

# ***For The Children***

Parent Handbook



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a program of Hampshire County Bar Association,  
Northampton, MA

*For The Children* (FTC) is a program of the Hampshire County Bar Association (HCBA), Northampton, MA. As an expression of deep concern for the well-being of families and children by the Hampshire Division of Probate and Family Courts, and by local lawyers and mental health professionals, the FTC program was developed by Judge Gail Perlman; First Assistant Register Mary-Lynn Carroll; Assistant Judicial Case Manager Beth Crawford; Attorneys Merry Nasser and Oran Kaufman; Psychologist Cynthia Monahan; and Executive Director of HCBA Rebecca Ryan.

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**This handbook** is for parents who live separately but share the parenting of their children. Raising children is a rewarding but challenging job. When parents are separated, there are added challenges. The goal of this handbook is to provide parents and other caregivers with information that will help them make decisions in the best interest of their children.

The handbook is designed to accompany a two-part, five-hour program for “Never Married” parents and was developed by the Hampshire County Bar Association’s Parent Education Programs.

This handbook contains information that can be helpful to parents who are separated. Some of this material was covered in the *For The Children* class and is included here as a resource for you to refer back to. There is additional information that was not covered in the class, but which you might find valuable.

Further Information may be obtained by contacting the:

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## ***Contents***

Proud to Parent .....	5
Co-Parenting Apart.....	5
Parenting Apart .....	6
Sharing the Children .....	6
Children’s Rights .....	7
Challenges of the “More Time” and the “Less Time” Parent.....	8
When a Parent Has Left a Child .....	10
Reflective Listening.....	14
Road Blocks to Communication .....	16
Steps for Active Listening .....	16
Talking So That You Can Be Heard .....	17
Protecting Children .....	18
The Big Do's: .....	18
The Big Don'ts:.....	19
Cooperative Colleagues.....	20

How Do You Reduce Conflict? .....	21
Establish a “Limited Partnership” .....	21
Reducing Conflict/Managing Anger.....	22
Time-out plan .....	23
Conflict Management/ Resolution .....	25
Preparing Yourself for Difficult Conversations.....	25
Use “I Messages” .....	26
The Comfort Zone.....	27
Planned Partnerships.....	27
The “Back-and-Forth” Blues .....	29
Tips for Success: General Guidelines .....	30
Keeping Children Out of the Middle.....	31
Problem Solving.....	32
Planning to Meet.....	32
Meeting for Problem Solving.....	33
No-Win Games .....	34
Games Parents Play.....	34
Games Children Play .....	36
High-Conflict Co-Parents .....	37
Future Families.....	39
Financial Issues .....	40
Tips on Navigating Through the Court System.....	41
Alternative Dispute Resolution .....	42
When to Seek Help: .....	42
Annotated Bibliography:.....	48

## Proud to Parent

We strongly recommend the Proud to Parent website. Many parents have stated that they found it helpful. It is designed for never married parents who are in the midst of some kind of change in their family situation – perhaps a change in a visitation schedule, custody, child support, etc. The website was designed knowing that parents want the very best for their children, love them deeply, and are willing to think carefully about how to best work with their co-parent so that their children grow up feeling safe, secure and loved. If you do not have easy access to a computer, try your local library.

**[www.proudtoparent.org](http://www.proudtoparent.org)**

## Co-Parenting Apart

When parents separate, the relationship between the two adults does not end. Hopefully, they will be co-parenting their shared children for many years to come. Separated parents develop different ways of relating to one another after they have separated. Some are friendly, some have cordial but businesslike relationships, some remain angry, some have ongoing periods of high conflict and some retreat altogether. Often relationships continue to change over time.

There are many challenges for parents when parenting apart. In addition to the normal stresses of parenting, co-parenting after separation requires communication between parents, the development of trust and coordination of different parenting approaches. In addition, you are often forced to spend less time with your child than you would like.

The type of relationship you establish with your children's other parent will greatly impact their well-being – now and in the future.

Children do best when both parents are constructively involved in their lives. Children's self-esteem is greatly influenced by their relationships with their parents. Children imitate their parents, so parents need to be good role models. It is normal for each parent to have his/her own unique style as a parent, and children can benefit from the styles of both parents. The key is that children receive reliable supportive parenting and this works best when parents communicate and cooperate.

## Parenting Apart

There are many challenges for parents when parenting apart. In addition to the normal stresses of parenting, co-parenting after separation requires communicating with the other parent, developing trust and coordinating different parenting approaches.

## Sharing the Children

When parents live apart, they must decide how to share the care of their children. It can be hard to sort out what is best for the children and what feels fair to the parents. When parents live apart and share parenting, they lose some time with their children and some influence over them. This can be painful, but most parents can successfully adjust to their new situation.

Keep these points in mind as you work out plans for sharing the children

- What is best for children will change as they mature and develop.
- What is best for children is to maintain as much stability and security as possible.
- What is best for children is to encourage strong, loving

relationships with both parents, assuming safety is not an issue.

- Each parent needs to be capable of providing constructive parenting and safety

What is best for your children may not feel ideal or fair to you. But, remember, if appropriate and desired, parenting plans can evolve and change as your children grow.

There are many issues to consider when making parenting plans. Each family, and each child is unique, and there is no “right” way to share parenting time. Many plans support effective parenting. When developing a plan, think about the following factors:

- The age and special needs of each child
- The personality, flexibility and adaptability of each child
- The parenting histories—what is familiar to the child in terms of each parent’s involvement
- The proximity of the parents’ homes to the child’s school, friends, community activities, etc.
- The ability of each parent to function effectively. (Is there substance abuse, violence or a serious mental health problem? Is the parent reliable, and can he/she provide a safe environment?)

## Children’s Rights

### **All children have the right**

- to be seen as people, not pawns or possessions
- to love both parents and be loved by both
- to be in a safe environment
- to be financially supported to the best of both parents’ abilities

- not to be asked to choose one parent over the other
- to express their feelings
- to be left out of their parents' conflicts
- to relationships with siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins
- to be children, free of adult responsibilities
- to be seen as independent persons, with interests, talents, friends and their own past and future.

### **Children with two loving and capable parents have the right**

- to have regular and frequent time with each parent
- to follow developmentally appropriate, predictable parenting plans that allow some flexibility as they get older
- to see participation by each parent in school, social and sports activities.

Most parents care deeply about their children and have high hopes. It can be useful for a parent to think about what they did or did not get from their own parents and what they most needed as children. This can be a guide to being the best parent you can be.

### **Challenges of the “More Time” and the “Less Time” Parent**

Frequently, the division of time with children is not equal. One parent has more time, one has less. Both positions can be challenging. Whichever your position, we encourage you to be aware of the challenges you face while also putting yourself in your co-parent's shoes to understand what it may be like for them.



"More time" parents often comment that there is no "down" time because they are constantly attending to transportation needs, medical needs, homework, appointments, cooking and housekeeping all while offering moral and emotional support. They may struggle with managing the finances and feel unable to pursue work or social opportunities. They may feel alone without the support of another person as they make daily parenting decisions.

It is understandable that "more time" parents may be at risk of being overwhelmed and even burning out. The quality of their parenting may suffer making them feel even worse.

