



Parenting Together – Even Through Divorce

Even under the best of family conditions, parents often disagree about how to parent – how to discipline, how to handle money, how much freedom a child should have. But during or following a family break-up, these disagreements can be magnified, taking on the emotional baggage of the animosity that led to divorce in the first place. Children often become the unwitting pawns in parents' ongoing conflicts – and they pay a high price for it. What special issues should parents watch out for? And how can they set aside their own pain and anger and work together in the best interests of their child?

I. Underlying issues

- The one thing a divorced couple may agree on is that they want their child to grow up well. And research shows that the one thing that will allow a child to grow up well is an ongoing, positive relationship with both parents even after divorce.
- Because child-rearing may be the only area in which divorced parents continue to interact, it can become the dumping ground for the anger and pain parents feel. Disagreements get blown out of proportion and take on greater meaning, obscuring ways in which the parents agree.
- The entry of step-parents into the equation can further complicate the situation. Step-parents bring their own personal history and ideas and expectations about child-rearing. Also they often are working hard to gain the trust and affection of the child, which can complicate their role as disciplinarian. (And, of course, there can be an underlying competitiveness between the biological mom and step-mom or the dad and step-dad.)

II. Tips for parents

- Get the right kind of help from the beginning, which includes:
 1. A marriage and family therapist to help you discern if divorce really is the only option and, if so, how to minimize harm
 2. Attorneys trained and willing to do mediated or collaborative divorce
- Keep your eye on the goal: your child growing up well
 1. Identify what you and your ex-spouse agree on (the big values, goals and expectations for your child)
 2. Agree to disagree on small matters (children can adapt to small differences in rules and expectations in different households)
 3. Be supportive of your child's relationship with the other parent (never badmouth the other parent in front of the child or try to sabotage their time together)