

# Dealing with Badmouthing from a Co-Parent

It's painful to find out that someone has been saying bad things about you behind your back. Badmouthing can make you feel like you've had your dignity swiped from you. You may feel like doing damage control that may not be productive.

Divorce and separation can often leave those involved feeling hostile and resentful, so it is not uncommon to find one or both people involved in badmouthing their ex-spouse behind their back.

Unfortunately, sometimes it is the children that these two people share that become first-hand witnesses of this badmouthing. When one parent says mean, hurtful things about their co-parent in front of their kids, the children carry the emotional burden of having heard those things. That burden can lead to negative consequences like anxiety, stress, and even grief.

Between one another, understanding what badmouthing is and dealing with it appropriately is a crucial step towards improving your co-parenting and protecting your children from divorce conflict.

## **What is badmouthing?**

Badmouthing can take many forms. It can come from calling someone bad names, telling lies or negative stories about a person, and placing unwarranted blame or criticism upon a person.

It can take place both privately and publicly, whether it is through something said to one person or posted online for many more people to see. As someone begins vocalizing mean things, the

individuals who hear these comments don't always know what to make of what they are listening to.

Children, in particular, are easily affected by what their parents say, and when kids have to deal with one parent badmouthing the other, they usually won't be entirely sure how to handle it right away.

Whether they believe what they are hearing or not, this often creates emotional distress in kids because they don't want to be involved in any part of the negativity between their parents.

Along with hearing one parent badmouth the other, it can also be harmful to kids to hear other family members or friends badmouth one of their parents. Even though it may not be coming from a parent, it can be just as uncomfortable and inappropriate for kids to hear.

## **Badmouthing a parent to a child – how to deal with it**

Badmouthing a parent to a child is inappropriate co-parenting. Dealing with badmouthing from your co-parent or someone else can be a frustrating process, but it is necessary to handle it appropriately.

### **Talking with your kids**

If one of your kids tells you that they've heard their other parent or someone else saying mean or harmful things about you, you must remember not to retaliate. No matter how tempting it might feel to do the same to this person, you should remain calm for the sake of your kids.

Don't involve your kids any further into this turmoil by using this moment to "get back" at your co-parent and say mean things about them to your children.

Instead, see this moment as an opportunity to have a conversation with your kids about what they heard and about saying mean things in general.

Even if what your kids have told you hurts your feelings, you don't need to get defensive in front of them. You can explain why what they heard is not true, but you shouldn't worry about having to prove anything to them just because of what they heard. Telling them the truth should be enough.

Let your kids ask questions to you about this or anything else that is related, and do your best to answer them as honestly as you can. Taking this time to have a moment of honesty with your kids will help them to better recognize truth compared to fiction in the future.

## What to do when one parent talks badly about the other

Once you've had a chance to talk to your kids, talk to the person doing the badmouthing. Try and have a calm conversation as you ask them to stop saying mean-spirited things about you to your kids.

If the person doing the badmouthing is a relative of your co-parent, you may want to start by talking to your co-parent about this first so that they are aware that this is going on as well.

If you find it too difficult to speak to this person face-to-face, send this request in writing, and document what you say and their response to it.

No matter what, protect your kids from being part of this conversation, and have it somewhere far from where they can hear you. They may have been the ones that told you about what they heard, but the issue does not involve them.

If your conversation does not go in your favor, and your co-parent continues to badmouth you to your kids or others, you should consider seeking help from a professional. Your attorney or another family law professional that you are working with can help guide you towards taking the appropriate actions towards preventing this from happening again.

Dealing with badmouthing from your co-parent is not something that you want to do, but it is necessary if the kids are put in the

middle of it. Recognizing in what way your co-parent is badmouthing you will help you to know how exactly you must handle the discussion that you'll have with your kids about it.

Later, handling it in an appropriate way to put an end to it will also be important so that neither you nor your kids must suffer the consequences of it any further.

## Are there laws against bad-mouthing the other parent?

Regarding laws around bad-mouthing, don't hesitate to speak to your attorney or a family professional if you have concerns about what is being said, how your kids are experiencing it, and what you can do to help make it stop.