We encourage "more time" parents to seek support from other parents, family, friends, and community involvement. It can be helpful to establish routines while being flexible when necessary. Where possible, involving the other parent can ease the load.

"Less time" parents often have different challenges. They may miss their child and feel uninvolved or unimportant in their child's lives. They may feel pressure to make up for "lost time" and try to pack too much into single visits. They may feel that as soon as they greet their child, they're preparing to say goodbye. They may feel at a disadvantage or in competition with the other parent.

For "less time" parents, there is a significant risk that they will feel disconnected, not needed, and begin to lose touch with their children. They may become depressed or bitter and may cope with their loss in unhealthy ways.

We encourage "less time" parents to seek support from others in similar situations and come to terms with their circumstances. It is important for the "less time" parent to maintain confidence that they still matter in their child's life and to identify ways to remain involved via extracurricular activities, daily phone calls, e-mail

communication, etc. It is important to make the most of each experience with the child. Building good communication with the other parent pays off.

Are you a "more time" parent or "less time" parent? What is challenging for you right now in your situation? What can you do about it to improve matters? What are the challenges for your co-parent? Is there anything you can do to help them?

## When a Parent Has Left a Child

*“What factors might contribute to the decline in one parent's involvement?”*

Unfortunately, sometimes a parent becomes less involved as time goes on. Many factors can influence this. That parent may not have accepted the responsibility of parenting or even know how to parent, there may be conflict with the other parent that makes co-parenting difficult, that parent may have shifted his attention to new relationships, past behavior may have led to inconsistent behavior or court enforced parent plans that limit one parent's access to their child(ren).

For the sake of the children, we encourage both parents to address any issues that may interfere with the healthy involvement of both parents.

The parent who has drifted away may need to honestly address personal issues that interfere with being a capable parent. Be patient and persistent when seeking increased time with the other parent. Show respect for the other parent while earning trust through consistent behavior and work with the assistance of the courts.

You can't force unwilling parents to be responsive and available. They have to be able and willing to parent on their own. Don't get in the way of involvement, but don't force the issue.

Periodically you may want to let the other parent know how the children are doing. Keep the door open for future contact if you feel it is in the best interest of your children. Children are very forgiving. Most of them want a relationship with each parent, despite having been abandoned by one. If the missing parent returns and is ready to be a reliable parent, be open minded. Don't be rejecting or go overboard with enthusiasm. If it is in your children's best interest, develop an appropriate plan for them to become reconnected in a step-by-step manner and let your children's experience be a guide.

Each parent should remain open minded to the other, regardless of the circumstances. Continue to focus on the child's best interest, show respect for the other parent, keep the other parent appropriately informed about your child and seek consultation when trying to decide if the other parent is trustworthy.

## Children's Needs

### **Infants**

- Infants become attached to a caregiver through their touch, smell and voice.
- Generally, frequent, brief periods of contact promote bonding more effectively than fewer, longer periods of time together.
- Infants feel safe and secure when their routine is consistent and predictable.

## **Toddlers and Preschoolers**

Children this age are sensitive to:

- Frequency and logistics of transitions (visual charts are helpful)
- Value of transitional objects (favorite stuffed animals, blankets, books, etc.)
- Support of siblings
- Similarity of routine

It is vitally important to allow your child to love each parent equally. It is also crucial that you tolerate your child's sadness during separations, as well as your own.

The ability of a young child to sleep comfortably at the "less time" parent's home depends upon a number of factors including

- Your child's temperament
- How comfortable the "more time" parent is with allowing the sleep-over
- The strength of the relationship between the child and the "less time" parent
- The presence or absence of siblings

Younger children do best with overnights when they are secure with the "less time" parent, the parents' relationship with one another is amicable, the child is adaptable and siblings are present.

## **School-Aged Children**

- Remain flexible to allow for your child's after school and weekend activities

- Remember that friendships are very important, and necessary, for children. You may have to accommodate plans with friends into your parenting plan.

School-age children can tolerate longer absences from one parent while with the other parent. Children's understanding of time and place is usually developed enough by mid-elementary school age that they can adjust well to predictable time in both homes.

## **Pre-Teens and Teens**

- As children reach this age, their thoughts and opinions become increasingly more important to consider when designing your parenting plan.
- Parenting plans need to be particularly flexible for older children in order to accommodate their school, social and sports activities.

## **Problem Solving**

Problem solving is most effective when the other person has been and feels heard. When a person's feelings have been acknowledged, they often come up with solutions on their own.

Don't try to "fix" someone else's problem. Instead, ask "What do you think can be done to better address this problem?" The best solutions usually come from the person who has the problem. If that doesn't work, you can make suggestions, such as, "Would it help if. . ."

# Reflective Listening

Reflective Listening (or Active Listening) is a powerful communication skill that reduces misunderstandings and supports emotional growth. It is useful in emotionally charged situations and when problems persist. When you use Reflective Listening, children learn to recognize their feelings, express them, and find their own solutions to problems more readily. Reflective Listening facilitates stronger relationships, conveys caring and promotes emotional strength and health in children. It also facilitates increased problem solving, decreases conflict with adults and decreases power struggles between parents and children.

## ***Overview of Reflective Listening process:***

1. Listen-attend. Stop what you are doing, and look at your child to encourage expression. Let your body language say “I’m listening and you have my undivided attention.”
2. Understand and accept feelings. Try to figure out what feeling the child is experiencing. Sort out the feeling from the story they’re telling. Remember that you can accept feelings even if you cannot accept behavior. (Give examples)
3. Rephrase and reflect feelings. Say back to the child what you think s/he might be feeling. “It sounds like you are feeling pretty angry about that.” Paraphrase with comments like: “You seem to be saying...”, or “Can you tell me more about that?” Consider yourself a mirror, reflecting back what the child is saying and feeling. Do not try to “name” the problem, or interpret.

Examples of this include:

- Reflecting feelings: "I can tell that you are very upset."
- Reflecting thoughts: "You think the whole day is a disaster?"
- Reflecting words: "You're saying you are sick of everything?"
- Reflecting behaviors: "You just threw your jacket onto the floor really hard?"

4. Gather information

5. Problem-solving. This is when Reflective Listening becomes Active Listening. Help the child move to problem solving only after the feelings have been expressed and the real problem is revealed. Ask: "What do you think could be done about this?" "What could you do to make this better?" etc. Let the child come up with a number of possible solutions to consider. Do not offer your own ideas unless absolutely necessary. "Would it help if. . ." Remember, your child's concerns may well "trigger" your own vulnerabilities and/or anger. Be aware of this so you can keep your feelings under control, while you help your child deal with his/hers.

With Reflective Listening, your job is to guide the child through their difficulties to their own solutions. Reflecting back the child's feelings validates their experience and increases the likelihood of resolving the problem.

## Road Blocks to Communication

Too often, people respond to another person's feelings in ways that block their ability to express or work through what is bothering them.

### **Ten Common Road Blocks to Communication are:**

1. Advising/giving solutions
2. Correcting
3. Lecturing
4. Blaming/judging
5. Interrogating/probing
6. Threatening/ridiculing
7. Analyzing
8. Arguing
9. Humoring/distracting
10. Ignoring

## Steps for Active Listening

1. Put yourself in the other person's place to understand what the person is saying and how he or she feels.



2. Show understanding and acceptance by nonverbal behaviors (tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and posture).
3. Restate the person's most important thoughts and feelings.
4. Do not interrupt, offer advice, or give suggestions. Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience.
5. Remain neutral. Don't judge or form an opinion.

