

This course has one purpose: to help parents effectively care for their children and themselves while co-parenting with someone from a previous relationship.

Single-parent families are part of our culture. You don't have to look far for it: movies, talk shows, books, and the Internet are overflowing with information about the causes and impact of raising children in a single-parent family. Most people hold preconceived ideas about what it means and how it affects their lives and the lives of their children. One goal of this book is to provide practical information and strategies for parents. Another aim is to debunk some limiting, stereotypical, and outdated beliefs about single-parent families and raising healthy children.

Most people know there will be changes in their lives. Few, however, recognize just how significant and unsettling these changes may be. The good news is that not all changes are bad, even if changes of any kind take some getting used to. The decision to end the relationship starts a chain of events that occur over time.

The choices you make during that time greatly affect how well your children adjust and whether they develop any significant or lasting difficulties. Taking the time to read and think about the ideas presented here should be helpful. Learning about the emotional, psychological, physical, and legal aspects of living in two households will help you and your children deal with the inevitable changes associated with the new normal your family will have.

The number of single-parent families in America continues to increase, as it has for the last 25 years. Most experts agree that roughly one out of every two marriages end in divorce and overall, it's estimated that one million children per year experience the impact of divorce. More important than these statistics, most experts agree that continued conflict between parents is the most harmful aspect of parents separating and the most detrimental to children.

Effective co-parenting (and that term embodies a variety of concepts and behaviors) is critical. It can be the most powerful antidote to the stress on children. Depending on their age, it is not uncommon for children to feel rejected, abandoned, confused, and hurt. Parents may feel overwhelmed by their own stress and emotions. However, it is crucial for parents to recognize their children's age-appropriate needs and take the steps necessary to reassure children that their parental roles will continue.

Positive Co-Parenting can:

- Help your child feel safe and secure.
- Ensures your child will meet developmental milestones because they can focus on themselves.
- Teach them how to better regulate their emotions by your example.
- Aid in their development of healthy relationships in the future

- Learn how to effectively manage conflict and how to overcome it
The degree of stress that children experience during their parent's break-up usually increases with any additional turmoil in the family, which can easily result from parents' own distress. Problems begin to fade as parents regain their own emotional stability and can provide more nurturance and support. For this reason, parents must remember to be parents first and foremost with respect to their children before, during, and after the termination of marriage. Generally speaking, problem behavior in children can range from nonexistent to prolonged difficulty years after the divorce is final. There is no such thing as a typical breakup, however, and you must find out what works and is effective for your individual family.

Most research and experience tell us that children successfully adjust if parents create specific necessary conditions. For example, open, age-appropriate communications, clear boundaries and limits, and stable routines all help children develop the internal controls necessary for healthy adjustment. Problems appear in families who are chronically stressed with instability and continued open conflict. Current life circumstances can play a critical role in children's long-term problems.

Resources you can turn to for help, please see below:

- <https://www.coloradodivorcemediation.com/family/support/>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/divorce/colorado>
- <https://www.ourchildinfo.com/how-it-works-101>

Reference Books for Parents

Surviving the Breakup **by Wallerstein, Judith S. & Kelly, Joan Berlin**

The Divorced Parent: Success Strategies for Raising Your Children After Separation, **by Marston, Stephanie**

Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Shared Custody Work **by Ricci, Isolina**

Challenges Faced by Parents and Adolescents

Parents and adolescents face unique and often intensely difficult challenges during their parent's breakup that differ significantly from those experienced by younger children. Adolescence is already a developmental period characterized by identity formation, increasing independence, peer focus, emotional intensity, and often conflict with parents—even in stable, intact families. When you layer the family transition onto this already turbulent developmental stage, the challenges multiply for both the adolescent and the parents trying to support them. Adolescents are old enough to understand the complexity and implications of the situation in ways younger children cannot, which can lead to more sophisticated questions, deeper anger, and more nuanced emotional responses. They're also more likely to have witnessed or been aware of parental conflict leading up to the

separation, which can create complicated feelings of relief, guilt, loyalty conflicts, and even responsibility for trying to hold the family together.

For parents, dealing with an adolescent during this time presents a particularly difficult balancing act. You're managing your own emotional turmoil while trying to parent a young person who may be hostile, withdrawn, acting out, or demanding answers to questions you're not prepared to address. Parents must navigate these responses while maintaining appropriate boundaries, enforcing necessary rules despite increased resistance, and recognizing which behaviors are typical adolescent development versus genuine crisis responses to family disruption. The challenge is compounded by the fact that adolescents need both increased independence and continued structure and support—finding that balance when your own life feels chaotic is extraordinarily difficult.

