

Co-Parenting

Excerpts from Healthy Marriage Curricula

Experiences from Participant Input

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ADVICE FOR PARENTS

Who Are Not Together

1. Most children want a relationship with *both* parents.
 - ☐ The desire is intense for many children.
 - ☐ Allow your child to talk about their feelings of sadness and loss about the other parents, even if you don't like him or her.
2. Make it possible—not difficult—for the other parent to stay in contact with his or her children.
 - ☐ Regular contact with the other parents is important for a child as long as the relationship isn't dangerous.



ADVICE FOR PARENTS

Who Are Not Together

3. Don't badmouth the other parent around child, even if you think he or she deserves it.
4. Don't believe that just anyone can substitute for the other parent.
 - A stepparent does not have the same benefits, though marriage can help stabilize the family.
 - Mentors can help children a lot when there is no chance that the other parent can be involved.

What role do fathers play?

Can have negative impacts by:

- being absent
- being abusive
- being a negative role model (selling drugs, prison, being unfaithful)

Some fathers aren't absent by choice, but because the mother pushes him away.

Can have positive impacts by:

- giving boys and girls healthy role models for how men should treat women
- helping boys become respectful, responsible and emotionally mature
- helping keep kids safe, have fewer problems in school, begin sexual activity later, less likely to get pregnant, lower rates of behavioral problems

Source: PREP's "Within My Reach" and "Walking the Line"



TIPS FOR MAKING *New Families Work*

1. Develop realistic expectations for family relationships.
2. New parents should support the rules of the house, but shouldn't start making new rules right away.
3. Discuss parenting roles with your partner.
4. Develop the relationships in the family one-on-one.
5. Be understanding and use your Speaker Listener communication skills.

Adapted from Papernow, P., & Adler-Baeder, F. (November, 2002). Seven tips for successful stepparenting. *Your Stepfamily Magazine*. Used by permission.



TIPS FOR MAKING *New Families Work*

6. Acknowledge that a child can be part of two households.

- Do not involve the children in conflict with your “ex.”
- Do not quiz kids about the other parent’s activities.
- Don’t badmouth the other parent. It will hurt your child’s feelings.
- If the other parent behaves badly, acknowledge the behavior in a neutral tone.
- Talk in a neutral tone about differences between households.
- Realize that consistency of household rules is rarely achieved, but children can adjust to 2 separate sets of rules.
- You and your partner should continually provide language that helps children sort out loyalty binds.

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TIPS FOR MAKING

New Families Work

7. Strengthen your couple relationship.

- Discuss how you each see the other's role.
- Discuss your parenting plan and philosophy.
- Take a parenting class or read books especially for stepfamilies.
- Take time alone together to enjoy your relationship.

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Participant Input

- Many of our participants talk about how the other partner continues to use the children as weapons to hurt them, use confusion, use confusion and anger to manipulate the children to like them better, and otherwise stir up trouble on purpose (or what they perceive as on purpose).
- Typically mothers want to protect their children from being in the middle of this dysfunction, however, they often learn through our classes that they play a role in it, too.
- One mother in a community-based setting for former domestic violence victims said, “I see now that it isn’t just his fault. I play into his game when I react with emotion rather than the simple facts that we need to solve today and I put the kids in the middle”.
- A man in jail said that he thought he and his ‘baby mamma’ were doing an ok job co-parenting but now see so many areas that they were missing – he wanted to take our class on the ‘outside’ (in the community) with his former partner when he gets out of jail. This is very common.