## Talking So That You Can Be Heard

1. Put yourself in their shoes and speak in a manner suited for them to be able to grasp.
2. Use "I" Statements. (I feel/think/wonder about \_\_\_\_\_)
3. Be respectful.
4. Use non-threatening body language.
5. Don't be provocative or "bait" the other person to respond.

## Leaving the Past Behind

It is important for co-parents to not dwell on the past. The only value in the past is the chance to learn how you want to be in the present and future. Once lessons have been learned from past successes or mistakes, it is best to move forward and create the life you want to live.

It is common for difficult or painful things that happen in your life to remain in your mind. Yet, it is important to try to move forward and let go of what is over. Otherwise the past creates the future.

It has been said that, "holding on to resentments is like taking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person."

## Protecting Children

Children can grow up to be productive, happy adults if their parents maintain a cooperative, businesslike relationship with each other and create a safe environment. They are then free from family conflicts, which are very damaging. Following are some of the most important recommendations for parents who have separated from their children's other parent.

Research has proven that exposing children to conflict between parents or imposing other unrealistic expectations is destructive to the child's development.

### The Big Do's:

- **Do** let your children know that you love them.
- **Do** let your children know that having parents living separately is not their fault.
- **Do** offer explanations without blaming the other parent.
- **Do** provide financially for your children to the best of your ability.
- **Do** allow children to express their feelings.
- **Do** allow your children to maintain their close relationships with family members and friends.

Here are some important don'ts to keep in mind when parenting:

## The Big Don'ts:

- **Don't** fight/argue in front of the children.
- **Don't** bad-mouth the other parent.
- **Don't** use the children as messengers.
- **Don't** use the children as spies.
- **Don't** discuss support payment problems with the children.
- **Don't** ask the children to take sides.
- **Don't** give children a parental role.
- **Don't** let others bad-mouth the other parent in front of the children.
- **Don't** ask children to keep secrets.
- **Don't** pressure children to say things they don't want to.
- **Don't** confuse your child with your co-parent or misdirect feelings about your co-parent toward your child.
- **Don't** allow guilt or fear to cause you to relax your expectations of your children.
- **Don't** expose your children to new romantic relationships too soon.
- **Don't** NOT "have a life" because of your children.
- **Don't** create too many losses for children.
- **Don't** compete with the other parent.
- **Don't** break promises.
- **Don't** withhold child support.

Are there ways your child/children have been caught in the middle of parental conflict or exposed to the difficulties mentioned above? What can you do about it?

Children exposed to hostility between parents suffer in many ways. They struggle with their love and loyalty for each parent. Children often remember aspects of parental conflict that parents do not. It is important to validate their experience. Remember, when parents fight, children see the people most important to them abusing each other and no one is available to comfort the children.

The destructive impact on children is even greater when the frequency, duration and intensity of conflict is greater. If your child witnesses problematic conflict, help them come to terms with what they were exposed to.

Children should never be exposed to domestic violence or live in fear of physical or emotional abuse.

## Cooperative Colleagues

When mothers and fathers establish a cooperative, businesslike relationship, family members can adjust to parents living separately. Children can grow up to be productive, happy adults if they are free from family conflicts. It is our hope that our parent education program will serve as a guide for raising secure and healthy children.

Children generally do best when co-parents are able to be what *Constance Ahron* termed *Cooperative Colleagues*. These parents communicate effectively by maintaining a respectful tone with each other and by being able to focus their discussions on the needs of their children. They are able to put aside old personal conflicts from the ongoing co-parenting issues. This allows for a business-like relationship in which parents remember their primary goal- the well-being of their child/ren. When conflicts arise, they implemented conflict resolution strategies.

## How Do You Reduce Conflict?

Create a Buffer Zone. Limit communication to the topic of mutual children; leave messages on private voice mail instead of answering machines a child might access; use a journal; e-mail (carefully!); stick to schedules/no changes; remember you have no control over the life of the other parent.

Try to focus on shared beliefs, goals and the business of co-parenting. Some things parents often have in common are:

- Caring about children
- Being needed by children
- Needing to have information about children
- Understanding that neither parent can control the other
- Deserving respect and consideration
- Feeling better when conflict is resolved

*Problem solving strategies: Alternative Dispute Resolution problem solving materials*

## Establish a “Limited Partnership”

Determine in what ways you and your co-parent will relate and at what times you will be together. For example,

- “We will communicate on phone or answering machines regarding schedules, children’s health, education, social and sports schedules”;
- “We will write down any changes in schedules and both have copies.”
- “We will alternate attendance at parent conferences and we will alternate taking children for annual physicals.”
- “We will be together and polite and civil at children’s birthday parties, weddings and family funerals or one of us will not attend.”
- “We will attend sports events, but sit on opposite sides.

Keeping a safe distance can be very helpful!

## Reducing Conflict/Managing Anger

Reducing conflict between parents is the most important gift you can give your children. Parental conflict greatly affects children's ability to develop healthily, succeed in school, manage their behavior and develop good relationships with peers and other adults.

Angry behavior by a parent can be highly disturbing to children. When you are angry or upset, the blood flow in your body actually changes. Blood and oxygen flow to the primitive part of your brain and to your arms and legs. It does NOT flow to the frontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for reasoning and thinking things through. Because of this, it is always in your best interest to calm or "cool off" before saying or doing things that might make the situation more difficult.

What triggers your anger?

How do you know you are getting angry?

What are your warning signs?

It is important to learn what triggers you and what warning signs are so that you can avoid escalating into an angry way of handling matters.

Some examples of warning signs are negative thoughts, strong emotions, and/or violent or threatening actions and body reactions (like your heart beating faster).

If you know you are escalating toward conflict, take a "time out." Pull back, as politely as possible. Take care of yourself and avoid conflict that may make matters worse in the future.

## How can you “cool off”?

- Take a break.
- Deep breathe.
- Go for a walk. Get exercise.
- Put the issue aside. Sleep on it.
- Give yourself time to sort your thoughts and feelings out.

## Remember the other parent will likely respond better when you. . .

- Treat them with respect
- Show you want your interactions to go well
- Use “I” messages.
- Paraphrase what they say to be certain you understand and to show you are listening.
- Acknowledge feelings.
- Problem solve together.
- Use e-mail—carefully!

If problem solving isn’t working well, say “this is hard for me right now. Let’s try to figure it out tomorrow.”

How do you know you are getting angry? Consider words, thoughts, emotions, actions, and body reactions.

## Time-out plan

It can be very useful to establish a “time-out” plan with your co-parent. A time-out is a tool to put a brake on any discussions or interactions that are getting out of hand. It is built upon the simple notion that when we become too upset, or too embedded in an argument, we or the other person has probably drifted away from a constructive frame of mind. If this is the case, there is no point continuing the discussion. Good co-parents who have

some history of getting tangled in destructive interactions, benefit from having an agreement that either parent could ask for a timeout if they feel things are becoming too negative to continue the interaction.

