

# Making Shared Parenting a Little Less Scary

Divorce and separation aren't terms to be taken lightly. Many might even think them to be rather scary! For those encountering the challenges of shared parenting for the first time, feelings of anxiety or fear may feel ever present, always in the back of their minds. However, there are ways to overcome the scariness of this difficult situation. With a parenting schedule and a solid routine to match, you can ease your fears and uncertainty and make things feel a little less scary for your kids.

## Define Your Parenting Arrangement

Children want to feel secure, especially at home. They also crave the security of knowing their schedule—when they'll be at school, what activities they'll participate in, and when they'll see their parents each day. Divorce can throw a child's sense of security for a loop which can leave them feeling anxious and even afraid.

The fear of feeling like their family is being torn apart can be profound for a child to experience, and they may wonder if they'll ever feel as happy as they did when their parents were together. While parents might not be able to do anything to fix the situation immediately, they can help to calm their child's fear by defining a steady parenting arrangement.

Your parenting arrangement will encompass the most crucial aspects of your children's daily routine plus agreements for how you plan to handle decisions made for your child on matters like education or health care. To your children, understanding their schedule can be hugely important to their sense of security.

Having a structured parenting schedule can benefit a child's emotional and physical health because their fears and stresses that stem from not knowing when they will see each of their parents next are diminished by knowing what to expect each day. It may be challenging to settle on a plan right upon separating but working to craft this plan as soon as possible can bring your family to a new standard of "normality" and make a new situation feel less scary for everyone involved. A parenting plan may be put in a Court Order.

## Build Lines of Communication Between Homes

A new family arrangement can feel scary for parents, too, as they adjust to parenting as a separated family. Strong emotions and conflict surrounding the divorce can detour parents from communicating in the same ways they had before—or at all. Though it may be hard to talk to each other like you did before, establishing new lines of effective parenting communication is indispensable.

Discuss with your co-parent ideas on how your parenting time plan should work based on everyone's work, school, extracurricular, and social schedules. Also, don't forget about including a holiday custody schedule into your overall plan. It will be important to have your holiday plan set well ahead of time, so holiday festivities are not interrupted due to parenting time disputes.

As hard as it may be to continue communicating with the other parent, it shows your children that even though you don't live all together anymore, you're still a family. Find a way to share information and maintain a dialog that works for you and your co-parent. This doesn't mean that you have to speak the way you used to; at its core, it simply means that you are keeping a line of communication open that pertains to your children.

# Maintain a Steady Routine

Many children are great at adapting to new situations, but keeping up a basic routine for them can help make the changes a little less scary. As you and your co-parent build your parenting schedule, try to maintain your children's previous schedule intact as much as possible.

Routines can prove to be important for children experiencing transitions as big as divorce, so try and look for aspects of their day-to-day that can remain the same. If your locations post-separation can accommodate it, allow your kids to go to the same schools, participate in the same activities, and see the same friends. Keeping these familiar aspects of their schedule in place will certainly help make your family's new arrangement a little less scary.

However, if you're unable to keep certain aspects of their routine in place, find healthy strategies to help them ease into new things. For example, if they must switch schools, visit the new school with your kids, and schedule a time to meet with one or more of their new teachers. This could help make the first day less frightening than it might be by just jumping in on day one.

Although you'll want to do your best to take your children's existing schedule into account, it's not always possible to keep everything exactly as it was. The biggest difference is that if you plan to share parenting time, they'll be moving between two homes to spend time with each of you. If kids aren't sure when they'll see either of their parents next, they may start to feel anxious and a little scared. Keep the routine of switching houses steady so that your children can rest easy knowing when they are seeing each of their parents.

Easing into a shared parenting routine won't be without a few bumps in the road. Even so, shared parenting doesn't have to be a scary transition for your family. Help create a solid agreement and routine that you can all depend on. Communicate when you need to about your children, always keeping one another up-to-date on the latest essential details coming in. Working on these things can help put your and your children's fears at ease.