Specific Challenges Faced by Parents of Adolescents Include:

Managing Increased Anger and Hostility

- Adolescents may express intense anger toward one or both parents, blaming you for destroying the family
- They may become verbally aggressive, disrespectful, or openly defiant in ways they weren't previously
- Parents must distinguish between appropriate consequences for disrespectful behavior and understanding that some anger is a legitimate response to genuine loss
- The challenge is maintaining authority and boundaries while also validating their right to be upset
- Adolescents may say cruel or hurtful things designed to wound, and parents must not respond in kind or take these attacks personally
- You may face rejection or punishment from your adolescent, including refusal to visit, talk, or engage with you

Navigating Side-Taking and Loyalty Issues

- Adolescents are more likely than younger children to aggressively choose sides, sometimes completely rejecting one parent
- They may have witnessed behavior that makes them legitimately angry at one parent (infidelity, financial irresponsibility, addiction)
- Parents face the challenge of not encouraging this side-taking while also validating adolescents' perceptions and feelings
- The rejected parent must continue showing up and maintaining boundaries even in the face of hostility or rejection
- Each parent must resist the temptation to accept or encourage the adolescent's alliance against the other parent
- Adolescents may use parents' guilt or desire for their approval to manipulate situations or avoid consequences

Dealing with Acting-Out Behaviors

- Adolescents may respond to family stress through increased risk-taking: substance use, sexual activity, reckless driving, truancy, or associating with concerning peer groups
- Parents must determine whether behaviors are direct responses to divorce stress or typical adolescent experimentation
- The challenge is maintaining appropriate supervision and consequences when you're emotionally depleted and managing your own crisis
- You may face the temptation to be overly permissive out of guilt or to be the "favored" parent
- Conversely, you might become overly controlling in an attempt to manage something when so much feels out of control
- Co-parenting around discipline becomes even more critical and often more difficult with adolescents who may play parents against each other

Boundary Violations and Parentification

- Adolescents may seem mature enough to handle adult information, leading parents to inappropriately confide in them
- They may be drawn into messenger roles, asked to carry information or make decisions that should be handled by parents
- Older adolescents, especially the eldest, may take on caretaking roles for younger siblings or even for parents
- Parents may unconsciously rely on adolescents for emotional support, companionship, or household management beyond appropriate levels
- The challenge is recognizing where normal increased responsibility crosses into unhealthy parentification
- Adolescents may volunteer for these roles as a way of maintaining control or feeling needed, making it harder to recognize the problem

Managing Logistics Across Two Households

- Adolescents have complex schedules involving school, jobs, extracurriculars, social activities, and more
- They may resist or refuse custody schedules that interfere with their activities or social lives
- Parents must balance the adolescent's legitimate need for autonomy and social connection with the importance of maintaining relationships with both parents
- Disagreements arise about flexibility: should teenagers choose which parent to stay with based on convenience?
- The challenge is being flexible enough to respect growing independence while not allowing adolescents to avoid one parent entirely
- Transportation, communication about schedules, and financial responsibilities for activities all become more complex

Questions About Adult Relationships and Sexuality

- Adolescents may ask direct questions about why the relationship ended, including about infidelity or sexual issues
- They're old enough to understand adult relationship dynamics but still deserve protection from inappropriate details
- Parents must navigate honesty without oversharing or damaging the adolescent's relationship with the other parent

- Adolescents may become judgmental about parents' dating or new relationships
- They may be dealing with their own emerging sexuality and relationships while processing their parents' relationship failure
- The challenge is maintaining appropriate boundaries while being honest enough that adolescents don't feel lied to or dismissed

Academic and Future Planning Concerns

- Adolescents may struggle academically due to emotional distress, but parents may have reduced capacity to provide support
- Questions arise about college finances, who will attend college events, how decisions will be made
- Parents must coordinate around college visits, applications, and financial planning despite their own conflict
- The challenge is keeping adolescents' futures and opportunities a priority
- Adolescents may worry about how their parent's breakup will affect their own future, finances, and opportunities