As part of a timeout plan, each parent should learn their warning signs which indicate that they are beginning to fall into an overly emotional or destructive interaction. These warning signs might include feeling intense emotions like anger, an increased heart rate, tightening of muscles, noticing a raised voice, negative thoughts, frequent interrupting, etc. When these signals arise, the person should say as respectfully as possible, "I need a timeout. I will get back to you." The other parent should then say, "I understand, thank you for telling me."

During the timeout, it is important to do something that will diffuse your feelings (walk, run, hot bath, etc.) and restore you to a positive frame of mind. If you asked for the timeout, be true to your word and get back to your co-parent in a reasonable amount of time. If you are still unable to discuss a particular subject, you may need to present your problem in writing, or find a third party to meet with you.

**The most important power you have in a relationship is the power to change yourself.** Changing your behavior should eventually bring about a shift in the relationship. When you change, the other person cannot respond in the usual way. It may take a few tries to convince him/her that you won't fall into the same old trap, but when you change your tone of voice, your choice of words, or your availability, the other person will respond differently. This may be the first step toward a better after-separation relationship.



# Conflict Management/ Resolution

Resolves Conflict/ De-Escalates Tension	Escalates Conflict
1. "I" Statements	"You" Statements
2. Paraphrase	Interrupt
3. Receptive Body Language	Rejecting Body Lang.
4. Open-Ended Questions	Accusatory Questions
5. Be Specific	Generalize
6. Focus on Present & Future	Focus on the Past
7. Focus on Problem	Focus on People
8. Focus on Needs & Interests	Focus on Positions
9. Open up	Dig in
10. Find Answers	Find Fault

## Preparing Yourself for Difficult Conversations

Think through the accusations or complaints you are likely to hear if you do talk with your ex-partner. Plan a new response—one that will not lead to a fight. Practice your response ahead of time. For example,

“This isn’t easy for either of us. I’m sorry that you’re upset.”

“This is an upsetting issue. I can’t talk about this now. Let’s talk later.”

Give yourself time to think. You don’t have to respond to requests right away. Put a reminder by the phone that says, “I’ll get back to you about that.”

What is the biggest obstacle to successful co-parenting at this time? Given that current problem, what’s one thing YOU can do to improve the situation?

Generally, parents tend to focus on the other parent’s role in creating the problem. This exercise guides you to identify what is under your control while realizing that you can only change your own responses and reactions, you can’t change the other person. However, when one person makes changes, the dynamic between the two of you will change. Facilitators point out that sometimes being patient or accepting a current impasse without making it worse may be the most you can do.

*What have you done to reduce conflict in the co-parent relationship?*

## Use “I Messages”

When a problem persists and you need to communicate a concern, “I Messages” are often helpful. “I Messages” are non-inflammatory. They are less likely to stir up a fight because they don’t include blame. These messages avoid the word “you.” They convey what *you* are thinking or feeling and what happened to cause that feeling. For example,

“I feel let down because it’s difficult getting the children settled before bedtime when they’re brought back late on Sundays.”

“I feel frustrated when the children come over and don’t have the things they need like pajamas and underwear.”

## The Comfort Zone

After a period of time, many couples find a level of comfort in their post-separation relationship. Children do better when parents can relate cooperatively within a zone of comfort that may include:

- Personal contact, especially when children go from one home to the other.
- Easy discussion of children’s education, health, activities and schedules. (financial issues may be more difficult and may require structured meetings)
- Joint participation in children’s activities or family events, from time to time.
- A civil, friendly or businesslike relationship where past conflicts are kept out of the present parenting relationship.

The comfort zone is not possible for everyone and is not recommended in cases where domestic violence may recur.

## Planned Partnerships

Some divorcing parents find it useful to agree on how they will share responsibilities, relate to one another and get together on certain occasions for the benefit of the children. This agreement is informal yet usually recorded in writing. For example, parents might decide on the following:

- How to communicate regarding children's schedules, health, education and social or sports events (by phone, writing, answering machines, e-mail, traveling journal, etc.).
- How to make sure that changes in schedules are written down and that both parents receive copies.
- How to manage attendance at children's teacher conferences and annual physical exams.
- How to manage sick-child coverage and visits to doctors.
- How to manage attendance at children's sports events and performances, birthday parties and family weddings and funerals, and how you will behave with one another at those functions.
- How to handle financial problems, if they arise.
- How and when to include new partners or spouses in these matters.

These are some of the items that might be included in a planned partnership. Thinking through issues like these ahead of time can prevent uncertainty and conflicts in the future and help build a better post-separation relationship that will ultimately benefit the children.

When and if you develop a new significant relationship, let your future partner know how you and your ex-partner relate to one another, what your financial and time responsibilities are to your first family and what your planned partnership includes. It is best for your children if your new partner respects and supports your agreements.

## The “Back-and-Forth” Blues

It is common for children to have some difficulty going back and forth between parents. This is a big change for them. Children may feel angry or confused before and after each transition. Those upset feelings may even emerge a few days before and after departure and arrival. Parents, too, may begin to feel edgy as the time approaches for the children to leave. Many parents feel sad and lost for a period of time after the children are gone.

### **What parents can do:**

- When your children are about to arrive, plan to devote some uninterrupted time to them. During these transitions children need sensitivity. Some need quiet time alone, some need cuddling, and some need to engage in an activity or conversation with you. Others want to go out and play with friends but want you to be available later.
- At the other end of the visit, prepare for your children’s departure. Anticipate some disruption. If necessary, explaining that it is hard to make these changes may diffuse the feelings a bit: “Even though you want to see mom/dad, it’s sometimes sad to leave here.”

It is normal for children to be out of sorts at the time of transition from one parent to the other. Don’t jump to the conclusion that this means the visits to the other parent are not good. Upset feelings usually are a normal reaction to going back and forth. But if you are seriously concerned about your child’s comfort level in the other home, don’t pressure the child for information right after the visit. This may cause the child to shut down. Wait a day or so and talk about the visit casually. See what comes up

then. If a child persists in not wanting to visit one parent, professional help may be needed.

## Tips for Success: General Guidelines

The following guidelines will promote success when parenting apart (Note that some recommendations *do not* apply in cases where there has been family violence or abuse):

- Minimize changes in your children's lives.
- Arrange frequent and regular contact with both parents.
- Be on time.
- Make equitable financial agreements
- Make timely support payments.
- Don't discuss child-support with your children.
- Keep your children in contact with friends and relatives of both parents.
- Keep your children out of parents' casual dating relationships. Wait until a serious relationship occurs before including the children.
- Stress the good points about the other parent. Avoid name calling and complaining about or blaming the other parent.
- Keep family photos available, including photos of the other parent. Keep photos updated.
- Allow your children to express love for the other parent and to talk about their experiences with the other parent.
- Remain nonjudgmental. If children complain about the other parent, encourage them to talk to the other parent about the problem.

- Encourage the other parent's involvement in school and other activities. Make sure both parents receive communications from teachers, coaches, etc.
- Assist children in buying cards and gifts for the other parent.
- Telephone, write, e-mail, make tapes and send cards if you are unable to see your children frequently. Reach out, but also allow children some control over when and how to converse.
- Convey respect by your words and tone of voice.

