

**The Law doesn't raise children.
Parents do!**

A Guide For Co-Parents

SADSA

Separation is never easy, especially when there are children involved. No matter what you may think about divorce. No matter what you may feel about divorce. No matter what your situation or experience, life will change for you and your children.

However, **how it changes, is up to you.**

If you are a parent going through a divorce/separation, this guide will assist you with many questions you may have regarding how to deal with the impact your separation will have on your children.

I will never repeat enough that as parents, all we truly are; are role models.

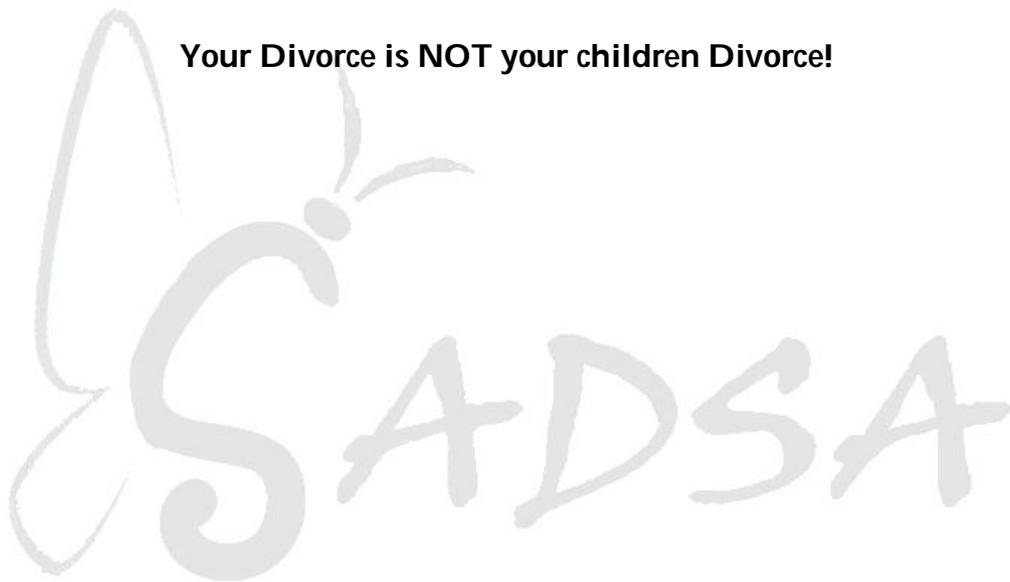
How you deal with your divorce will determine how it affects the children.

We live in a society where divorce has become a norm and where the troubled road to separation is no longer unmapped. We know the challenges that can lie ahead and we can therefore be better prepared for it.

Divorcing parents have an added responsibility when they separate:

Keep the focus on their children's well-being -- no matter what led to their divorce.

Your Divorce is NOT your children Divorce!



"A divorce undertaken thoughtfully and realistically can teach children how to confront serious life problems with wisdom and appropriate action".

~ Judith Wallerstein~

While learning to be a good parent is difficult in itself, in situations where co-parenting occurs, the job of being a Mom or Dad can become even harder.

Co-parenting is a learned process. It is understandable that it is daunting at first and perfectly normal that it may seem impossible, but nothing is impossible if we decide to work at it.

Divorce and co-parenting are difficult and challenging. Planning ahead in working out some agreements and establishing some parenting principles help to alleviate some of those challenges.

Through my own experience as a divorce parent I have gathered an understanding of 3 simple principles that have helped me keep my focus on my children's needs.

The 3 Co-Parenting Principles:

1. All we truly are, are role models

Children look up to their parents throughout their lives for support, guidance and love. This, although challenging at times, is our responsibility. As adults and separated parents, if we are unable to fulfil this role, we are hurting our children.

If you are involved with an un-cooperative co-parent, blaming your co-parent is not going to exempt you from this responsibility, it is only going to add to the problem.

In keeping the focus on the love you share for your children, you are becoming part of the solution.

2. To your children, you will always be their family

Your divorce is not your children divorce and whatever has contributed to the dissolution of your relationship, it is not your children problem. To your children, you will ALWAYS be Mom and Dad.

They will inevitably be hurt by the news but you can spare them much trauma in allowing them to love both parents and be loved by both parents.

