



STEP 2

ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO LOVE BOTH PARENTS

At times, you might wonder if your child would be better off with just one parent. You can probably visualize yourself with less stress, less conflict, and less time spent working out details with your former partner. You wouldn't have to share your child's time, and all parenting decisions would be solely under your control. Ah, how life would be easier—for you!

When your thinking leads you in this direction, you are in danger of choosing the path that most harms your child.

VALUE BOTH PARENTS.

Let's look at the concept of having one parent from a different perspective. Every parent has qualities, skills, and interests that are unique to the individual. Both you and your coparent offer something special to your child. One of you might be a good teacher while the other is a good listener. One plays basketball with the child; the other plays chess. Think objectively about your child's other parent and identify some of their characteristics or skills that might contribute to parenting in a positive way. Write at least two of them on the next page.

3. Show acceptance for two homes.

- Talk to your child about how they will have a family in two homes.
- Keep personal items like toys, music, and books at each home.
- Make sure your child has their own space in each home—if not their own room, then a sleeping nook and a dresser or shelves to store personal belongings.
- Provide toiletries and basics like socks and undergarments for your child at each home.
- Honor your child's preference to carry favorite items back and forth between homes, as long as important items are returned.
- Be sure to refer to the other parent's residence as your child's "other home." Do not refer to your home as your child's only home, even if it was where you lived before the separation.
- Post a calendar noting the days your child will be living with each parent.
- Encourage your child to make friends in both neighborhoods and invite friends over from both neighborhoods.
- If you can, establish consistent routines that work for both parents, such as bedtime and homework structure. However, if conflict with your former partner prevents such communication, know that children can accept some differences. Remember, there are even differences within intact families.
- As much as possible, establish consistent rules for discipline. Although children can adapt to different rules and procedures, adhering to the same procedures across households will ease their adjustment.
- Establish and maintain responsibilities for your child in both homes. Children achieve a sense of belonging and build self-confidence by contributing to the family. Chores suited to the developmental level and interests of your child can help them gain a sense of place in the family. Keep the other parent informed about the responsibilities in your home. Having chores in both homes will help to normalize the environment.
- Make the time you spend with your child feel as normal as possible. Sometimes a parent tries to make up for lost time by filling weekends with "special events." Do not try to keep your child entertained the entire time, and avoid spoiling them out of guilt or competition. What your child will remember most is the accumulation of experiences, including everyday ones. When you are there for homework and everyday activities like playing catch or reading stories, you build the kind of long-term relationship that your child needs most of all. Spend one-on-one time with each of your children. Plan an activity that your child finds enjoyable. It can be as simple as coloring or putting a puzzle together.



THE S.T.O.P. TECHNIQUE

STEP 1. **STOP** yourself from reacting.

When an anger-inducing situation occurs, such as your child's other parent calling with a sudden change of plans, the first thing to do is STOP yourself from reacting.

STEP 2. **TAKE** a few deep breaths.

Take a few deep breaths and calm yourself. Two effective calming techniques are slow, deep breathing and creating calming thoughts. As you become calmer, allow your focus to settle on your long-term goals for your children.

STEP 3. **OBERVE** yourself non-judgmentally.

Observe what is happening in your body and your emotions. Observe how your mind is working in this moment. Without becoming judgmental, observe what is really bothering you.

STEP 4. **PROCEED** with your next move.

Now you are ready to take action with a calmer mind and the knowledge that you will not let anger and other strong emotions make the decision for you.



ANGER DOs AND DON'Ts

DOs

- DO practice the S.T.O.P. Technique.
- DO write in a journal when you feel angry and need a release.
- When you need support, DO find someone (other than your child) to talk to: a family member, friend, member of the clergy, therapist, or support group.
- DO find a physical activity such as walking, exercising, or gardening to channel your anger.
- DO create a ritual or a symbolic act to “let go” of your pain. For example:
Write a letter to the person with whom you are angry, stamp the envelope and write an imaginary address. When you put the envelope in the mailbox, try to say goodbye to your anger.
Find a stone and let it represent your anger. Carry it around in your purse or pocket. Put it next to your bedside at night. Carry it with you everywhere until you get really

CLARIFYING BOUNDARIES ACTIVITY

Directions: In the chart below, decide whether each issue is something you should discuss with your coparent or whether it's not your business. Place a checkmark in the appropriate column. (NOTE: When in doubt, assume it's NOT your business.)

Issue	Coparent Business	Not My Business
You are not sure how your coparent is using the child support money you send.		
You are not sure who is babysitting your child when your coparent goes out.		
Your coparent takes your child boating without life jackets.		
Your coparent changed your child's pediatrician without consulting you.		
Your coparent just got a new job in another city.		
Your coparent has a new dating partner spend the night when the child is with you.		
Your coparent bought an expensive new car.		

Task #5

BE DEDICATED TO THE FUTURE.

Coparenting is forever. The health of your coparent relationship will influence your child throughout their lifetime. Remember, one day you and your coparent may share a wedding or grandchildren together. When you are committed to making this relationship work over the long term, you have the best chance of creating a positive environment for your child's emotional well-being and shielding them from harm.

Encourage shared activities.

Form a picture in your mind of the following scene: Your child is performing on stage, and you and your coparent are sitting as far as you can get from one another in the audience. Watch your child scan the audience trying to find both of you and make eye contact. See how hard they have to work to seek you out?