Financial Stress and Changes in Lifestyle

- Adolescents are acutely aware of financial changes and may experience significant lifestyle shifts
- They may need to give up activities, change schools, move to different neighborhoods, or lose material comforts
- Parents face challenges explaining financial limitations without blaming the other parent or creating additional anxiety
- Adolescents may express anger about financial changes or make unfavorable comparisons between households
- The challenge is maintaining appropriate boundaries around adult financial information while acknowledging real changes

Specific Challenges Faced by Adolescents Include:

Identity Formation During Family Disruption

- Adolescence is a critical period for identity development, and family disruption can complicate this process
- Adolescents may question their own beliefs about relationships, commitment, marriage, and family
- They may struggle with questions like "If my parents' relationship failed, can any relationship work?" or "What does this mean about who I am?"
- The challenge is forming a coherent identity when their foundational family structure is changing
- They may reject family identity markers or traditions as they separate from what the family "was"
- Adolescents must integrate the reality of their parent's breakup into their evolving sense of self

Loss of Family Stability and Future

- Adolescents grieve not just the current family structure but the future they envisioned: intact family at graduations, weddings, grandchildren
- They may experience profound loss of security and predictability about what their life will look like
- Unlike younger children, they fully understand the permanence and implications of divorce
- They may feel robbed of a “normal” family experience during their final years at home
- The challenge is processing this grief while still engaging in normal adolescent development
- They may feel cheated out of the stability they need during an already turbulent life stage

Increased Awareness of Parental Flaws

- Adolescents are old enough to recognize their parents’ mistakes, failures, and human limitations
- They may lose respect for or become disillusioned with one or both parents
- Witnessing parental conflict, poor decision-making, or destructive behavior can be particularly damaging at this age
- They may struggle with the realization that their parents are imperfect humans who made choices that hurt the family
- The challenge is integrating this new understanding while maintaining necessary relationships
- They may become cynical about relationships, commitment, or authority figures in general

Pressure to Choose Sides or Mediate

- Adolescents may feel pressured to choose which parent they support or believe
- They’re old enough that parents may try to recruit them as allies or convince them of their version of events
- Friends and extended family may ask questions or expect them to take positions
- They may feel responsible for mediating between parents or solving family problems
- The challenge is navigating complex family dynamics without taking on inappropriate responsibility
- They may struggle with loyalty conflicts that create internal emotional turmoil

Balancing Independence Needs with Family Disruption

- Adolescents are naturally moving toward independence and separation from family
- They may disengage from family conflict and focus on peers
- Conversely, they may feel unable to pursue normal independence because of family instability
- Some adolescents delay their own development to try to hold the family together or care for parents or siblings
- The challenge is achieving developmentally appropriate autonomy during family crisis
- They may feel guilty about their normal developmental drive toward independence when the family is struggling

Social Stigma and Peer Relationships

- Adolescents are acutely concerned with peer perceptions and fitting in
- They may feel embarrassed about their family situation or different from peers with intact families

- Friends may ask uncomfortable questions or make insensitive comments
- They may struggle with explaining their family situation or decide whether to share this information
- The challenge is managing social dynamics while processing private family pain
- They may withdraw from social connections or conversely over-invest in peer relationships to escape family stress

Practical Challenges of Managing Two Households

- Adolescents must navigate living in two homes with potentially different rules, expectations, and resources
- They face logistical challenges around belongings, homework, activities, jobs, and social plans
- Differences between households in terms of structure, resources, or parenting style become more apparent and frustrating
- They may feel they have no stable “home base” or place that’s truly theirs
- The challenge is maintaining organization, meeting responsibilities, and managing belongings across locations
- They may resist transitions between homes, preferring to stay where their friends, activities, or comfort are

Concerns About Younger Siblings

- Older adolescents often worry about how the new family dynamic is affecting younger siblings
- They may take on protective or caretaking roles beyond what’s appropriate
- They might feel torn between their own needs and responsibility to younger siblings
- The challenge is balancing concern for siblings with their own developmental needs
- They may become angry at parents for the impact on younger children
- They might feel they need to compensate for parental limitations or absence

Processing Complex Emotions Without Adequate Support

- Adolescents experience the full range of grief, anger, fear, relief, guilt, and confusion that adults experience
- They may lack the emotional regulation skills or support systems to process these feelings healthily
- Parents may be too overwhelmed to provide adequate emotional support
- Adolescents may resist therapy or support, viewing it as stigmatizing or unnecessary
- The challenge is managing intense emotions while maintaining daily functioning
- They may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms if healthier outlets aren’t available or encouraged

Strategies for parents to support adolescents through these challenges include maintaining consistent boundaries and expectations despite increased resistance, validating their emotions while not tolerating disrespect or destructive behavior, resisting the urge to treat them as friends or confidants, encouraging appropriate therapy or support groups, staying involved in their lives even when they push you away, coordinating with your co-parent around major decisions and discipline when possible, modeling healthy coping and emotional regulation, and remembering that some difficult behavior is normal adolescent development.