3. The law doesn't raise children. Parents do!

When faced with the truth of an impending separation, parents have a habit of running to an attorney.

Endless testimonies confirm that attorneys will make a case of your disagreements, prolong the divorce process and bill you huge amounts without seeing any resolution.

The Law doesn't raise children. Parents do!

Do you like people who don't know you to make decisions for yourself?
That is exactly what happens when you run to an attorney to get divorced.
Wouldn't you rather be and stay in charge of your life?

In reminding yourself of your parental responsibilities you will allow your children to be raised by their parents and not by the decisions of a legal system that has no insight into what your family is about.



Rosalind Sedacca, the founder of the Child-Centered Divorce Network, writes:

"Picture this: you're getting divorced and you're angry, resentful, hurt, or any combination of other painful emotions. You want to lash out at, or maybe get back at your (soon to be former) spouse. Hiring the most aggressive divorce lawyer you can find seems like your smartest choice. You are gearing up for a fight!

But stop. Think. If you are a parent, you may be making a choice you regret for a long time. If you choose a lawyer who directs you into a vicious court battle, the costs may be insurmountable – not only the financial expenses, but the emotional costs as well.

Think long and hard before you move your divorce battle into the legal system. If you do that it is likely to take its toll on every member of your family – especially your children – in the most destructive and gut-wrenching ways. It happens all the time. But it need not happen to your family.

When you give your divorce outcome over to the courts, you pave the way to unimaginable stress and frustration compounded by a sense of powerlessness that is impossible to understand until you are swept away in it.

As you stand by and watch attorneys and judges make decisions about your life and your future, you may begin to feel violated and helpless. The taste of revenge you thought you had will sometimes morph into anxiety and shock as issues get twisted and victors become victims. The consequences of everyone's actions play out for years and years...

Sadly, your children are not protected from the emotional and psychological repercussions of your actions and the decisions that may be made by others on your behalf. When timesharing, custody, or other child-focused decisions are made by third parties who are focused more on financial issues than family issues, children's needs often get pushed aside in favour of other objectives. Relationships, balance, and goodwill are not paramount concerns when divorce is a battle, and the very real injuries (and potential scars) on your children's psyches may be overlooked in the legal bloodbath that ensues.

But there are other ways. Better ways. And more ways than ever before to create a divorce that respects the rights of everyone in the family.

Learn from the lessons and mistakes of others. If you want to save yourself considerable expense – both emotional and financial – and if you want to minimize the distress to your children (maybe even have them thank you sometime for creating a civilized, sensible, harmonious divorce), you can do it. You have the power to make the right decisions today.

Stay out of court. Stay out of the hands of killer attorneys. Create a Peaceful Divorce. Create a Child-Centered Divorce – and reap the rewards for years to come!"



Parents need to be reminded again and again that the consequences of their choices will affect their children not just for a few years, but for decades to come. It will influence their self-esteem, their sense of trust, their life choices, marriage partners and other vital decisions. Parents who violate the principles of their Children's Rights are emotionally and psychologically violating their own children.

The American Association of Matrimonial Lawyers formed a committee back in 1998 to formulate a Children's Bill of Rights.

The Children's Bill of Rights is quite simple.

It says to children:

"Your parents' divorce is not your fault and you should never blame yourself. Every child has rights and parents should not forget them when the family is in the midst of a break-up."

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1. **You have the right to love both your parents** -- and be loved by both of them. It reassures children not to feel guilty for wanting Mom and Dad in their life or desiring to see Mom or Dad at any time.
2. **You do not have to choose one parent over the other** -- and shouldn't be forced to make a choice. It reminds children they are entitled to all the feelings they are having -- including feeling scared, sad, resentful or angry.
3. **You have a right to be in a safe environment** -- physically and emotionally. Children are advised to speak out to an adult if they are being hurt in any way.
4. **You don't belong in the middle of your parent's break-up.** It encourages children to remind their parents that it's their fight, not yours. Children are not equipped to handle adult conflicts and shouldn't be brought into parental disputes.
5. **You have the right to keep your grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins in your life.** Even if you're living with one parent, you can still see relatives on your other parent's side without guilt or opposition.
6. **You have a right to be a child.** Children shouldn't be taking on the burden of adult problems. They should be focusing on loving Mom and Dad, their school work, friends and other activities. Let your parents handle the parenting.

