationship? If this is the case, then it is time to examine how you feel about you. Do you feel worthy? Do you love and care about yourself?
- Could you act in a more constructive way? Think about how you react stress and how you deal with conflict and insecurities. Are you secure?
- Do you love un-conditionally? Consider whether or not you accept other people the way they are, not the way they could or "should" be.
- Are you in control of your feelings, or are they in control of you? Think of your negative feelings as a starting point for change.
- Try not to dwell on who is to blame or beat yourself up over your mistakes. As you look back

on the relationship, you have an opportunity to learn more about yourself, how you relate to others, and the problems you need to work on.

- You'll be able to see where you went wrong and make better choices next time, if you are able to objectively examine your own choices and behavior, including the reasons why you chose your former partner.
- Often we attain a habit, or a pattern of negative thinking which holds us back and doesn't allow growth, learning and moving on. It is counterproductive to think about everything that went wrong in the relationship over and over again.
- Break your old habits of negative thinking. This is very hard to do, but it can be done. Try meditation, listening to positive motivational speakers—fantasizing, anything to redirect your thoughts to positive.

### **HELPING KIDS COPE WITH SEPARATION AND DIVORCE**

- For children, divorce can be stressful, sad, and confusing. At any age, kids may feel uncertain or angry at the prospect of mom and dad splitting up. As a parent, you can make the process and its effects less painful for your children.
- Helping your kids cope with divorce means providing stability in your home and attending to your children's needs with a reassuring, positive attitude.
- Focus your efforts on what your children need most during this difficult time:
  - Acceptance, assurance of safety
  - Freedom from guilt or blame for their parents' break up
  - Structure, routine
  - A stable parent who has the strength to conduct business
  - The ability to just be a kid

### **THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT RULES**

- There are two important rules concerning children during times of crisis and instability in your family:
  1. Do not burden your children with situations they cannot control. Children should not bear such a responsibility. It will promote feelings of helplessness and insecurity, causing them to question their own strengths and abilities.
  2. Do not ask your children to deal with adult issues. Children are not equipped to understand adult problems. Their focus should be on navigating the various child development stages they go through.

### **AVOID THE BLAMING GAME**

- It's vital to be honest with your kids, but without being critical of your spouse. This can be especially difficult when there have been hurtful events, such as infidelity, but with a little diplomacy, you can avoid playing the blame game.
- Present a united front. As much as you can, try to agree in advance on an explanation for your separation or divorce—and stick to it.
- Plan your conversations. Make plans to talk with your children before any changes in the living arrangements occur. And plan to talk when your spouse is present, if possible.
- Show restraint. Be respectful of your spouse when giving the reasons for the separation.

## **DON'TS: DON'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO LOSE CONTROL**

- Never sabotage your child's relationship with the other parent.
- Never make your child feel guilty about spending time with your ex (even for holidays)
- Never use your child as a pawn to get back at or hurt your ex.
- Never use your child to gain information or to manipulate and influence your ex.
- Never transfer hurt feelings and frustrations toward your ex onto your child.
- Never force your child to choose a side when there's a conflict in scheduling or another planning challenge.
- Never turn family events into a gossip party about your ex
- Never use your child as a mediator to argue or even to give information to your ex
- Never depend too much on your child for companionship and support because you're hurt and lonely.
- Never treat your child like an adult because you're lonely or just want help.
- Never become so emotionally needy that your child develops feelings of guilt if he or she spends time with others.
- Never convert guilt into overindulgence when it comes to satisfying your child's material desires.
- Never talk badly about your ex around the children (no matter how bad your ex behaves)

## **DO'S: DO COMMIT YOURSELF TO EMOTIONAL INTEGRITY**

- Do focus on your own ability to effectively deal with your spouse and completely ignore your ex's communication blunders.
- Sit down with your ex and make an affirmative plan that sets aside any differences you may have and focuses instead on meeting the needs of your children.
- Agree with your ex that you absolutely won't disparage each other to your children. Further, forbid your children to speak disrespectfully about the other parent, even though it may be music to your ears.
- Negotiate and agree on how you can best handle such things as handing off the children for visitation, holidays, or events.
- Agree on boundaries and behavioral guidelines for raising your children so that there's consistency in their lives, regardless of which parent they're with at any given time.
- **Negotiate and agree on the role extended family members will play** and the access they'll be granted while your child is in each other's charge.
- **Communicate actively with your ex** about all aspects of your child's development.
- **Recognize that children are prone to testing a situation and manipulating boundaries** and guidelines, especially if there's a chance to get something they may not ordinarily be able to obtain.
- Compare notes with your ex before jumping to conclusions or condemning one another about what may have happened.
- Although it may be emotionally painful, make sure that you and your ex keep each other informed about changes in your life circumstances so that the child is never, ever the primary source of information.
- Commit to conducting yourself with emotional integrity.

## **WHAT I NEED FROM MY PARENTS: A CHILD'S LIST OF WANTS**



- I need both of you to stay involved in my life. Please write letters, make phone calls, and ask me lots of questions. When you don't stay involved, I feel like I'm not important and that you don't really love me.
- Please stop fighting and work hard to get along with each other. Try to agree on matters related to me. When you fight about me, I think that I did something wrong and I feel guilty.
- I want to love you both and enjoy the time that I spend with each of you. Please support me and the time that I spend with each of you. If you act jealous or upset, I feel like I need to take sides and love one parent more than the other.
- Please communicate directly with my other parent so that I don't have to send messages back and forth.
- When talking about my other parent, please say only nice things, or don't say anything at all. When you say mean, unkind things about my other parent, I feel like you are expecting me to take your side.
- Please remember that I want both of you to be a part of my life. I count on my mom and dad to raise me, to teach me what is important, and to help me when I have problems.

### **REMEMBER THE PURPOSE OF DIVORCE**

- Remember that you got divorced because the circumstances or situation was intolerable either for you, your spouse, or both of you and divorce became the best option.
- Everyone—without exception—has the right to pursue their own happiness. To have the expectation that someone must be with you against their own will is counter productive—not only to their happiness—but to your own happiness as well!
- Furthermore, to stay with another person against your wishes or desires is counter productive—not only to your happiness—but to their happiness as well.
- So, whatever the circumstances of your divorce, the purpose of getting divorced is the unencumbered pursuit of happiness, both, for you and for your ex.
- From this vantage point, the purpose of divorce is for both of you to be happier.

### **REMEMBER THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS**

- If the pursuit of divorce is happiness, then the pursuit of happiness must also be clarified.
- Everyone has a right to pursue their own happiness. You are not responsible for anyone else's happiness and no one else is responsible for your own happiness.
- Your only job is to make yourself happy. While this may sound selfish at first glance, it is actually very selfish to have the opposite attitude.
- It is very selfish to think that some one else's purpose in life is—not to make themselves happy—but to make *you* happy.
- Having the attitude that someone else must make you happy is like saying, "*Do not do that which makes you happy, do that which makes me happy, because my happiness is more important than yours.*"
- If you are expecting someone else to be responsible for your happiness, you will always—without exception—be disappointed.
- At the same time, if you are trying to make someone else happy you will—without exception—fail every single time.
- Your job is to make yourself happy just as it is the job of others to make themselves

happy.