## Keeping Children Out of the Middle

- Communicate directly with the other parent about matters related to the children. Children should not be used as messengers or asked to deliver support payments.
- Respect each other's privacy. Curb your curiosity about the other parent's life. Children should not be used as spies.
- Focus on and respond to the child's feelings when talking about an event or person connected to the other parent.
- Control your temper. Don't argue with the other parent in front of children. Postpone the conversation until you can manage your feelings.
- Allow your children to stay neutral. Don't ask them to take sides.
- Recognize that different households may have different rules. Don't criticize the other parent's rules and don't ask the children to try and change the other parent's rules.
- Allow children to be children. Don't lean on them for emotional support.

# Problem Solving

Problem solving is a form of letting go and getting on with your life. Continued fighting keeps you in a relationship with your ex-partner. It takes strength to let go and move on.

- Use common courtesy. Be businesslike in your dealings with the other parent.
- Get all the information before jumping to conclusions.
- To avoid confusion, put in writing agreements about vacation dates, medical appointments and changes in the parenting plan.
- Negotiate with the other parent about changes in schedules or parenting responsibilities. Negotiating requires give-and-take from both parents.
- Recognize that, as children grow and develop, parenting plans and parents' responsibilities may have to change to meet the changing needs of the children.
- Keep past conflicts out of present decisions.

Children generally suffer when parents go to court; court actions often intensify angry feelings and conflicts. It is best to settle disputes out of court, if possible.

# Planning to Meet

To be sure your motives for meeting are constructive, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this a child-related problem? Separated parents do best to limit discussions to issues of the children's health, education or schedules.



- Is a change in the parenting plan convenient for only you, or does it accommodate the other parent or the children?
- Are you trying to control the parenting style of the other parent, or do you have genuine concerns about the physical or emotional well-being of the children?
- Are you acting out of old anger? Make a list of the issues to be discussed and let them sit for a few days. Do you want to make changes? Do you need any more information?
- Are your intentions construct or destructive?

## Meeting for Problem Solving

- Arrange to meet at a time and location that will help make the meeting successful for both of you.
- Put a time limit on the meeting in advance. Keeping meetings limited to 30 minutes usually allows parents to keep emotions under control.
- Have a short list of issues, and start with the easy ones.
- Make your requests specific.
- Don't attack or call names.
- When there are disagreements, plan to compromise.
- Write down the agreements that you make, and have a copy for each parent.
- If a problem cannot be solved, consider mediation.

## Win/Win Problem-Solving Steps

1. Identify a concern.
2. Determine a good time/place to discuss.
3. Prepare.

4. Discuss (Using effective communication strategies including, “I” messages, Reflective and Active listening, Conflict Resolution approaches and Conscious Communication steps)
5. Brainstorm possible solutions.
6. Evaluate possible solutions and choose a reasonable solution.
7. Set up a plan and follow it.
8. Evaluate the results. Make any needed modifications.

## No-Win Games

When parents and children are angry, disillusioned or hurt by other family members, they may consciously or unconsciously engage in “games” that cause more pain. Though one may feel powerful in the moment, the result of the games is the destruction of the parent-child relationship. These are “no-win” games.

## Games Parents Play

*“I spy”*: Parents sometimes ask children for information about the other parent’s private life. The motive may be to make yourself feel better, to keep the connection going, or to control the other parent. Putting children in the position of spying is damaging to their emotional well-being.

*Name-calling*: When you criticize or insult the other parent in the presence of the children, the children feel put down themselves. Most children see aspects of both parents within themselves and are hurt if a parent is insulted. Let the children discover for themselves the strengths and weaknesses of each parent.

*Tug-of-war.* Trying to get the children to side with you against the other parent may feel reassuring to you, but it puts the children in the middle of the fight and tears them apart. Don't ask them to take sides.

*Messenger.* Even though it may be difficult to communicate with your ex-partner, don't ask the children to be messengers. Even informational messages should be communicated between the parents themselves to protect children from the other parent's reaction. Leave the children out of the middle.

*"What would I do without you?":* Loneliness and emotional pain are heavy burdens for parents to bare. But children should not be burdened with their parents' emotional or social needs. This warps the parent-child relationship and interferes with the child's development.

*"I'm starting over":* A parental separation can thrust the parents into a new social world. When parents begin to date, they may want to adopt a younger life style and more youthful clothing. This can be confusing to the children, especially adolescents. Children need their parents to be reliable, adult role models.

*"My poor children":* Parents may feel guilty about having hurt their children and may not want to place more stress on them. Or they may feel insecure about their relationship with their children and wish to win them over. For these and other reasons, parents may not want to "rock the boat" by setting limits on their children, but children need guidance and discipline as well as love. When parents try to buy things for their children or give in to all their requests, the children may fear that their parents don't care enough or aren't strong enough to take care of them.

*Bargaining chips:* Sometimes parents are so hurt and angry that they want to interfere with the children's access to the other parent as a way to strike back at or control the other parent.

Children are not property and should not be used as bargaining chips. They need free access to both parents and should not be used as leverage to solve problems.

## Games Children Play

*“The other house is better”*: Children may tell you how wonderful the other house is, or how much fun they had with the other parent as a way of getting something from you or communicating frustration with something happening at your house. Parents need to remember not to take this personally. Each home, and each parent has strengths and weaknesses. The quality of the relationship you have with your children is based on the love, guidance and respect you express, not on material things. Respond to the children’s feelings, and try not to compete with the other parent.

*“The other house is awful”*: Sometimes children tell you all about the problems they have with the other parent as a way of making you look good. Then they try to get a special favor from you. Remember that children are not always accurate reporters and may want to manipulate situations to their advantage.

*“But Mom/Dad said I could!”* While spending time with one parent, dad, for example, a child might mention a forthcoming activity that would be supported by him, knowing full well that the other parent will object. When an issue arises, children need to be reminded that they live by the rules of the household in which they are staying.

*Blackmail*: This game can be very upsetting to parents. A child tries to influence the parent’s actions by threatening to move out or not visit anymore if the parent has a new partner, or is going to remarry, or disciplines the child. It is important to respond to the

child's feelings of sadness, disappointment or fear and not react with anger or alarm.

*"I'll get even with you"*: This game is usually unconscious on the children's part. They are unaware of how they are feeling and they are trying to strike back at their parents by engaging in destructive activities. These children need understanding from, and good communication with, their parents. They need help with their feelings of anger and sadness. They may need professional help.

## High-Conflict Co-Parents

For many couples, sitting and talking things through is simply not an option. Interactions tend to lead to verbal or physical violence. One parent may be unable to relinquish power over the other and will stop at nothing to preserve this inequality, including intimidation and limiting the other parent's contact with the children. The more frequent, intense, overt or insoluble the conflicts, the more serious the problem.

Hearing or seeing their parents in conflict profoundly hurts children. Children from high-conflict families are at risk of behavior and emotional problems at home and at school. If conflict cannot be eliminated, consider everything within your power to reduce their exposure to it. In high-conflict families, instead of working toward a cooperative co-parenting relationship, it can be best to work toward "parallel parenting," where each parent interacts with the child or children but not with the other parent. Highly structured arrangements are generally the most successful for parents in conflict. Here are some suggestions for limiting the need to interact to minimize the risk of exposing children to conflict:

- Make decisions, however small, in advance (if necessary, with outside assistance). Avoid having the children make transitions directly from one parent to the other. Transitions should be from home to school and from school to the other parent, or some similar arrangement.
- Where this is impossible, transitions should occur only in public places. The goal is not flexibility; the goal is to abide by agreements made in the children's best interest.
- When contact is unavoidable, proceed with caution. Learn to recognize warning signs, high-risk topics, and high-risk times of day both for you and for the other parent.
- Avoid escalation with time-outs and a prearranged code to terminate an interaction.

