

Dealing With An Uncooperative Co-Parent

Co-parenting, even at its easiest, is still a complicated endeavour. It can get even more complicated when co-parents are uncooperative with one another. That's because, at its heart, co-parenting is a collaborative affair, and when one party refuses to meet the other halfway, it can throw a huge wrench in a family's daily life.

But when people think about parenting after divorce, many still default to imagining a cooperative co-parenting relationship with parents working in tandem to raise children in a happy and healthy environment. Unfortunately, that's simply not the case for all families.

So if you find yourself opposite to an uncooperative co-parent, you're far from alone. But that may not be much comfort, so to help you maintain a positive outlook, here are 3 things you can focus on when you're in this situation.

Keep things in perspective

"Uncooperative" is often used to reference a whole host of behaviours. So it's important to first assess where your co-parent's actions fall on the scale between annoyance to severe transgression.

If your child's other parent is violating the terms of your custody arrangement, they've broken past the uncooperative label completely. So whether it's them refusing to reimburse you for shared expenses or modifying your parenting schedule without approval, legal involvement may be necessary. Your custody arrangement was created for the ultimate benefit of your children,

and one parent unilaterally deciding they know better can have severe and long-lasting consequences.

On the other hand, if your child's other parent is still operating within the bounds of your parenting agreement—while uncooperative or passive-aggressive behaviours will certainly still be frustrating—changing those behaviours may very well be beyond your control. In these circumstances, it's often a better use of your time and energy to focus on yourself and your kids.

Don't let them set the tone for your own co-parenting

Respect is non-negotiable in every healthy co-parenting relationship. When it feels as though you're giving all of the respect without getting any back, however, interactions with your co-parent can really start to test your patience.

On the positive side, conflict typically requires the active participation of both parties to truly blossom. While you cannot reasonably expect to control your co-parent's every action, you are expected to be able to control your own. If they continue to engage in button-pushing or petty behaviours, take a deep breath and a step back. That way, you're not cornered into reacting to their behaviour.

Negative behaviours can be highly manipulative, and it's all too easy to get sucked into a cycle of tit-for-tat pettiness. If you're committed to positive and healthy co-parenting, don't let your co-parent distract you from that goal. You still have control over setting the overall tone of your own co-parenting.

Explore alternatives to co-parenting

Many parents after a divorce, whether due to past conflict or other issues, turn to less direct forms of parenting.

One of these methods is parallel parenting. It's similar to co-parenting but has additional built-in boundaries that can be helpful for parents with high-conflict or volatile relationships. In these types of arrangements, parents keep their interactions to an absolute minimum, typically by using a single, isolated platform for their communication. Without emails, texts or phone calls, they can disengage from both each other and the catalysts that set off conflict, yet still remain highly involved in their children's lives.

Brook Olsen, the founder of the High Conflict Diversion Program™, describes parallel parenting as the "do no harm" model of shared parenting. Instead of forcing direct and frequent contact that could lead to arguments and an unhealthy environment, parents are able to focus on their own efforts rather than stress over what their co-parent is or isn't doing.

Co-parenting opposite to a person uninterested in cooperation or positive communication can be a frustrating and draining experience. After you've assessed that the behavior you're seeing in your co-parent isn't actually reaching beyond being "uncooperative," there are several strategies you can employ to lessen your stress. By keeping things in perspective, remaining committed to positive parenting, and trying alternative shared parenting methods, you'll hopefully be able to find a balance that allows you to put your focus on where it belongs: your kids.