## **HELP YOUR KIDS EMERGE FROM DIVORCE FEELING LOVED, CONFIDENT AND STRONG**

- As a parent, it's normal to feel uncertain about how to give your children the right support through your divorce or separation. It may be uncharted territory, but you *can* successfully navigate this unsettling time—and help your kids emerge from it feeling loved, confident, and strong.
- There are many ways you can help your kids adjust to separation or divorce.
  - Your patience, reassurance, and listening ear can minimize tension as children learn to cope with new circumstances.
  - By providing routines kids can rely on, you remind children they can count on you for stability, structure, and care.
  - And if you can maintain a working relationship with your ex, you can help kids avoid the stress that comes with watching parents in conflict.
- Such a transitional time can't be without some measure of hardship, but you can powerfully reduce your children's pain by making their well-being your top priority.

## **WHAT TO TELL YOUR KIDS**

- When it comes to telling your kids about your divorce, many parents freeze up.
- Make the conversation a little easier on both yourself and your children by preparing significantly before you sit down to talk.
- If you can anticipate tough questions, deal with your own anxieties ahead of time, and plan carefully what you'll be telling them, you will be better equipped to help your children handle the news.
- It may even be helpful to go to a family therapist to help you and your children talk about your concerns and ask questions.

## **WHAT TO SAY AND HOW TO SAY IT**

- Difficult as it may be to do, try to strike an empathetic tone and address the most important points right up front. Give your children the benefit of an honest—but kid-friendly—explanation.
- Tell the truth. Your kids are entitled to know why you are getting a divorce, but long-winded reasons may only confuse them. Pick something simple and honest, like “We can't get along anymore.” You may need to remind your children that while sometimes parents and kids don't always get along, parents and kids don't stop loving each other or get divorced from each other.
- Say “I love you.” However simple it may sound, letting your children know that your love for them hasn't changed is a powerful message. Tell them you'll still be caring for them in every way, from fixing their breakfast to helping with homework.
- Address changes. Preempt your kids' questions about changes in their lives by acknowledging that some things will be different now, and other things won't. Let them know that together you can deal with each detail as you go.

## **HOW MUCH INFORMATION TO GIVE KIDS**

- Especially at the beginning of your separation or divorce, you'll need to pick and choose how much to tell your children.
- Think carefully about how certain information will affect them.
- Be age-aware. In general, younger children need less detail and will do better with a simple explanation, while older kids may need more information.
- Share logistical information. Do tell kids about changes in their living arrangements, school, or activities, but don't overwhelm them with the details.
- Keep it real. No matter how much or how little you decide to tell your kids, remember that what you do decide is appropriate to tell them, the information should be truthful above all else.
- Listen. Support your children by helping them express emotions and commit to truly listening to these feelings without getting defensive.
- Your next job is reassurance—easing fears, straightening misunderstandings, and showing your unconditional love.
- The bottom line: kids need to know that your divorce isn't their fault.

### **HELP CHILDREN EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS**

- For kids, divorce can feel like loss: the loss of a parent, the loss of the life they know. You can help your children grieve and adjust to new circumstances by supporting their feelings.
- Listen. Encourage your child to share their feelings and really *listen* to them. They may be feeling sadness, loss or frustration about things you may not have expected.
- Help them find words for their feelings. It's normal for children to have difficulty expressing their feelings. You can help them by noticing their moods and encouraging them to talk.
- Let them be honest. Children might be reluctant to share their true feelings for fear of hurting you. Let them know that whatever they say is okay. If they aren't able to share their honest feelings, they will have a harder time working through them.
- Acknowledge their feelings. You may not be able to fix their problems or change their sadness to happiness, but it is important for you to acknowledge their feelings rather than dismissing them. You can also inspire trust by showing that you understand.

### **CLEARING UP MISUNDERSTANDINGS**

- Many kids believe that they had something to do with the divorce, recalling times they argued with their parents, received poor grades, or got in trouble. You can help your kids let go of this misconception.
- Set the record straight. Repeat why you decided to get a divorce. Sometimes hearing the real reason for your decision can help.
- Be patient. Kids may seem to “get it” one day and be unsure the next. Treat your child's confusion or misunderstandings with patience.
- Reassure. As often as you need to, remind your children that both parents will continue to love them and that they are not responsible for the divorce.

### **GIVE REASSURANCE AND LOVE**

- Children have a remarkable ability to heal when given the support and love they need. Your

words, actions, and ability to remain consistent are all important tools to reassure your children of your unchanging love.

- Both parents will be there. Let your kids know that even though the physical circumstances of the family unit will change, they can continue to have healthy, loving relationships with both of their parents.
- It'll be okay. Tell kids that things won't always be easy, but that they will work out. Knowing it'll be all right can provide incentive for your kids to give a new situation a chance.
- **Closeness.** Physical closeness—in the form of hugs, pats on the shoulder, or simple proximity—has a powerful way of reassuring your child of your love.
- **Be honest.** When kids raise concerns or anxieties, respond truthfully. If you don't know the answer, say gently that you aren't sure right now, but you'll find out and it will be okay.
- **Be happy.** Allowing yourself to be happy and making your happiness a priority is the greatest gift you can give your child. It really feels good to see someone you love truly happy.

### **PROVIDE STABILITY AND STRUCTURE**

- While it's good for kids to learn to be flexible, adjusting to many new things at once can be very difficult.
- Help your kids adjust to change by providing as much stability and structure as possible in their daily lives.
- Remember that establishing structure and continuity doesn't mean that you need rigid schedules or that mom and dad's routines need to be exactly the same.
- But creating some regular routines at each household and consistently communicating to your children what to expect will provide your kids with a sense of calm and stability.
- The comfort of routines. The benefit of schedules and organization for younger children is widely recognized, but many people don't realize that older children appreciate routine, as well.
- Kids feel safer and more secure when they know what to expect next. Knowing that, even when they switch homes, dinnertime is followed by a bath and then homework, for example, can set a child's mind at ease.
- Resist the temptation to spoil kids during a divorce by not enforcing limits or allowing them to break rules. Maintaining routine also means continuing to observe rules, rewards, and discipline with your children.

### **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**

- The first safety instruction for an airplane emergency is to put the oxygen mask on yourself before you put it on your child. The take-home message: take care of yourself so that you can be there for your kids.
- Your own recovery. If you are able to be calm and emotionally present, your kids will feel more at ease. The following are steps you can take toward improving your own well-being and outlook:
- Exercise often and eat a healthy diet. Exercise relieves the pent-up stress and frustration that are commonplace with divorce. And although cooking for one can be difficult, eating healthfully will make you feel better, inside and out—so skip the fast food.

- See friends often. It may be tempting to hole up and not see friends and family who will inevitably ask about the divorce—but the reality is that you need the distraction. Ask friends to avoid the topic; they'll understand.
- Keep a journal. Writing down your feelings, thoughts, and moods can help you release tension, sadness, and anger. As time passes, you can look back on just how far you've come.

### **GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED**

- At the very least, divorce is complicated and stressful—and can be devastating without support.
- Lean on friends. Talk to friends or a support group about your bitterness, anger, frustration—whatever the feeling may be—so you don't take it out on your kids.
- Never vent negative feelings to your child. Whatever you do, do not use your child to talk it out like you would with a friend.
- Keep laughing. Try to inject humor and play into your life and the lives of your children as much as you can; it can relieve stress and give you all a break from sadness and anger.
- Watch the movies, listen to the music and do the things that make you happiest.
- See a therapist. If you are feeling intense anger, fear, grief, shame, or guilt, find a professional to help you work through those feelings.