This poem, by Dorothy Law Nolte, reminds us what our responsibilities as role models to our children are.

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to feel discouraged
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to feel angry
If a child lives with violence, he learns to feel afraid
If a child lives with dishonesty, he learns to feel suspicious
If a child lives with judgment, he learns to feel guilty
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to feel ashamed
If a child lives with disorder, he learns to feel confused
If a child lives with disappointment, he learns to feel helpless
If a child lives with silence, he learns to feel lonely

BUT

If a child lives with protection, he learns to feel safe
If a child lives with honesty, he learns to feel trustful
If a child lives with peace, he learns to feel calm
If a child lives with sharing, he learns to feel thankful
If a child lives with understanding, he learns to feel encouraged
If a child lives with laughter, he learns to feel happy
If a child lives with creativity, he learns to feel inspired
If a child lives with choice, he learns to feel free
If a child lives with community, he learns to feel supported
If a child lives with accomplishment, he learns to feel confident
If a child lives with meaning, he learns to feel fulfilled
If a child lives with love, he learns to feel tender

WITH WHAT IS YOUR CHILD LIVING?

Because divorce leaves us feeling emotionally vulnerable we are often not equipped at that time to make the right decisions for ourselves, let alone giving the much needed support to our children. Our reactions are based on our anger and hurt and we will hurt our children and involve them in a vicious tug of war if we do not modify our behaviours.

It was through my divorce that I was made aware of the importance of both parents in a child's life and the responsibility we have towards our children to provide this for them.

It is not divorce per se that leaves children emotionally scared, but the parent's attitude towards their divorce that determines the impact it has on the children.

Most of the negative consequences of divorce result from one or both parents making choices that are not in the best interest of their children.

A breakup cannot and does not end your responsibility as a parent.

Parents are forever.

Both parents should make every attempt to play a vital part in the lives of their children, and allow one another to do so. Children need the ongoing affection, interest and concern of their parents. Children must feel that they have two parents who love them, even though they could not live happily with each other.

The problem is that children are powerless victims when their parents separate or divorce -- and are helpless to do much about it.

5 Tips to help your children through your divorce:

Love them unconditionally

To love your children unconditionally means « without » any conditions. These conditions include the decisions you make on their behalf that they should have restricted access to their other parent.

Unless in exceptional cases when children are in direct danger with their other parent, your anger, hurt and sadness should not interfere in your children relationship with their other parent.

Respect their needs

Children have a natural need to love and be loved by both their parents. Respect their needs to be part of their family, even if their family is changing.

Pay attention

Show your children they are important and valuable and that they are actively considered in your decision to divorce. Be interested in what they are going through and allow them to voice their own anger and sadness. This will contribute to their self esteem

Let them be themselves

When parents go through a divorce, children who are caught in a tug of war between their parents, feel guilty whenever they spend time with their other parent. They will learn to hide their feelings, lie and manipulate situations.

Let them be themselves. They have only one childhood. Do not take this away from them.

Never feel sorry for your children

Feeling sorry comes from a lack of respect and fear.

To love your child is to trust and respect them completely. When children feel respected they trust themselves that they can get themselves out of the situation they are in and that they will be alright. When we feel sorry for our children we are really saying that we do not trust that they can deal with whatever is happening and that we fear the effect upon us if they cannot!

So, instead of panicking when your child appears sad and angry about the divorce situation just stop and trust that he will be alright.

I think we saved our children the day
we realized we couldn't raise them
in a lawsuit, only in a family.
--33-year-old father of two

For a while when my spouse was pouring
conflict into our children's lives, I used that as
an excuse to fight, too. I finally realized that the
worse my co-parent was doing, the better I had to
do. Not only did my kids love me for being the
bigger person, but my spouse started doing
better too. --32-year-old parent of three

The studies are absolutely clear on
one point: Conflict between parents is the
best predictor of a child's later maladjustment.
--Dr. Anthony L. Berardi

Children of divorce are like kids bobbing face down
in a river. What a tragedy that some of their parents stand
on the riverbank arguing how the children got there, why
their swimsuits don't match, or who is going to pay
for the hospital bill if a rescue is ever mounted.

