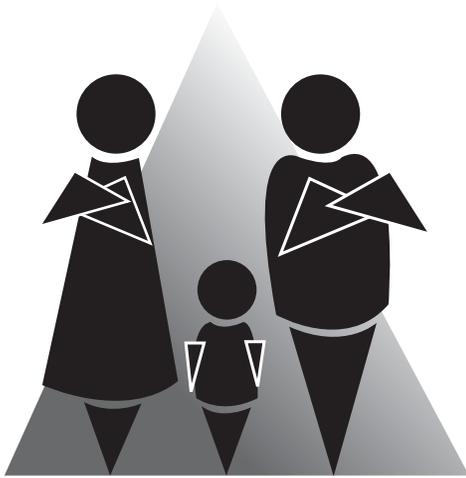


**EXTENSION PROGRAMS**

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Are Your Children in the  
**MIDDLE**  
 of Your Conflict or Divorce?

**The Business of Co-parenting**

**P**arents can divorce each other, but the parent-child relationship and parenting responsibilities are forever. It is common for parents to feel guilty about how divorce affects children. As the family faces divorce, both parents can improve their children's well-being by applying some new strategies. In preparing for the future, concentrate on what you can do, not what the other parent should do. The only behavior you can control is your own.

**Both Parents Need to Maintain Close Relationships With Their Children**

When both parents maintain close relationships with their children, the children feel more "whole" because their identity development is tied to their relationship with both parents. When parents can put aside their differences, it shows they care for their children. Children will feel secure in knowing they are loved and valued when both parents are part of their lives.

Close relationships with both parents after divorce help children to avoid developing distorted or unrealistic fantasies about a parent. Children will also be more prepared if a change in custody occurs. Close parental relationships with children by both parents mean the children will have fewer divided loyalties. They will have the chance to develop relationships with extended family, too.

Parents who co-parent or develop parallel parenting will have fewer power struggles and less backlash between parents and children. Non-custodial parents are less likely to initiate court action. Parents who can share in the work of co-parenting are more willing to provide financial support for the children. They will also have an easier time maintaining parental authority.

Parents who maintain a close relationship with their children are validating the importance of birth parents and long-term relationships. Both parents and children will experience greater well-being and sense of recovery after divorce.

One way to view post-divorce parenting is as a business-like relationship. This approach helps parents separate the emotions from the work of parenting their children.

Planning ahead and keeping a calendar of events will go a long way in helping parents in their "business" of parallel parenting. Here is a list of items parents may wish to include in their agreement to parallel parent.

- ✓ Legal custody
- ✓ Primary residence
- ✓ Routine parent time-share
- ✓ Holidays and birthdays
- ✓ Vacations
- ✓ Child care
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Policy for canceling and rescheduling time-share
- ✓ Medical and school decisions
- ✓ Religious upbringing
- ✓ Child support
- ✓ Medical expenses
- ✓ Community activities
- ✓ Telephone calls
- ✓ Clothing and setting up households
- ✓ Sharing parental information
- ✓ Involvement with other adults
- ✓ Grandparents' visits
- ✓ Changing the time-share routine
- ✓ Consistency of households
- ✓ Handling conflict
- ✓ Mediation
- ✓ Geographical moves
- ✓ Higher education





## Are Your Children in the MIDDLE of your Conflict or Divorce?

### The Business of Co-parenting

Keep a calendar using markers, stickers or other colorful representations for events and activities. For example, days spent at Mom's house may be represented by green hearts; days spent at Dad's house may be indicated by red hearts. Visits to grandparents, dental appointments, gymnastics class, band practice, etc. may be indicated on the calendar, too. This will remind the parent as well as helping children to know what is happening. You may wish to make a duplicate calendar for your children's other parent or get the children to keep one of their own if they are old enough. Remember that changes in dates should be updated on all the calendars. Changes are inevitable. The calendar should be only a guide. Flexibility is important when dates must be changed. Allow a little reasonable flexibility in your agreements as well.

Divorce and single-parenting are difficult and challenging. Planning ahead by working out some of these agreements and establishing parallel parenting business principles help to alleviate some of those challenges.

#### Here are some points to consider as parallel parenting business principles:

- ▶ Keep your feelings in check: Don't mix business with pleasure or displeasure.
- ▶ Be flexible and cooperative.
- ▶ Help with the transitions children need to make as they move from one parent to the other.
- ▶ Use business-like communication and record keeping.
- ▶ Be clear, and don't make assumptions.
- ▶ Put assumptions in writing.
- ▶ Communicate directly.
- ▶ Don't use the children to carry messages or mediate.
- ▶ Make an appointment with the other parent to deal with parenting business.
- ▶ Provide information on schedules, school events, activities.
- ▶ When you make agreements about issues involving the children:
  - minimize loss for the children
  - make small changes
  - make gradual changes
- ▶ Make a commitment to parallel parenting where you focus on the needs of children.

- ▶ Refer to the other parents as the mother/father of your children.
- ▶ Don't let your children manipulate you. Be clear that the rules may differ between their parents. Put things in writing.

If you are interested in more information on this and other related topics, please call your local LSU AgCenter parish office. Below is the list of topics in the "Are Your Children in the Middle of Your Conflict or Divorce?" series.

A Child's View of Divorce  
The Business of Co-parenting  
Coping with Stress and Change  
Costs of Raising Children  
Custody Issues Today  
Dating Issues  
Disciplining Children  
Friendship and Support  
Help! I Feel Overwhelmed  
Loss of a Relationship  
Managing Income and Expenses  
Not Enough Hours in the Day  
Separating Your Finances  
Sharing Parenting  
Talking with Your Children  
Talking with Your Children About Money  
Talking with Your Children -- Communicating  
Within Your Family: Active Listening  
Visitation Do's and Don'ts

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Syverson, S.; Persing, M.; Alberts, M. (1997) "Pathways to a New Life" (Publication No. BU-6780-GO) **Parents Forever Series**. Regents of the University of Minnesota: Minnesota Extension Service.

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