### **WORK WITH YOUR EX AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**

- Conflict between parents—separated or not—can be very damaging for kids.
- It's crucial to avoid putting your children in the middle of your fights, or making them feel like they have to choose between you.
- When you are upset with your ex or what you are upset with your ex about is not your kid's problem; the less the kids know, the better.
- Remember that you and your ex are getting divorced, your kids are not getting a divorce from either of you.

### **THE NAME OF THE GAME IS EASE**

- Remember that your goal is to avoid lasting stress and pain for your children. The following tips can save them a lot of heartache.
- Take it somewhere else. Never argue in front of your children, whether it's in person or over the phone. Ask your ex to talk another time or drop the conversation altogether.
- Use tact. Refrain from talking with your children about details of their other parent's behavior. It's the oldest rule in the book: if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.
- Be nice. Be polite in your interactions with your ex-spouse. This not only sets a good example for your kids but can also cause your ex to be gracious in response.
- Look on the bright side. Choose to focus on the strengths of all family members. Encourage children to do the same.
- Work on it. Make it a priority to develop an amicable relationship with your ex-spouse as soon as possible. Watching you be friendly can reassure children and teach problem-solving skills as well.

### **REMEMBER THE BIG PICTURE**

- If you find yourself, time after time, locked in battle with your ex over the details of

parenting, try to step back and remember the bigger purpose at hand.

- Relationship with both parents. What's best for your kids in the long run? Having a good relationship with *both* of their parents throughout their lives.
- The long view. If you can keep long-term goals—your children's physical and mental health, your independence—in mind, you may be able to avoid disagreements about daily details. Think ahead in order to stay calm.
- Everyone's well-being. The happiness of your children, yourself, and, yes, even your ex, should be the broad brushstrokes in the big picture of your new lives after divorce.

### **WHEN IT'S TIME TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP**

- While it is ALWAYS a good idea to get family counseling during a divorce, if your kids remain overwhelmed, though, you may need to seek professional help.
- Some children go through divorce with relatively few problems, while others have a very difficult time.
- It's normal for kids to feel a range of difficult emotions, but time, love, and reassurance should help them to heal.
- It will take some time for your kids to work through their issues about the separation or divorce, but you should see gradual improvement over time.
- **Normal reactions to separation and divorce**
- Although strong feelings can be tough on kids, the following reactions can be considered normal for children.
- **Anger.** Your kids may express their anger, rage, and resentment with you and your spouse for destroying their sense of normalcy.
- **Anxiety.** It's natural for children to feel anxious when faced with big changes in their lives.
- **Mild depression.** Sadness about the family's new situation is normal, and sadness coupled with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness is likely to become a mild form of depression.

### **RED FLAGS FOR MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS**

- If things get worse rather than better after several months it may be a sign that your child is stuck in depression, anxiety, or anger and could use some additional support.
- Discuss these or other divorce/separation related warning signs with your child's doctor, teacher or consult a child therapist for guidance on coping with specific problems.

## **WATCH FOR THESE WARNING SIGNS OF DIVORCE-RELATED DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY:**

- Sleep problems
- Poor concentration
- Trouble at school
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Refusal of once loved activities
- Self-injury, cutting, or eating disorders
- Frequent angry or violent outbursts
- Withdrawal from loved ones

## **MAKING JOINT CUSTODY WORK FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHILDREN**

- Things were difficult and stressful when you were married, so you separated, broke-up or got a divorce. So, now things should be easy, right?
- Wrong! You have kids together. So, even though the relationship did not work out, you still have to work it out together.
- Some would argue that life after separation or divorce is even harder than being married.
- Co-parenting amicably with your ex can give your children stability and close relationships with both parents—but it's rarely easy.
- Putting aside relationship issues to co-parent agreeably can be fraught with stress. Despite the many challenges, though, it is possible to develop a cordial working relationship with your ex for the sake of your children.

## **CO-PARENTING IS THE BEST OPTION**

- Joint custody arrangements, especially after an acrimonious split, can be exhausting and infuriating.
- It can be extremely difficult to get past the painful history you may have with your ex and overcome any built-up resentment.
- Making shared decisions, interacting with each another at drop-offs, or just speaking to a person you'd rather forget all about can seem like impossible tasks. But while it's true that co-parenting isn't an easy solution, it is the best way to ensure your children's needs are met and they are able to retain close relationships with both parents.
- It may be helpful to start thinking of your relationship with your ex as a completely new one—one that is entirely about the well-being of your children, and not about either of you.
- Your marriage may be over, but your family is not; doing what is best for your kids is your most important priority. The first step to being a mature, responsible co-parent is to always put your children's needs ahead of your own.
- **Through your parenting partnership, your kids should recognize that they are more important than the conflict that ended the marriage**—and understand that your love for them will prevail despite changing circumstances. Kids whose divorced parents have a cooperative relationship:
- **Feel secure.** When confident of the love of both parents, kids adjust more quickly and easily to divorce and have better self-esteem.
- **Benefit from consistency.** Co-parenting fosters similar rules, discipline, and rewards between households, so children know what to expect, and what's expected of them.
- **Better understand problem solving.** Children who see their parents continuing to work together are more likely to learn how to effectively and peacefully solve problems

themselves.

- **Have a healthy example to follow.** By cooperating with the other parent, you are establishing a life pattern your children can carry into the future.

### **NEW FOCUS: SETTING HURT AND ANGER ASIDE**

- The key to co-parenting is to focus on your children—and your children only.
- Yes, this can be very difficult. It means that your own emotions—any anger, resentment, or hurt—must take a back seat to the needs of your children.
- Admittedly, setting aside such strong feelings may be the hardest part of learning to work cooperatively with your ex, but it's also perhaps the most vital.
- Co-parenting is not about your feelings, or those of your ex-spouse, but rather about your child's happiness, stability, and future well-being.
- Furthermore, if you can set aside hurt and anger, you can focus on the health and well-being of your children and having a focus on health and well-being will improve your own health and well-being!
- That is the true beauty of focusing on health and well-being of ANYONE, the mere act of focusing on it will enhance it for everyone.
- It's okay to be hurt and angry, but your feelings don't have to dictate your behavior. Instead, let what's best for your kids—you working cooperatively with the other parent—motivate your actions.
- **Get your feelings out somewhere else.** Never vent to your child. Friends, therapists, or even a loving pet can all make good listeners when you need to get negative feelings off your chest. Exercise can also be a healthy outlet for letting off steam.
- **Stay kid-focused.** If you feel angry or resentful, try to remember why you need to act with purpose and grace: your child's best interests are at stake. If your anger feels overwhelming, looking at a photograph of your child may help you calm down.
- **Use your body.** Consciously putting your shoulders down, breathing evenly and deeply, and standing erect can keep you distracted from your anger, and can have a relaxing effect.