When children have been exposed to domestic violence, strive to:

- Protect children from more exposure.
- Help children recover from past exposure.
- Address recovery issues for victims, witnesses and perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Make sure children are emotionally and physically safe with both parents.
- Plan time sharing accordingly.

Children who have witnessed one parent hurt the other, whether emotionally, verbally or physically, are at risk of a variety of physical, behavioral and psychological problems, which can affect them negatively throughout their lives. If your children have been exposed to violence, don't hesitate to get help for them. If you are living in fear, there are many resources and hotlines available to you. And if you have a problem handling your own emotions and actions, there are a number of organizations ready to offer assistance to help break these unhealthy patterns. (See the Self-Help Guide below for all community resources).

## Future Families

One of the toughest times after parent separation can be when your ex-partner brings home a new partner. It can be very difficult to adjust to the fact that your ex-partner has found a new partner and that the children have a new parent figure. For the children's sake, it is a good idea to do all you can to be accepting of the situation and to welcome the new person.

Integrating children into new families is extremely difficult and is one of the reasons new relationships fail. When a new relationship occurs, children need opportunities to discuss their feelings. Frequent family meetings, where everyone can put problems on the table, are very helpful. Children also need regular time alone with their biological parent.

When introducing a new adult into the family, find a special name or title for that person. Step-parents should not be called "mommy" or "daddy". Children should call them by their first names or by a special name. This reduces confusion and helps children maintain their loyalty to all the adults involved in parenting.

In planning for a new family, parents need to maintain their financial commitment to their first family before making other financial commitments.

Remember, be hopeful and confident with your children. With support, love, understanding and time to adjust, children and parents can get used to their new families.

## Financial Issues

One challenging aspect of family life is handling finances.

Under the laws of the Commonwealth, all parents have an obligation to provide financial support for their children. Judges, who follow state guidelines when issuing court orders, determine specific payments. There are instances when they may deviate from guidelines if there is cause. It is not uncommon for support agreements to be modified over time, particularly as children's needs or parental circumstances change.

It can be easy for parents to lose sight of the impact of financial losses on their children, if they are in the midst of emotional turmoil and conflict. For example, it is not uncommon for non-custodial parents to resent having to send funds to the other parent. Often, they lack confidence that the money will go towards the children's support. Parents in a primary residence, on the other hand, often feel they are not receiving enough money to care adequately for their children. They may feel the other parent is shirking the responsibility to provide support.

The goal of child support payments is to allow children to live at as high a standard as possible. Custodial parents must make efforts to meet their children's basic needs, and to minimize their losses after separation. All parents must struggle to set aside their negative feelings about each other in order to negotiate fair and realistic financial arrangements for the children. Couples often require assistance from outside sources, such as an attorney or mediator, during this process.

Parents should protect children from any frustration they have toward the other parent over financial matters. There is little to be



gained, and much harm to be done, in sharing details of disappointment or disagreement with children. In addition, parents should avoid canceling scheduled time with children because child-support payments have not been made, as this only further punishes the child, and has a negative effect on the child's relationship with both parents.

Many children adjust to financial changes when parents separate, despite losses, because they have been reassured by their parents that they will be cared for and that their basic needs will always be met. They have been given enough of an idea of family finances to understand what will and won't have to change. Explanations have been given without blame, despite whatever tensions may exist between the parents.

## Tips on Navigating Through the Court System

### **Do:**

- Arrive on time and dress appropriately.
- If applicable, arrive with a carefully prepared, accurate, and neat financial statement.
- Provide the judge with concrete examples of behavior you have engaged in that demonstrates that your child(ren) are your 1<sup>st</sup> priority.
- Provide the judge with concrete examples of behavior you have engaged in that demonstrates you understand that, in most cases, children do best when both parents are involved.
- Develop a detailed, carefully thought-out, parenting plan.
- Separate child-related issues from financial issues.
- Be open to compromise if it is in the best interest of the child(ren).

- Settle as many issues as possible with your former partner, rather than having the Court decide the matters for you.
- Use all appropriate resources offered by the court (ADR).

### **Don't:**

- Interrupt the judge, opposing counsel, or other party.
- Use the court as a venue for badmouthing or insulting the other party.
- Put “having your day in court” as a top priority.
- Allow your attorney (if you have one) to escalate tensions or frustrations during the process.
- Ask the judge if your child(ren) can testify in court (with some exceptions).
- Bring current partners with you to court.
- File complaints for modification frequently and within a short period of time following the original order (with some exceptions). The standard: (unanticipated) significant and material change in circumstances must exist. Pick your issues!

## Alternative Dispute Resolution

Discuss mediation as an alternative to continued conflict. Mention that mediation is not appropriate, if there is physical danger and when power imbalance is too great.

### When to Seek Help:

Many people decide to seek help for the challenges of parenting. There are many types of help to seek, including psychotherapists and other mental health professionals, support groups, clergy, friends, books, etc. Consider seeking professional help.

## **Seek help for children when:**

- Your child or you are not able to adjust to your circumstances.
- Your child is in danger of hurting him/herself or others (seek help immediately).
- Your child's regression to young behaviors shows no sign of decreasing.
- Nightmares or sleep problems continue.
- Problems with feeding or eating persist.
- A lack of interest in social occasions, school, sports or family activities persists.
- There is a noticeable drop in school performance.
- Relationships with friends, teachers or parents appear to be suffering.

## **Seek help for yourself when:**

- You need a consultation about how you and/or the children are doing.
- You feel you can't cope.
- Conflict with the other parent continues or gets worse.
- You experience signs of depression for more than three weeks (signs include feelings of worthlessness, irritability or hopelessness; loss of energy; fatigue; sleeping or eating problems; and lack of interest or pleasure in usual activities).
- You are turning to your children to meet your emotional needs.
- Your mood swings, vulnerability or other emotions are getting in the way of effective parenting.
- There is excessive use or abuse of alcohol or other mood-altering substances.
- There is frequent use of the court system to solve problems.

# Hampshire County Resources:

## **Child Care:**

Dept. of Early Education and Care, (413) 784-1227. Assistance with finding licensed child care for children birth to kindergarten age.

## **Child Neglect/Abuse:**

MA Department of Child and Family Services, 24 hr./day child abuse hotline: 1-800-792-5200.

## **Court:**

Hampshire Conciliation Program, 33 Gothic St. Northampton, MA  
Contact: Jill Kelley (413) 586-8500

Hampshire Lawyer for the Day Program  
Contact: Jenna Martinez (413) 586-8500

Hampshire Probation Office: (413) 586-8503

**Domestic Violence:** District Attorney's Office, Northampton, (413) 586-9225.  
Victim and witness support and advocacy.

Everywoman's Center, UMass, Amherst (413) 545-0883. Support groups, workshops, events, counseling and online services for women.