For adolescents, the most helpful supports include having at least one parent who maintains stability and appropriate boundaries, access to therapy or counseling if they're open to it, connection with trusted adults outside the family (teachers, coaches, counselors, extended family), permission to maintain normal adolescent activities and friendships without guilt, honest age-appropriate information without adult details or burdens, reassurance that the divorce isn't their fault or responsibility, and modeling from parents that difficult situations can be navigated with integrity and resilience.

The relationship between parents and adolescents during this time is often strained and painful for both parties. Parents may feel rejected, disrespected, or unable to reach their teenager at a time when they desperately want to provide comfort and stability. Adolescents may feel angry, abandoned, or burdened by family chaos during a developmental period when they need to be focusing on their own growth and future. The key is recognizing that this is a challenging period that will eventually pass, that the relationship can survive and even strengthen if parents maintain appropriate boundaries and consistent love, and that the skills both parents and adolescents develop during this difficult time, resilience, emotional regulation, communication, problem-solving, will serve them well long after the immediate crisis has resolved. Adolescents who successfully navigate this challenge often emerge with greater empathy, maturity, and life skills, particularly when their parents handle the situation with integrity, maintain appropriate boundaries, and continue showing up with love even in the face of rejection or hostility.

Skill Building and Coping Strategies

Skill building and coping strategies are essential tools that help both parents and children navigate the emotional, practical, and relational challenges of separation and divorce. These aren't abstract concepts, they are concrete, learnable abilities that can make the difference between a family that struggles indefinitely and one that adapts and ultimately thrives despite significant disruption. When parents actively teach and model healthy coping strategies, they're not just helping their children get through the immediate crisis of divorce; they're equipping them with life skills that will serve them in every future challenge they face. The skills children learn during this difficult period, emotional regulation, communication, problem-solving, resilience, become part of their permanent toolkit for managing stress and adversity throughout their lives.

For parents, developing your own coping strategies is not selfish or secondary to your children's needs, it's foundational to being able to parent effectively during this transition. You cannot pour from an empty cup. Parents who are overwhelmed, emotionally dysregulated, or lacking healthy coping mechanisms will struggle to provide the stable, supportive presence their children desperately need. This means you must prioritize learning and practicing skills that help you manage your own stress, process difficult emotions, communicate effectively even in conflict, and maintain your physical and mental health. When your children see you using healthy coping strategies rather than falling apart or lashing out, they learn by example that difficult situations can be managed constructively.

Key Skill-Building and Coping Strategies for Parents Include:

Emotional Regulation Skills

- Learn to identify and name your emotions accurately rather than reacting automatically
- Practice pausing before responding to triggering situations or communications from your co-parent
- Use techniques like deep breathing, counting to ten, or taking a brief walk when you feel overwhelmed
- Develop awareness of your emotional triggers and plan strategies for managing them
- Distinguish between feelings and actions: you can feel angry without acting on that anger destructively
- Seek therapy or counseling to process complex emotions in appropriate settings rather than with your children

Stress Management Techniques

- Establish regular exercise routines, even if just walking for 20 minutes daily
- Practice mindfulness, meditation, or other relaxation techniques
- Maintain adequate sleep, nutrition, and basic self-care even when you don't feel like it
- Identify and engage in activities that help you decompress and recharge
- Set boundaries around work, social obligations, and demands on your time to prevent burnout
- Build and maintain a support network of friends, family, support groups, or professionals

Communication Skills

- Practice “I” statements that express your feelings without blaming: “I feel frustrated when...” rather than “You always...”
- Learn active listening techniques: reflecting back what you hear, asking clarifying questions, suspending judgment
- Develop the ability to have difficult conversations while staying calm and focused on solutions
- Master the skill of choosing battles, recognizing what's worth addressing and what's better to let go
- Use written communication (email, text) strategically for emotionally charged topics, allowing time to craft thoughtful responses
- Learn to set and maintain boundaries clearly and respectfully