### **SEPARATING FEELINGS FROM BEHAVIOR**

- It's okay to be hurt and angry, but your feelings don't have to dictate your behavior. Instead, let what's best for your kids—you working cooperatively with the other parent—motivate your actions.
- Get your feelings out somewhere else. Never vent to your child. Friends, therapists, or even a loving pet can all make good listeners when you need to get negative feelings off your chest. Exercise can also be a healthy outlet for letting off steam.
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- Use your body. Consciously putting your shoulders down, breathing evenly and deeply, and standing erect can keep you distracted from your anger, and can have a relaxing effect.

### **CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE**

- You may never completely lose all of your resentment or bitterness about your break up, but what you can do is compartmentalize those feelings and remind yourself that they are your issues, not your child's. Resolve to keep your issues with your ex away from your children.



- Never use kids as messengers. When you have your child tell the other parent something for you, it puts him or her in the center of your conflict. The goal is to keep your child out of your relationship issues, so call or email your ex yourself.
- Keep your issues to yourself. Never say negative things about your ex to your children or make them feel like they have to choose. Your child has a right to a relationship with his or her other parent that is free of your influence.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR EX**

- Peaceful, consistent, and purposeful communication with your ex is essential to the success of co-parenting—even though it may seem impossible.
- It all begins with your mindset. Think about communication with your ex as having the highest purpose: your child’s well-being.
- Before contacting your ex, ask yourself how your talk will affect your child, and resolve to conduct yourself with dignity.
- Make your child the focal point of every discussion you have with your ex-partner.
- It may seem impossible to stay calm when dealing with a difficult ex-spouse who’s hurt you in the past or has a real knack for pushing your buttons.
- When the pressure builds, stop communication in a peaceful manner. Never, ever end the communication in an angry manner.
- When the pressure builds, and you feel either yourself or your ex getting too emotional. Make any excuse to end the communication: headache, diarrhea or any other urgent business to take care of.

## **WHEN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR EX IS DIFFICULT**

- Communication with your ex is likely to be a tough task.
- Remember that it isn’t always necessary to meet your ex in person—speaking over the phone or exchanging texts or emails is fine for most conversations.
- The goal is to establish conflict-free communication, so see which type of contact works best for you.
- Whether talking via email, phone, or in person, the following methods can help you initiate and maintain effective communication:
- Set a business-like tone. Approach the relationship with your ex as a business partnership where your “business” is your children’s well-being. Speak or write to your ex as you would a colleague—with cordiality, respect, and neutrality. Relax and talk slowly.
- Make requests. Instead of making statements, which can be misinterpreted as demands, try framing as much as you can as requests. Requests can begin "Would you be willing to..." or "Can we try...?"
- Listen. Communicating with maturity starts with listening. Even if you end up disagreeing with the other parent, you should at least be able to convey to your ex that you’ve understood his or her point of view. And listening does not signify approval, so you won’t lose anything by allowing your ex to voice his or her opinions.
- Show restraint. Keep in mind that communicating with one another is going to be necessary for the length of your children's entire childhood—if not longer. You can train yourself to not overreact to your ex, and over time you can become numb to the buttons he or she tries to push.

- Commit to meeting/talking consistently. Frequent communication with your ex will convey the message to your children that you and their other parents are a united front. This may be extremely difficult in the early stages of your divorce or separation.
- Keep conversations kid-focused. You can control the content of your communication. Never let a discussion with your ex-partner digress into a conversation about your needs or his/her needs; it should always be about your child's needs only.

### **IMPROVING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR EX**

- If you are truly ready to rebuild trust after a separation or divorce, be sincere about your efforts.
- Remember your children's best interests as you move forward to improve your relationship.
- Ask his or her opinion. This fairly simple technique can effectively jump-start positive communications between you and your ex. Take an issue that you don't feel strongly about, and ask for your ex's input, showing that you value his or her input.
- Apologize. When you're sorry about something, take the time to apologize sincerely—even if the incident happened a long time ago. Apologizing can be very powerful in moving your relationship away from being adversaries.
- Chill out. If a special outing with your ex is going to cut into your time with your child by an hour, graciously let it be. Remember that it's all about what is best for your child; plus, when you show flexibility, your ex is more likely to be flexible with you.

### **PARENTING AS A TEAM**

- Marriage was easy compared to divorce.
- Parenting is full of decisions you'll have to make with your ex, whether you like each other or not.
- Cooperating and communicating without blow-ups or bickering makes decision-making far easier on everybody.
- If you make consistency, geniality, and teamwork with your ex the ultimate goal, the details of child-rearing decisions tend to fall into place.

### **AIM FOR CONSISTENCY**

- It's healthy for children to be exposed to different perspectives and to learn to be flexible, but they also need to know they're living under the same basic set of expectations at each home.
- Aiming for consistency between your home and your ex's avoids confusion for your children.
- Rules. Rules don't have to be the same between two households, but if you and your ex-spouse establish generally consistent guidelines, your kids won't have to bounce back and forth between two radically different disciplinary environments.
- Important lifestyle rules like homework issues, curfews, and off-limit activities should be followed in both households.
- **Discipline.** Try to follow similar systems of consequences for broken rules, even if the infraction didn't happen under your roof. So, if your kids have lost TV privileges while at your ex's house, follow through with the restriction. The same can be done for rewarding good behavior.
- **Schedule.** Where you can, aim for some consistency in your children's schedules. Making meals, homework, and bedtimes similar can go a long way toward your child's adjustment to

having two homes.

## **IMPORTANT ISSUES**

- Major decisions need to be made by both you and your ex. Being open, honest, and straightforward about important issues is crucial to both your relationship with your ex and your children's well-being.
- Medical needs. Effective co-parenting can help parents focus on the best medical care for the child and can help reduce anxiety for everyone. Whether you decide to designate one parent to communicate primarily with health care professionals or attend medical appointments together, keep one another in the loop.
- Education. School plays a major role in maintaining a stable environment for your kids, so be sure to let them know about changes in your child's living situation. Speak with your ex ahead of time about class schedules, extra-curricular activities, and parent-teacher conferences, and be polite to him or her at school or sports events.
- Financial issues. The cost of maintaining two separate households can strain your attempts to be effective co-parents. Set a realistic budget and keep accurate records for shared expenses. Be gracious if your ex provides opportunities for your children that you cannot provide.

## **DISAGREEMENTS**

- As you co-parent, you and your ex are bound to disagree over certain issues. Keep the following in mind as you try to come to consensus with your ex.
- Respect can go a long way. Simple manners are often neglected between co-parents, even though they should be the foundation for co-parenting. Being considerate and respectful includes letting your ex know about school events, being flexible about your schedule when possible, and taking his or her opinion seriously.
- Keep talking. It might sound tedious, but if you disagree about something important, you will need to continue to communicate about the topic. Never discuss your differences of opinions with or in front of your child. If you still can't agree, you may need to talk to a third party, like a therapist or mediator.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. If you disagree about important issues like a medical surgery or choice of school for your child, by all means keep the discussion going. But if you want your child in bed by 7:30 and your ex says 8:00, try to let it go and save your energy for the bigger issues.
- Compromise. Yes, you will need to come around to your ex-spouse's point of view as often as he or she comes around to yours. It may not always be your first choice, but compromise allows you both to "win" and makes both of you more likely to be flexible in the future.