--Dr. Timothy A. Onkka

The other thing Dad will do that will
hurt my feelings is he'll say something like,
"You're just like your mother," when he's
being negative. That hurts a lot.
--Tracy, age 16, from

Our children have an absolute right to good relationships **with both their parents**.
The best mom still isn't a dad, and the best dad still isn't a mom.

In order to best hear and understand your children's point of view, you need to acknowledge your own emotional experience. When you are aware of what is happening with you, you can better help your children.

Learn to connect with yourself on a daily basis. Open and listen to your heart.

Simple Breathing exercise

At regular intervals during your day stop what you're doing and:

- Take a deep breath in. Hold it for one second, and then let it go, exhaling all tension.
- Do this at least 3 times, putting your neurology into "pause mode".

Next:

- Take a normal breath in through your nose and exhale slowly from your mouth – about twice as long as the inhalation.
- Continue breathing in this circular way for as long as it takes you to feel relaxed and that you are no longer holding on to any thoughts. Whatever thoughts come into your mind, just let it pass, like a bird flying in the sky.
- Once you're completely relaxed, and your mind has quietened continue breathing naturally and open your heart. Let your heart become the source of your intentions, not your mind.
- In this calm state, create a mental picture of you successfully achieving the result that you want to accomplish next.
- Then make a positive affirming statement to achieve that, like: "I can and I will..."

Use this technique as and when you wish and especially when you find yourself distressed about something. The 3 deep breaths followed by the circular breathing can be used as a quick relaxation method unto itself. You can spend anything between 1 minute and 20 minutes doing this technique. When you're done, allow yourself to be inspired and continue with the next most important thing for you.

The rewards to children and parents from a good co-parenting relationship are tremendous. **Children** are already hurt by all the painful losses that go with their parents' separation, including:

- Being exiled from one parent every time there's a reunion with the other parent,
- Feeling something is wrong with them or their world, and
- Wondering what else can go wrong in their lives.

Through an effective co-parenting partnership between their parents, children are reassured that their parents will remain their family, no matter what the future holds.

Parents are also rewarded. They don't have to live in fear that vital child-related decisions will be made without them or that their co-parent will diminish their role as parent. They know they'll never find themselves in an expensive and embarrassing court battle over what are properly parent questions. And above all, parents know they are giving their children the gift of a cooperative, respectful, and predictable relationship between the two most important people in their lives.

The rewards truly justify the effort.

Are you ready to sign your Co-Parenting Agreement?

CO-Parenting Agreement

The truly awful part of divorce is the pain and suffering it causes children. While there will always be some issues for the children, the parents can do much to mitigate the pain and suffering. Parents must be very adult, very grown up about it and set aside their differences.

We, the undersigned, _____

Parents of: _____

Are in agreement that:

- We both love our children tremendously.
- We are committed to our children's welfare and well being.
- We will put aside our own differences to work together as co-parents in our children's best interests.
- When we work together, we will use positive communication and will act in a spirit of cooperation.
- I understand that competing with my co-parent for my children's affection will only hurt my children.
- If I feel that my co-parent is entering into a competition with me for our children's affection, I will not enter the competition myself. I will continue to act only in the best interest of our children.
- I will try to understand and resolve any issues that keep me from acting in our children's best interests.
- I will not talk down to my co-parent in front of our children.
- I will prepare myself emotionally for co-parent meetings so that I can remain calm and focused to best help our children.
- I will put the best interests of our children before any negative feelings between myself and my co-parent.
- I will follow through with my financial responsibility for our children.
- I will not use our children as a...
 - Pawn

- Bargaining Chip
- Punishment
- Means of Revenge
- Messenger

Signed: _____

Date: _____



CONGRATULATIONS!

You have chosen an important step towards your responsibility as a Co-Parent.

Remember though. Being a Parent is not easy. Being a Co-Parent can be even more challenging but it can be done.

You are not alone.

Have fun in being creative and being part of the solution.

The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem. - Theodore Rubin



To book a Co-Parenting Coaching Consultation:

NADIA THONNARD Dip.Couns.(SACAP)(CHE)

info@sadsa.net