SafeLink, (877) 785-2020 Multi-lingual hotline support for domestic violence victims. Safe homes.

Safe Passage, Northampton, (413) 586-1125 or 24 hr/day hotline at 888-345-5282. Counseling and assistance for victims of domestic violence

## **Emergency Hotlines:**

Child Abuse/Neglect, DCF 1-800-792-5200

Cooley Dickinson Hospital, (413) 582-2000. Mental health, domestic violence concerns.

Rape Crisis Hotline, 1-800-837-0800

ServiceNet, 24 hr. crisis line (413) 586-5555. Mental health concerns, substance abuse.

## **Family and Parenting Support Services:**

Collaborative for Educational Services, (413) 586-4998, Early childhood department: Parent education and consultation.

Family Centers (Northampton, Amherst, Belchertown, South Hadley, Ware), Call (413) 586-4998 for specific sites and hours. Drop in play groups for children under 6 years old; parent support.

Family Ties, 800-902-8437, Support services for children with special needs

Parents Helping Parents, (617) 632-8188, Support groups and guidance for individuals experience stress in their role as parent.

MSPCC, (413) 532-4996, parent counseling, support, early intervention, parenting guidance

REACH, (413) 397-8986, Early intervention for children birth to 3 years old with developmental concerns. Autism support services for children under 3 years.

**Men's Resources:**

Men's Resource Center for Change, (413) 253-9887. Drop-in support groups focusing upon issues of concern to men such as fathering, anger management and coping with histories of abuse.

**Mental Health/Counseling:**

Carson Center at Valley Human Services, 96 South St., Ware, (413) 967-6241

Child and Family Services, 3 Union St, Easthampton, (413) 529-1764  
Individual, group and family counseling for children and adults.

Children's Clinic, Northampton, (413) 587-3265. Outpatient services for children with histories of abuse, neglect, trauma, foster care and adoption.

Clinical and Support Options, 17 New South St, Northampton, (413) 585-1041

Psychological Services, UMass Amherst, 135 Hicks Way, 123 Tobin Hall, (413) 545-0041, Individual, couples and family therapy.

ServiceNet, 50 Pleasant St., Northampton, MA, Individual, group and family counseling for children and adults, (413) 584-6855

\*Private practitioners (Ask your doctor for a recommendation or call your insurance company for names of practitioners covered by your insurance plan.)

**Multicultural Services:**

Cambodian American Assoc., 70 Boltwood Walk, Amherst, (413) 253-0696

Casa Latina, (413) 586-1569, Latina organization whose mission is to support Latino families.

Center for New Americans, (413) 587-0084, Locations in Amherst and Northampton to offer immigrants resources to learn English, become involved community members, and obtain tools necessary to maintain economic stability.

**Substance Abuse:**

Cooley Dickinson Hospital, 10 Main St., Northampton, (413) 586-5555 or 800-322-0424

Clinical and Support Options, 17 New South St, Northampton, (413) 585-1041

Hairston House, 25 Graves Ave, Northampton, (413) 585-8390.

Hilltown Community Health Center, 73 Russell Rd, Huntington, (413) 667-3009, and Old North Rd, Worthington, (413) 238-5511

ServiceNet, 50 Pleasant St, Northampton, (413) 584-6855

***\*\*When you're not sure whom to call for assistance, try "Community Resources for Advocacy" (formerly, First Call for Help) at (413) 582-4237. They will guide you to the appropriate organization.***

## Annotated Bibliography:

The following is a book list for parents and children of all ages that directly or indirectly addresses issues faced by parents and children when parents live apart. Though many, but not all, of the books refer to divorcing parents, the issues faced by children of never-married parents who live apart are similar.

### ***General parenting, communication and discipline***

Borba, M., *Parents Do Make a Difference*. Hoboken: Jossey-Bass, 1999. A guide to raising self-confident, empathetic kids, with a breakdown of eight characteristics that lead to kids' success in life.

Briggs, D.C., *Your Child's Self-Esteem*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998. A classic book on raising an emotionally healthy child.

Faber, A., and E. Mazlish., *How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk*. New York: Scribner, 2012. Classic book that makes clear how valuable parent-child communication is and how we can improve it.

Gottman, J., and J. DeClaire, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1997. Psychologist provides expert advice in better understanding yourself as a parent and how best to support your child.

Hallowell, E., *When You Worry About the Child You Love: Emotional and Learning Problems in Children*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998. A psychiatrist explores the biological and genetic contributions to emotional and behavior problems of childhood.

Phelan, T., *1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12*. Parentmagic, Inc. 2010. A simple approach to firm yet loving management of children.

Phelan, T., *Surviving your Adolescents: How to Manage-and Let Go of Your 13-18 Year olds*. Parent Magic, Inc, 1998. Practical guide for managing the teen years.

Talan, K., *Help Your Child or Teen Get Back on Track: What Parents and Professionals Can Do for Childhood Emotional and Behavioral Problems*.



London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 2009. A child psychiatrist answers a range of parental concerns in the context of the drive towards healthy development.

Turecki, S., with L. Tonner, *The Difficult Child: Expanded and Revised Edition*. New York: Bantam, 2005. Children with difficult temperaments need different parenting approaches.

Webster-Stratton, C., *The Incredible Years: A Trouble-Shooting Guide for Parents of Children Aged 3-8*. Boulder, CO, 2006. Solid advice to parents of younger children.

Wolf, A.E., *I'd Listen to My Parents if They'd Just Shut up: What to Say and Not Say When Parenting Teens*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

### **Co-parenting after separation and single parenting**

Ackerman, M., *Does Wednesday Mean Mom's House or Dad's House? Parenting Together While Living Apart*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008. Keeping your eye on the child's needs in developing and making successful family time-sharing plans.

Ahrons, C., *The Good Divorce*. New York: Harpercollins, 1994. Sound suggestions for coping well with divorce, based on a research study of 200 parents.

Anderson, S., *The Journey from Abandonment to Healing*. New York: Berkeley, 2000. Promotes understanding of and advice for coping with the emotional experience of being left by another.

Bryan, M., *The Prodigal Father: Reuniting Fathers and Their Children*. New York: Clarkson Potter, 1997. Helping fathers and mothers resolve resentment and pain when families have been abandoned.

Foust, L., *The Single Parent's Almanac: Real World Answers to Your Everyday Questions*. Rocklin: Prima Publishers, 1996. A comprehensive resource book.

Klatt, W., *Live-away Dads: Staying a Part of your Children's Lives When They Aren't a Part of Your Home*. New York: Penguin, 1999. A practical and encouraging guide for fathers who want to make the best of their relationships

with their children after a divorce or breakup.

Lyster, M., *Child Custody: Building Parenting Agreements That Work*. Berkeley: Nolo Press, 2003. A step-by-step guide to help even hostile couples work out agreements after separation.

Newman, G., *101 Ways to be a Long-Distance Super Dad...or Mom, Too!* New York: Robert Reed, 2006. Keeping the connection with children when living apart from them.

Oberlin, L.H. *Surviving separation and divorce*. Adams Media, 2005. Written for women facing an unwished for separation/divorce.

Ricci, I., *Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for Your Child*. New York: MacMillan, 1997. A well-respected guide.