## **MAKING TRANSITIONS EASIER**

- The actual move from one household to another, whether it happens every few days or just on weekends, can be a very hard time for children.
- Transitions represent a major change in your children's reality.
- Every reunion with one parent is also a separation with the other; each "hello" is also a "goodbye."
- In joint custody arrangements, transition time is inevitable, but there are many things you can do to help make exchanges and transitions easier, both when your children leave and return.

## **WHEN YOUR CHILD LEAVES**

- As kids prepare to leave your house for your ex's, try to stay positive and deliver them on time. You can use the following strategies to help make transitions easier:
- Help children anticipate change. Remind kids they'll be leaving for the other parent's house a day or two before the visit.
- Pack in advance. Depending on their age, help children pack their bags well before they leave so that they don't forget anything they'll miss. Encourage packing familiar reminders like a special stuffed toy or photograph.
- Always drop off—never pick up the child on "switch day." It's a good idea to avoid "taking" your child from the other parent so that you don't risk interrupting or curtailing a special moment. Drop off your child at the other parent's house instead.

## **WHEN YOUR CHILD RETURNS**

- The beginning of your children's return to your home can be awkward or even rocky. You can try the following to help your child adjust:
- Keep things low-key. When children first enter your home, try to have some down time together—read a book or do some other quiet activity.
- Double up. To make packing simpler and make kids feel more comfortable when they are at the other parent's house, have kids keep certain basics—toothbrush, hairbrush, pajamas—at both houses.
- Allow the child space. Children often need a little time to adjust to the transition. If they seem to need some space, do something else nearby. In time, things will get back to normal.
- Establish a special routine. Play a game or serve the same special meal each time your child returns. Kids thrive on routine—if they know exactly what to expect when they return to you it can help the transition.

## **DEALING WITH VISITATION REFUSAL**

- Sometimes kids refuse to leave one parent to be with the other. Although this can be a difficult situation, it is also common for children in joint custody.
- Find the cause. The problem may be one that is easy to resolve, like paying more attention to your child, making a change in discipline style, or having more toys or other entertainment. Or it may be that an emotional reason is at hand, such as conflict or misunderstanding. Talk to your child about his or her refusal.
- Go with the flow. Whether you have detected the reason for the refusal or not, try to give your child the space and time that he or she obviously needs. It may have nothing to do with you at all. And take heart: most cases of visitation refusal are temporary.
- Talk to your ex. A heart-to-heart with your ex about the refusal may be challenging and emotional but can help you figure out what the problem is. Try to be sensitive and understanding to your ex as you discuss this touchy subject.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS: UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT IN RELATIONSHIPS**

- Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship.
- After all, two people can't be expected to agree on everything, all the time.
- Learning how to deal with conflict—rather than avoiding it—is crucial.
- Conflict arises from differences, both large and small. It occurs whenever people disagree

over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires.

- Sometimes these differences appear trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal need is often at the core of the problem.
- These needs can be a need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel respected and valued, or a need for greater closeness and intimacy.
- When conflict is mismanaged, it can cause great harm to a relationship, but when handled in a respectful, positive way, conflict provides an opportunity to strengthen the bond between two people.
- By learning skills for conflict resolution, you can keep your personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

## CONFLICTS ARISE FROM DIFFERING NEEDS

- **Everyone needs to feel understood, nurtured, and supported**, but the ways in which these needs are met vary widely.
- **Differing needs for feeling comfortable and safe** create some of the most severe challenges in our personal and professional relationships.
- **Think about the conflicting need for safety and continuity versus the need to explore and take risks.** You frequently see this conflict between toddlers and their parents. The child's need is to explore, so the street or the cliff meets a need. But the parents' need is to protect the child's safety, so limiting exploration becomes a bone of contention between them.
- **The needs of both parties play important roles in the long-term success of most relationships**, and each deserves respect and consideration.
- **In workplace conflicts**, differing needs are often at the heart of bitter disputes, sometimes resulting in broken deals, fewer profits, and lost jobs.
- **In personal relationships**, a lack of understanding about differing needs can result in distance, arguments, and break-ups.
- **When you can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs** and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships.

## CONFLICT 101

- What is conflict?
- A conflict is more than just a disagreement. It is a situation in which one or both parties perceive a threat (whether or not the threat is real).
- Conflicts continue to fester when ignored. Because conflicts involve perceived threats to our well-being and survival, they stay with us until we face and resolve them.
- We respond to conflicts based on our perceptions of the situation, not necessarily to an objective review of the facts. Our perceptions are influenced by our life experiences, culture, values, and beliefs.
- Conflicts trigger strong emotions. If you aren't comfortable with your emotions or able to manage them in times of stress, you won't be able to resolve conflict successfully.
- Conflicts are an opportunity for growth. When you're able to resolve conflict in a relationship, it builds trust. You can feel secure knowing your relationship can survive challenges and disagreements.

## **HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE CONFLICT?**

- Do you fear conflict or avoid it at all costs?
- If your perception of conflict comes from frightening or painful memories from previous unhealthy relationships or early childhood, you may expect all present-day disagreements to end badly.
- You may view conflict in relationships as demoralizing, humiliating, dangerous, and something to fear. If your early life experiences also left you feeling out of control and powerless, conflict may even be traumatizing for you.
- If you view conflict as dangerous, it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. When you go into a conflict situation already feeling extremely threatened, it's tough to deal with the problem at hand in a healthy way. Instead, you are more likely to shut down or blow up in anger.

## **UNHEALTHY RESPONSES TO CONFLICT**

- An inability to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person
- Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions
- The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment
- An inability to compromise or see the other person's side.
- The fear and avoidance of conflict; the expectation of bad outcomes

## **HEALTHY RESPONSES TO CONFLICT**

- The capacity to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other person
- Calm, non-defensive, and respectful reactions
- A readiness to forgive and forget, and to move past the conflict without holding resentments or anger.
- The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishment.
- A belief that facing conflict head on is the best thing for both sides.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION, STRESS AND EMOTIONS**

- Conflict triggers strong emotions and can lead to hurt feelings, disappointment, and discomfort.
- When handled in an unhealthy manner, it can cause irreparable rifts, resentments, and break-ups.
- But when conflict is resolved in a healthy way, it increases our understanding of one another, builds trust, and strengthens our relationship bonds.
- If you are out of touch with your feelings or so stressed that you can only pay attention to a limited number of emotions, you won't be able to understand your own needs.
- And, if you don't understand your own needs, you will have a hard time communicating with others and staying in touch with what's really troubling you.
- For example, couples often argue about petty differences—the way she hangs the towels, the way he slurps his soup—rather than what is really bothering them.

## **COMMON RESPONSES TO CONFLICT**

- Common ways people respond when they're overwhelmed by stress:
- Aggressive Response. An angry or agitated stress response. You're heated, keyed up, overly

emotional, and unable to sit still.

- Passive Response. A withdrawn or depressed stress response. You shut down, space out, and show very little energy or emotion.
- Unresponsive. A tense and frozen stress response. You “freeze” under pressure and can’t do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you’re extremely agitated.