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

- Break overwhelming problems into smaller, manageable steps
- Gather information before making major decisions rather than acting impulsively
- Consider multiple options and potential consequences before choosing a course of action
- Consult with appropriate professionals (lawyers, therapists, financial advisors) when needed
- Distinguish between problems you can control and those you cannot, focusing energy appropriately
- Practice flexibility and creativity when initial solutions don't work

Building Resilience

- Reframe the breakup as a challenge to overcome rather than a permanent catastrophe

- Identify and acknowledge your own strengths and past successes in handling difficulty
- Maintain perspective by considering what you've learned and how you've grown through adversity
- Set realistic expectations rather than demanding perfection from yourself or others
- Practice self-compassion when you make mistakes or fall short of your ideals
- Focus on what you can control and let go of what you cannot

Key Skill-Building and Coping Strategies for Children Include:

Emotional Awareness and Expression

- Help children identify and name their emotions: "It sounds like you're feeling disappointed"
- Provide age-appropriate vocabulary for complex feelings: frustrated, overwhelmed, confused, conflicted
- Validate all emotions while setting limits on behaviors: "It's okay to feel angry, but it's not okay to hit"
- Teach children that emotions are temporary and manageable, not permanent or overwhelming
- Create opportunities for emotional expression through talking, drawing, play, writing, or physical activity
- Model healthy emotional expression yourself, showing children it's normal to have feelings and manage them constructively

Healthy Outlets for Difficult Emotions

- Encourage physical activity as a way to process stress and release tension
- Provide creative outlets like art, music, dance, or writing for emotional expression
- Teach specific calming techniques: deep breathing, counting, visualization, progressive muscle relaxation
- Help children identify activities that help them feel better when upset: reading, being in nature, playing with pets, listening to music
- Ensure children have private space and time to process emotions without constant adult intervention
- Recognize that different children need different outlets—what works for one may not work for another

Communication and Self-Advocacy

- Teach children to express their needs and feelings clearly and respectfully
- Practice having difficult conversations in safe, low-stakes situations
- Help children learn to ask for what they need from adults, teachers, and peers
- Model and teach the difference between aggressive, passive, and assertive communication
- Encourage children to speak up when they're uncomfortable, confused, or need help
- Validate their right to have and express their own opinions and preferences

Problem-Solving Skills

- Walk children through the problem-solving process: identify the problem, brainstorm solutions, evaluate options, choose and implement, reflect on results

- Ask guiding questions rather than immediately solving problems for them: “What do you think you could try?”
- Help children break big problems into smaller, manageable pieces
- Encourage them to learn from mistakes rather than viewing failures as permanent or defining
- Teach children to distinguish between problems they can solve and those requiring adult help
- Celebrate successful problem-solving to build confidence and competence

Building and Maintaining Supportive Relationships

- Encourage children to maintain friendships and social connections during this transition
- Help them identify trusted adults they can talk to: teachers, counselors, coaches, relatives, friends’ parents
- Teach children how to ask for help and support when they need it
- Model healthy relationship skills: trust, communication, boundaries, reciprocity
- Facilitate opportunities for positive peer interactions and activities
- Be aware if children are isolating and gently encourage connection

Developing Routine and Structure

- Help children create predictable daily routines that provide stability
- Teach time management and organizational skills appropriate for their age
- Encourage healthy habits around sleep, nutrition, homework, and self-care
- Create rituals and traditions that provide comfort and continuity
- Involve children in planning their schedules when age-appropriate, giving them some control
- Maintain consistency even when it’s difficult or inconvenient

Resilience and Growth Mindset

- Teach children that challenges can be opportunities for learning and growth
- Help them identify their own strengths and past successes in handling difficulties
- Reframe setbacks as temporary and specific rather than permanent and pervasive
- Encourage perseverance and effort, praising the process rather than just outcomes
- Share age-appropriate stories of people who overcame adversity
- Help children see that their family situation doesn’t define their worth or determine their future

Cognitive Reframing

- Help children challenge negative or catastrophic thinking: “Is that really true? What’s another way to think about this?”
 - Teach them to distinguish between facts and interpretations or assumptions
 - Encourage balanced thinking that acknowledges both difficulties and positives
 - Model realistic optimism—acknowledging problems while maintaining hope
 - Help children recognize and challenge self-blame related to the new family dynamic
- One often overlooked aspect of skill-building is teaching children practical life skills that may have been disrupted or neglected during the crisis. Depending on their age, this might include basic cooking, laundry, managing their belongings across two households, keeping

track of homework and activities, or managing their emotions when transitioning between homes. These practical competencies build self-efficacy and help children feel more in control during a time when much feels uncertain.