Shulman, D., *Co-Parenting After Divorce: How to Raise Happy, Healthy Children in Two-Home Families*. Winsted Press, 1996. Short: clear and practical information.

### **Co-Parenting and Children with Special Needs:**

Price, Margaret. *Divorce and the Special Needs Child: A Guide for Parents*.

### **Conflict Resolution in Divorce**

Baris, M., and C. Garrity, *Caught in the Middle: Protecting Children of High-Conflict Divorce*. Lexington, MA: Jossey Bass, 1997. Explores the causes and consequences of high-level conflict between divorced parents, as well as its impact on children's development. Offers useful advice for getting back on track.

Blau, M., *Families Apart: Ten Keys to Successful Co-Parenting*. New York: Putnam, 1995. Communication, conflict resolution and coping with the events that continue to bring parents together after a divorce.

Evans, P., *The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to Recognize it and How to Respond*. Cincinnati: Adams Media, 2010. A reissued best-seller with valuable advice for managing verbal abuse.

Garber, B.D., *Keeping Kids out of the Middle: Child-Centered Parenting in the Midst of Conflict, Separation, and Divorce*. Deerfield Beach, FL: HCI, 2008.

Highly practical advice on keeping the focus on children while undergoing parental conflict.

Kline, I. and S. Pew, *For the Sake of the Children: How to Share Your Children with Your Ex-Spouse in Spite of Your Anger*. Rocklin, CA: Prima, 2000. A divorced parent gives advice on protecting children from adult anger and resentments.

MacKay, M, *Calming the Family Storm: Anger Management for Moms, Dads, and All the Kids*. Atascadero, CA: Impact Publishers, 2004. Explores the effect of parental anger on developing children, along with practical advice for changing family patterns.

### ***Remarriage and Step-Parenting***

Lofas, J., *Family Rules: Helping Stepfamilies and Single Parents Build Happy Homes*. New York: Kensington, 1998. Practical advice for establishing house rules and expectations after divorce or separation.

Penton, John and S. Welsh, *Yours, Mine and Hours: Relationship Skills for Blended Families, 2007*. Guiding your family through emotional adjustments to new siblings, parents, and family dynamics.

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### ***Young Children (3-7)***

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Abney, J., *Anaiya Lives with Daddy; Anaiya Visits Mommy*, OK: Tate Publishing, 2009.

An African-American child moves from her mother's to her father's home, learning that parents do not have to be married in order to love and care for

their child.

Bunting, E. and Papp, L., *My Mom's Wedding*. Ann Arbor: Sleeping Bear Press, 2011. Seven-year-old Pinky reflects upon her relationships with her faraway father and soon-to-be stepfather. Pinky secretly hopes her parents will get back together, but eventually realizes that she is happy for her mother and stepfather.

Coffelt, N., *Fred Stays with Me!* New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2007. Highlights the importance of bringing loved objects back and forth between two homes, and emphasizes the things that remain the same: school, friends and the constancy of a beloved dog.

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Levine, S and Langdo, B. *Do You Sing Twinkle?: A Story About Remarriage and New Family*. Washington, D.C.: Magination Press, 2009. A boy misses his mother and resents his new step-sisters. With sensitivity, his parents help him understand his feelings and adjust to the changes in his life.

Lindsay, J., *Do I Have a Daddy? A Story About a Single-Parent Child*, Buena Vista, CA: Morning Glory Press, 1999. A child of never-married parents asks about his father. Good advice for parents, too. Also available in Spanish.

Moore-Malinos, J., *When My Parents Forgot How to be Friends*, New York: Barron's, 2005. This book shows a "best case" scenario of parents learning to protect their children from conflict.

Newman, L. and Hegel, A., *Saturday is Pattyday*. Chicago: New Victoria Publishers, 1993. A child feels the pain of his mothers' divorce. A "best case" scenario in which the two moms convey that "only grown-ups get divorced. Not kids." 3-8

Penn, A., *The Kissing Hand*, Washington, DC: Child and Family Press, 1993. Chester Raccoon misses his mother when it's time to go to school. A comforting book for any child missing one parent while spending time with the other.

Rubin, J., *My Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore*, Washington, DC:

Magination Press, 2002. A journal and drawing book for children whose parents have separated or divorced.

Thomas, P., *My Family's Changing*, New York: Barrons, 1999. Guide to the range of emotions a young child might have, with helpful guide for parents. Does not discuss remarriage or step-families.

Wyeth, S.D., *Always my Dad*. Scholastic, 1998. An African American girl misses her father. 5-7

### ***Elementary School Children (8-12)***

Boy, C. *Chevrolet Saturdays*. New York: Puffin Books, 1995. An African-American boy deals with a new stepfather who is reaching out to him. 8+

Byars, B., *The Pinballs*. Scholastic, 1986. A wise and charming story of three children in foster care. 10+

Cleary, B., *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. New York: Harper Trophy, 2000. A Newbery Medal winner. In his correspondence with an author, a young boy reveals changes in his family and his father's absence.

Davis, D., *Something is Wrong at my House*. Seattle: Parenting Press, 2010. Based on a true story, this 32-page book shows a child seeking, and finally obtaining, help in a domestic violence situation. 6+

MacGregor, C., *Jigsaw Puzzle Family: The Stepkids' Guide to Fitting It Together* Atascadero, CA: Impact Publishing, 2005. Reassurance and advice for children in blended families. 10-14

McDonald, M., *Meet Julie*. Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing, 2007. Well-adjusted ten-year old adjusts to a move away from friends, her family home and her father in 1970's California. 8+

Ricci, I., *Mom's House Dad's House for Kids: Feeling at Home in One Home or Two* New York: Fireside, 2006. From popular author, how kids can stay strong and succeed in life when parents separate, divorce, or get married again. 9+

Swan-Jackson, A., *When Your Parents Split Up: How to Keep Yourself Together*. Price Stern Sloan, 1999. Experts answers teens' questions about

divorce. Includes advice, questionnaires and activities, plus real-life interviews with teens who have been through the same situation. 9+

Verdick, E., *How to Take the Grrrr Out of Anger*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2002. Helping children understand anger and learn how to manage it. 8+

### **Adolescents (13+)**

Buscemi, K. *Split In Two: Keeping it Together When Your Parents Live Apart*. San Francisco: Zest Books, 2009. With edgy, modern, graphic novel feel, a valuable resource to help teens feel less crazed and confused, and more self-confident.

Casella-Kapusinski, L. *Now What Do I Do? A Guide to Help Teenagers with Their Parents' Separation or Divorce*. ACTA Publications, 2006. How to deal with feelings of guilt and anger, improve communication with parents, reexamine family ties, avoid the parental war zone, find comfort in faith and friends, and learn to forgive. (Christian orientation)

Schab, L. *The Divorce Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Move Beyond the Break Up*. Oakland, CA: Instant Help, 2008. This workbook helps teens understand their feelings, cope with parental fighting, develop self-awareness and communication skills.

Trueit, T. *Surviving Divorce: Teens Talk About What Hurts and What Helps*. CT: Children's Press, 2007. Personal stories and photos, frequent statistics and quizzes. 12+

Youngerman, B., *The Truth about Divorce*. Facts on File, 2010. A comprehensive A-Z guide to the facts and myths of divorce. Evenhanded treatment of sensitive topics.