### **SUCCESSFULLY RESOLVE CONFLICT**

- The ability to successfully resolve conflict depends on your ability to:
- Manage stress quickly while remaining alert and calm. By staying calm, you can accurately read and interpret verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Control your emotions and behavior. When you’re in control of your emotions, you can communicate your needs without threatening, frightening, or punishing others.
- Pay attention to the feelings being expressed as well as the spoken words of others.
- Be aware of and respectful of differences. By avoiding disrespectful words and actions, you can almost always resolve a problem faster.
- **To successfully resolve a conflict, you will need to learn and practice two core skills:**
- The ability to quickly reduce stress in the moment.
- and the ability to remain comfortable enough with your emotions to react in constructive ways even in the midst of an argument or a perceived attack.
- Being able to manage and relieve stress in the moment is the key to staying balanced, focused, and in control, no matter what challenges you face.
- If you don’t know how to stay centered and in control of yourself, you will become overwhelmed in conflict situations and unable to respond in healthy ways.

### **STRESS RELIEF: THE FIRST CORE CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL**

- Stress interferes with the ability to resolve conflict by limiting your ability to:
- Accurately read another person's nonverbal communication
- Hear what someone is really saying
- Be aware of your own feelings
- Be in touch with your deep-rooted needs
- Communicate your needs clearly
- Is stress a problem or you?
- You may be so used to being stressed that you're not even aware you *are* stressed.
- Stress may be a problem in your life if you identify with the following:
- You often feel tense or tight somewhere in your body
- You're not aware of movement in your chest or stomach when you breathe
- Conflict absorbs your time and attention

### **EMOTIONAL AWARENESS: THE SECOND CORE CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL**

- Emotional awareness is the key to understanding yourself and others.
- If you don’t know how you feel or why you feel that way, you won’t be able to communicate effectively or resolve disagreements.
- Although knowing your own feelings may sound simple, many people ignore or try to sedate strong emotions like anger, sadness, and fear.
- Your ability to handle conflict, however, depends on being connected to these feelings.
- If you’re afraid of strong emotions or if you insist on finding solutions that are strictly

rational, your ability to face and resolve differences will be impaired.

## **WHY EMOTIONAL AWARENESS IS A KEY FACTOR IN RESOLVING CONFLICT**

- Emotional awareness—the consciousness of your *moment-to-moment* emotional experience—and the ability to manage all of your feelings appropriately is the basis of a communication process that can resolve conflict.
- Emotional awareness helps you:
  - Understand what is really troubling other people
  - Understand yourself, including what is really troubling you
  - Stay motivated until the conflict is resolved
  - Communicate clearly and effectively
  - Attract and influence others

## **ASSESSMENT: RECOGNIZING YOUR ABILITY TO MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS**

- The following quiz helps you assess your level of emotional awareness. Answer the following questions with: *almost never*, *occasionally*, *often*, *very frequently*, or *almost always*. There are no right or wrong responses, only the opportunity to become better acquainted with your emotional responses. If any of these experiences are unfamiliar, your emotions may be turned down or even turned off.

## **DEVELOPING YOUR EMOTIONAL AWARENESS ASSESSMENT**

- **1.** What kind of relationship do I have with my emotions?
- **2.** Do you experience feelings that flow, encountering one emotion after another as your experiences change from moment to moment?
- **3.** Are your emotions accompanied by physical sensations that you experience in places like your stomach or chest?
- **4.** Do you experience discrete feelings and emotions, such as anger, sadness, fear, joy, each of which is evident in subtle facial expressions?
- **5.** Can you experience intense feelings that are strong enough to capture both your attention and that of others?
- **6.** Do you pay attention to your emotions? Do they factor into your decision-making?
- **7.** Are you in control of your thoughts which cause your emotions? Can you change your thoughts and thus change your mood?
- **8.** Are you a negative emotion junkie? Have you become so accustomed to negative emotion that you feel comfortable in it? Then it is time for a change.

## **NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

- The most important information exchanged during conflicts and arguments is often communicated nonverbally.
- Nonverbal communication is conveyed by emotionally driven facial expressions, posture, gesture, pace, tone and intensity of voice.
- The most important communication is wordless.
- When people are upset, the words they use rarely convey the issues and needs at the heart of the problem.



- When we listen for what is felt—as well as what is said—we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people.
- Listening in this way also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us.
- **When you're in the middle of a conflict**, paying close attention to the other person's nonverbal signals may help you figure out what the other person is really saying.
- **This will allow you to respond in a way that builds trust** and gets to the root of the problem.
- **A calm tone of voice, a reassuring touch, or an interested or concerned facial expression.** can go a long way toward relaxing a tense exchange.
- **Your ability to accurately read another person depends on your own emotional awareness.**
- The more aware you are of your own emotions, the easier it will be for you to pick up on the wordless clues that reveal what others are feeling.

### USING HUMOR IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- Joy is a deceptively powerful resource.
- Studies show that you can surmount adversity, as long as you continue to have moments of joy.
- Humor plays a similar role when facing conflict.
- You can avoid many confrontations and resolve arguments and disagreements by communicating in a humorous way.
- Humor can help you say things that might otherwise be difficult to express without offending someone.
- However, it's important that you laugh *with* the other person, not *at* them.
- When humor and play are used to reduce tension and anger, reframe problems, and put the situation into perspective, the conflict can actually become an opportunity for greater connection and intimacy.
- Laughter is, after all, the best medicine.

### TIPS FOR MANAGING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

- Managing and resolving conflict requires the ability to quickly reduce stress and bring your emotions into balance.
- You can ensure that the process is as positive as possible by sticking to the following guidelines:
- Listen for what is felt as well as said. When we listen we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us when it's our turn to speak.
- Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or "being right." Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.
- Focus on the present. If you're holding on to grudges based on past resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- Pick your battles. Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy. Maybe you don't want to surrender a parking space if

you've been circling for 15 minutes, but if there are dozens of empty spots, arguing over a single space isn't worth it.

- Be willing to forgive. Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.
- Know when to let something go. If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

### **DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT EX: TIPS TO HELP YOU COPE**

- Wouldn't it be nice if adults could remember that parenting is not about them, and that it is about the children?
- Wouldn't it be wonderful if the pain of the broken personal relationships of the past could be kept separate from the practical parental concerns of the present.
- Wouldn't it be nice... Yes, it would. But sometimes people aren't nice.
- Dealing with a difficult ex-spouse can be very discouraging and defeating.
- Yet, we are called to continue trying to pursue good OR to "turn the other cheek", and "walk the extra mile."
- Hopefully the following tips can aid you in your efforts to cope—*because it's all about the children.*
- **When dealing with a difficult ex, the most important thing to remember is** that ONE of you is going to have to be more cunning, manipulative, and inventive than the other without letting the other spouse discover that they are being manipulated.
- When dealing with a difficult ex, make sure the kids always win.
- When dealing with a difficult ex, empathizing with them, letting them think they are "winning" and letting them think they are getting their way is a good tactic as long as the kids are happy.

### **CONFLICT AND EMPATHY: DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT EX**

- **When dealing with a difficult ex, the most important thing to remember is** that ONE of you is going to have to be more cunning, inventive and manipulative than the other by achieving what is best for the children with the complete compliance of your ex and without letting your ex discover what you are up to.
- **When dealing with a difficult ex it is extremely important to remember** that when in conflict, most often people seek empathy. They want you to feel what it is like for them to be angry, sad, disappointed, betrayed...and on and on...
- **Remember**, giving someone empathy does not mean that you agree with that person. It only means that—from their perspective—you understand why they feel the way they feel.
- **Did you get that?** From *their perspective, in their shoes, in their physical body, in their perception, in their mind...* In this sense, you can empathize with anyone!
- **EMPATHETIC RESPONSES:**
- "I can understand why you feel that way."
- "I can see how that upset you."
- "I understand how important that is to you."

