



## From the Roundtable:

YOUR KIDS:

# Golden Rules of Coparenting

Adapted from *Family Advocate*

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Coparenting after divorce is so important to your child's healthy development. The following suggestions can help you stay focused on your child's needs.

### **Cooperate with Your Ex.**

The best indicator of your children's adjustment is the level of civility between parents. Examine your communication style — do you speak with the other parent in a normal and civil tone? Also, stop fights before they escalate by recognizing the beginnings of a fight, such as body tension, negative/defensive thinking, or louder than normal voice. Work hard to negotiate differences, and if necessary, use a mediator to resolve problems.

### **Facilitate Parenting Time with the Other Parent.**

Work with your ex to make a parenting plan that is developmentally appropriate for your kids, recognizing that their need change over time. Encourage your children to be loyal to both parents by telling them they don't have to take sides or comfort either parent.

### **Treat Your Former Spouse as a Business Partner.**

When executing your parenting plan, check in with the other parent, and follow through on your obligations in a responsible and mature way. When absolutely necessary, let the other parent know when you will be late with a pickup or drop off. Also, work out plans in advance when you will both be attending an event. Finally, when they're with you, let your kids have contact (phone, video, text) with the other parent.

### **Remember, Parenting Time is *for the Child*.**

Even if you're upset with your child or ex, continue spending regular parenting time with your child. And although you may want to have your kids to yourself during your parenting time, if they wish, encourage them to spend time with friends, to make things as 'normal' as possible.

### **Be Honest with Your Children About what Happened.**

If asked, you may need to provide children with a realistic view of the marriage. So if your kids witnessed problems, talk honestly about it without blame or distortion. Say, for example, “The fights your [dad/mom] and I sometimes had weren’t about you. We both love you. We just had problems in our marriage that we couldn’t solve.”

### **Expect Your Kids to be Upset About the Divorce.**

If they want to, let kids talk openly with you about their feelings. And when they do, stay calm, listen attentively, and keep from being overly emotional. Validate their feelings by saying, for example, “Whenever people go through things like this, they have a lot of different feelings. Being sad is part of it.” Or if your child doesn’t want to talk about it, let them know that’s OK, too, and that you’re available if they change their mind.

### **Keep Your Kids From Getting Involved.**

Never ask leading or prying questions about the other parent, or ask kids to act messengers. Make drop-offs and pick-ups, often stressful for kids, as painless and cordial as possible, and do your business with the other parent when your children aren’t around.

### **Find a Good Support Network for Yourself.**

Don’t depend on your child to support you, comfort you, or understand your feelings/thoughts about the divorce. Instead, talk with friends, see a counselor, or join a post-divorce support group. Also, find activities that relax and nurture you, and build them into your life.

### **Be Careful Not to Make New Dating Partners Part of the Family Too Soon.**

Wait until you are reasonably sure that the relationship will be long-term. Meeting and then losing several new partners can be difficult for children.

### **Teach Your Kids Coping Strategies.**

Without sugar-coating things, help your children see divorce-related issues as challenges rather than problems. A challenge is something that ‘just is’ and has to be coped with. Also, many schools/communities have divorce support groups which help kids learn they’re not alone; others are struggling with the same issues.

### **Learn More.**

Others have been through what you’re experiencing. You can learn from their successes and mistakes by joining a support group, working with a therapist/counselor, or reading articles/books/blogs.