## EFFECTIVELY DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT EX

- To effectively deal with a difficult ex, you must step forward and be the team leader.
- What does being the team leader mean? It means you must *investigate how, learn how, discover how*, figure out how to motivate, reinforce, encourage and achieve willing, enthusiastic compliance from your ex to do what is best for the children.
- Is being the team leader easy? Heck no it's not easy! You picked the hardest job to do! But it's your fault for being the more emotionally intelligent adult in the end of the relationship.
- However, the team leader job is a perpetual internship. You can back out anytime by *getting angry, losing control, focusing on the poor life skills of your ex, feeling sorry for yourself, feeling resentful that you have to be the team leader*, and on and on...
- The good news is: the job is always open. You don't even have to reapply. Your only competition is your ex, and are they even capable of doing the job?
- Don't waste your time blaming the inept. Would you blame a deaf person for not listening? Would you blame a blind person for not looking you in the eye? Then you should not blame your inept ex for being inept. Just be happy that you are not.
- Appreciate even the smallest, effort from your inept ex. It is not easy being inept, but you wouldn't know what it is like. Any effort from your inept ex, no matter how small, should be appreciated. After all they are doing the best they can under their inept circumstances.

## 10 DIFFICULT EX TIPS

1. Be sure to notice your own part of the ongoing conflict. Christian ex-spouses, for example, often feel justified in their anger toward their irresponsible ex-spouse. It's easy, then, to also feel justified in your efforts to change them in whatever ways you feel are morally or practically necessary. Unfortunately, this sense of "rightness" often blinds good-hearted Christians from seeing just how their own behavior contributes to the ongoing cycle of conflict. Any time you try to change a difficult ex-spouse—even if for understandable moral reasons—you inadvertently invite hostility or a lack of cooperation in return. Learn to let go of what you can't change so you don't unknowingly keep the between home power struggles alive.
2. Stepparents should communicate a "non-threatening posture to the same-gender ex-spouse. An ex-wife, for example, may continue negativity because she is threatened by the presence of the new stepmother. It is helpful if the stepmother will communicate the following either by phone or email: "I just want you to know that I value your role with your children and I will never try to replace you. You are their mother and I'm not. I will support your decisions with the children, have them to your house on time, and never talk badly about you to the children. You have my word on that." This helps to alleviate the need of the biological mother to bad-mouth the stepparent or the new marriage in order to keep her children's loyalties.
3. Keep your "business meetings" impersonal to avoid excessive conflict. Face-to-face interaction has the most potential for conflict. Use the phone when possible or even talk to their answering machine if personal communication erupts into arguments. Use email or faxes when possible. Keep children from being exposed to negative interaction when it's within your power.

4. Use a script to help you through negotiations. This strategy has helped thousands of parents. Before making a phone call, take the time to write out your thoughts including what you'll say and not say. Also, anticipate what the other might say that will hurt or anger you. Stick to the business at hand and don't get hooked into old arguments that won't be solved with another fight.
5. Whenever possible, agree with some aspect of what you ex-spouse is suggesting. This good business principle applies in parenting as well. Even if you disagree with the main point, find some common ground.
6. Manage conversations by staying on matters of parenting. It is common for the conversations of "angry associate" co-parents to gravitate back toward negative personal matters of the past. Actively work to keep conversations focused on the children. If the conversation digresses to "old marital junk," say something like, "I'd rather we discuss the schedule for this weekend. Where would you like to meet?" If the other continues to shift the conversation back to hurtful matters assertively say, "I'm sorry. I'm not interested in discussing us again. Let's try this again later when we can focus on the weekend schedule." Then, politely hang up the phone or walk away. Come back later and try again to stay on the parenting subject at hand.
7. When children have confusing or angry feelings toward your ex, don't capitalize on their hurt and berate the other parent. Listen and help them explore their hurt feelings. If you can't make positive statements about the other parent, strive for neutral ones. Let God's statutes offer any necessary indictments on a parent's behavior.
8. Remember that for children, choosing sides stinks! Children don't want to compare their parents or choose one over the other. They simply want your permission to love each of you. This is especially important when the two of you can't get along.
9. Wrestle with forgiveness. Hurt feelings from the past are the number one reason your ex—*and you*—overreact with one another. Do your part by striving to forgive them for the offenses of the past (and present). This will help you manage your emotions when dealing with them in the present.
10. Work hard to respect the other parent and his or her household. For your kids sake, find ways of being respectable even if you honestly can't respect your ex-spouses lifestyle or choices. Do not personally criticize them, but don't make excuses for their behavior either.

### **COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS**

- Losing someone or something you love or care deeply about is very painful. Even if you felt little love for the person, the loss of a relationship is still painful. It means venturing into the unknown, which for some is precarious.
- You may experience all kinds of difficult emotions and it may feel like the pain and sadness you're experiencing will never let up. These are normal reactions to a significant loss.
- But while there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are healthy ways to cope with the pain that, in time, can renew you and permit you to move on.

### **GRIEF IS A NATURAL RESPONSE TO LOSS**

- It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief will be. You may associate grief with the death of a loved one—which is often the cause of the most intense type of grief—but any loss can cause grief, including:
  - Divorce or Break-Up      Death of a Pet
  - Loss of Health            Loss of a Dream
  - Loss of a job              Serious Illness
  - Retirement                Loss of Friendship
  - Miscarriage                Loss of Safety
- Grieving is a personal and highly individual experience. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and the nature of the loss.
- The grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried—and **there is no "normal" timetable for grieving.**
- Some people start to feel better in weeks or months. For others, the grieving process is measured in years. Whatever your grief experience is, it's important to be patient with yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.

### THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF BY KÜBLER-ROSS

- If you are experiencing any of these emotions following a loss, it may help to know that your reaction is natural and that you'll heal in time.
- **Denial:** "This can't be happening to me."
- **Anger:** "Why is this happening? Who is to blame?"
- **Bargaining:** "Make this not happen, and in return I will \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Depression:** "I'm too sad to do anything."
- **Acceptance:** "I'm at peace with what happened."
- However, not everyone who grieves goes through all of these stages—and that's okay. Contrary to popular belief, **you do not have to go through each stage in order to heal.**
- In fact, some people resolve their grief without going through *any* of these stages. And if you do go through these stages of grief, you probably won't experience them in a neat, sequential order, so don't worry about what you "should" be feeling or which stage you're supposed to be in.
- These five stages are not meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but **there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss.**
- Our grieving is as individual as our lives.
- Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal—including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your religious beliefs.

### GRIEF CAN BE A ROLLER COASTER

- Instead of a series of stages, we might also think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows. Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning, the lows may be deeper and longer.

- The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss.
- Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief.
- When grief doesn't go away. It's normal to feel sad, numb, or angry following a loss. But as time passes, these emotions should become less intense as you accept the loss and start to move forward.
- If you aren't feeling better over time, or your grief is getting worse, it may be a sign that your grief has developed into a more serious problem, such as complicated grief or major depression.

### **COMMON SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF**

- Shock and disbelief – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting him or her to show up, even though you know he or she is gone.
- Sadness – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- Guilt – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- Anger – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry with yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.
- Fear – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.
- Physical symptoms – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

### **COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS**

- 1. Get support after a loss. The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you aren't comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Wherever the support comes from, accept it and do not grieve alone. Connecting to others will help you heal.
- Turn to friends and family members – Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Draw loved ones close, rather than avoiding them, and accept the assistance that's offered. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need—
- Draw comfort from your faith – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its

mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you—such as praying, meditating, or going to church—can offer solace.

- Join a support group – Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help.
- Talk to a therapist or grief counselor – If your grief feels like too much to bear, call a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles.
- 2. Take care of yourself. When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.
- Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loss in a journal or a poem. Painting or sculpting can take your mind off of your grief and into a new direction in your life.
- Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.
- Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh and to find moments of joy.
- Plan ahead for grief "triggers." Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies for the holidays.

## COMPLICATED GRIEF

- The sadness of losing someone you love never goes away completely, but it shouldn't remain center stage.
- If the pain of the loss is so constant and severe that it keeps you from resuming your life, you may be suffering from a condition known as *complicated grief*.
- Complicated grief is like being stuck in an intense state of mourning. You may have trouble accepting the loss long after it has occurred or be so preoccupied with the loss that it disrupts your daily routine and undermines your other relationships.

## SYMPTOMS OF COMPLICATED GRIEF:

- **Intense longing and yearning for the old relationship**
- **Intrusive thoughts or images of the past**
- **Denial of the loss or sense of disbelief**
- **Imagining that your loved one is alive**
- **Searching for the person in familiar places**
- **Avoiding things or people that remind you of your loss**
- **Extreme anger or bitterness over the loss**
- **Feeling that life is empty or meaningless**

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRIEF AND DEPRESSION**

- Distinguishing between grief and clinical depression isn't always easy as they share many symptoms, but there are ways to tell the difference.
- Remember, grief can be a roller coaster. It involves a wide variety of emotions and a mix of good and bad days.
- Even when you're in the middle of the grieving process, you will have moments of pleasure or happiness.
- With depression, on the other hand, the feelings of emptiness and despair are constant.

## **OTHER SYMPTOMS THAT SUGGEST DEPRESSION, NOT JUST GRIEF:**

- Intense, pervasive sense of guilt
- Thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Slow speech and body movements
- Inability to function at work, home, and/or school
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there

## **WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR GRIEF**

- If you recognize any of the symptoms of complicated grief or clinical depression, talk to a mental health professional right away.
- Left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life-threatening health problems, and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.
- Contact a grief counselor or professional therapist if you:
  - Feel like life isn't worth living
  - Wish you had died with your loved one
  - Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
  - Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
  - Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
  - Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

## **THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT FROM PARENTS TO CHILDREN**

- The most precious gift that parents can give their children is their own happiness. It may sound selfish, because most of us have been told the opposite all of our lives.
- Think about it. How can you contribute to anyone else's happiness if you yourself are not happy? It is impossible. You must first be happy before you can contribute to the happiness of another.
- It is not your responsibility to make someone else happy, (nor is it anyone else's responsibility to make you happy) even though they would have you to believe that to be true.
- In fact, making someone else responsible for your happiness is the epitome of selfishness.
- It is so important for you to teach your children how to be happy by your own example so your children grow up realizing that they and only they are responsible for their own happiness. No one else is. And Taking responsibility for your own happiness and taking



charge of making yourself happy is the epitome of mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

- So, how do you make yourself happy? That is a highly individual subject, but you can start making yourself happier by changing the way you think.
- Positive thoughts make a happy person. Yes, simply changing your thoughts to a more positive outlook can make you happier.

## HERE'S HOW...

### POSITIVE THINKING AND BEHAVIOR

- Your thoughts are powerful, in fact it is your thoughts that create your life! And it is your thoughts that guide and direct your life creating your destiny. It works like this:
- *Your thoughts affect your feelings, which affects your emotional state, which affects your focus, which affects your viewpoint, which affects your judgment, which affects your decisions, which affects your behavior which affects your direction in life which ultimately affects YOUR DESTINY!*
- Often, thoughts simply occur out of habit (that is, because we have had similar thoughts in the past), and not because they are actually reflecting any truth.
- For example, the thought, "I always get in trouble," is highly unlikely. It is impossible that you are always getting in trouble, even if you experience multiple episodes of getting in trouble, there are still moments when you are not in trouble!
- Even though a thought may *feel* true, in reality, it is not. Believing that it is, however, can negatively impact your behavior, putting you at risk for more of the same trouble or worse. It is important to learn how to identify unhealthy thought patterns and behaviors and address them before they affect your behavior and decisions.

### THE 3 STEPS TO POSITIVE THINKING

#### 1. BELIEVE your life is exactly as it should be

- From the time you were born, you began growing and learning. The way you grow and learn is from all of the experiences in YOUR own unique life starting from birth until now. Good experiences and bad experiences help you learn and grow.
- Therefore, your life is perfect just as it is in order for YOU to grow and learn. I know this may be a hard pill to swallow, but it is true. The hardships of your life create YOU; therefore, even if you are in a lot of trouble right now, your life is perfect with all of its imperfections because it helps you learn and grow.
- Feel the power of this belief...know that it is truth and you WILL FEEL BETTER.

#### 2. PRACTICE Non-Judgment-

- When we judge things as good, bad, right or wrong, we exert a lot of energy and create a lot of strain and stress in our lives.
- Imagine for a moment that you stopped judging things that you do, or things that other people do, as good or bad, right or wrong. Can you see how much less stress you would

experience? Everyone (including you) is on their own personal journey.

- Everything in each person's life (good and bad) is perfectly suited to their own growth and development. Ultimately, what they do with their life in respect to their growth and development is their own personal decision to make. Just as what you do with your own life experiences is your own personal decision to make. You are the only one responsible for your happiness, just as others are solely responsible for their own happiness.

### **3. RELEASE yourself from the burden of expectations-when and where you have not control.**

- **You can have expectations on circumstances and goals that you are working towards, but not on people. You cannot control people and their behaviors.**
- When you have expectations, you are expecting something specific to happen. You believe that this result will be best for you. Having a coach or mentor in your life can help you figure out realistic goals.
- When something you expect to happen does not happen, you feel frustrated, and you cannot be happy and frustrated at the same time. However, your frustrations can lead to learning how to accomplish the task! Talk to your coach or mentor to see how you can accomplish your goals. There may be an angle you did not consider!
- Remember that your life is a work in progress, your experiences are designed for you to grow and develop. Failure is the basis for success! You can learn from your mistake and succeed!

## **CONGRATULATIONS, YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE PARENTING EDUCATION AND CHILD NURTURING PROGRAM!**

*“Be true to yourself; love yourself—and everything else will fall into place” – Anonymous.*

- **Please remember: Change is an inevitable process of life. You do not have to force yourself to practice the concepts in this course. Simply being aware of and understanding the concepts offered to you in this course will create small, positive changes in your life...**
- **Every day is a new day. Every day is a new opportunity. Each success—no matter how small—is still a success!**

**We wish you the very best,**

*gisela bryant*

**Retired RN, MSN AGNP-NC  
Program Director**