It's also important to recognize that skill-building isn't a one-time event but an ongoing process. Children will need different strategies at different developmental stages, and what works during the immediate crisis may need to evolve as the family settles into new patterns. Regularly check in with your children about what's helping them cope and what isn't. Be willing to try new approaches when existing strategies stop working. And perhaps most importantly, model lifelong learning by continuing to develop your own coping skills and being open about your own growth process in age-appropriate ways.

Remember that seeking professional help, therapy for yourself or your children, parenting classes, divorce support groups, or skill-building workshops, is not a sign of weakness but rather a healthy coping strategy in itself. These resources provide structured opportunities to learn and practice essential skills with expert guidance and peer support. When parents invest in developing both their own coping strategies and their children's emotional and practical skills, they create a foundation for not just surviving divorce but ultimately building healthier, more resilient lives on the other side of this transition.

Managing Your Own Emotional Response

Dealing with a difficult coparent can trigger your own stress responses and negative emotions. Develop strategies to manage these reactions before they impact your parenting. This might include taking a cooling-off period before responding to inflammatory messages, practicing deep breathing techniques, or having a support system you can call when feeling overwhelmed.

Remember that you cannot control your coparent's behavior, but you can control your response to it. Focus your energy on what you can influence: your own parenting, your children's experience in your home, and your emotional regulation. Consider working with a therapist who specializes in high-conflict divorce situations to develop coping strategies specific to your situation.

Healthy Ways to Deal with the Stress of Co-parenting

1. Distractions

After it's been decided that you each will go your own way, it's easy to start obsessing about past choices or worrying about the future. Find engaging distractions that allow you to focus your attention elsewhere such as funny movies, time with friends or doing activities with your children or pets. Those that are creative should find outlets such as journaling, gardening or painting. These are highly recommended because expressing yourself is fun and cathartic.

2.Active

The healthiest way to refocus your energy during this stressful time is through physical activity. According to many research articles, exercise can calm you down by reducing levels of the body's stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol. Examples such as joining a gym, biking, tennis, swimming, and other aerobic activities will help you release pent-up frustration. Less strenuous activities such as walking or hiking can clear your head and revitalize your spirit. Playing a team sport like softball, soccer or volleyball is a option if you are thinking of making new friends and interact with other people having fun.

3.Support

When the feelings co-parenting or parenting alone become overwhelming, many people find comfort in processing their emotions with family or friends. Another alternative is seeking therapy from a professional in a judgment free zone with the benefit of confidentiality. A support group can also be very helpful. In this environment, you will connect with others going through similar situations so you won't feel so alone. It's important for you to take responsibility for your own emotional well-being and make sure that you nurture yourself emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

4.Self-Care

Self-care, such as getting a full night's sleep, eating a healthy, well-balanced diet, getting a massage or mani-pedi are recommended. Avoid bingeing on comfort foods that often feel in the moment, but can leave you feeling worse later. Be cautious around drugs and alcohol as these substances often perpetuate negative and remorseful feelings.

4.Permission to Grieve

Because divorce and/or separation is a loss of your partner and the life you had together, feelings of anger, resentment and sadness are common responses. For those parenting alone, feelings of isolation and abandonment can be overwhelming. Be prepared to confront a wide range of unexpected emotions and give yourself time and space to grieve what is changing. In time you will find a new normal and the feelings of grief will lessen.

5.Prioritize

On especially tough days, prioritize the most important tasks you can handle and reschedule others for another time. It is okay to call professional services to deliver groceries, help clean your house or spend time with kids. Learning to say "no" to things you don't really want to do in order to spend time doing the things you do want to do is perfectly acceptable. Plan activities that bring you pleasure and participate in them regularly.

Maintain a close circle of friends and socialize often as to not to isolate yourself from others. Get out and enjoy life even if it means forcing yourself to.

6.Explore

This unexpected change in your life can bring a positive change if you look at it from a place of hope. Take stock of your interests and take up an old hobby or try out a new one. Join a book club, enroll in a cooking class or volunteer in your community. Immersing yourself in an activity you enjoy or a cause you are passionate about focuses your attention on the present. Following your interests can also be a great way to meet like-minded people and to cultivate new relationships. You'll find that once you're out engaging in fun activities, you'll feel less stressed.

7.Decision-making

Being on your own while co-parenting can be a very confusing time. Using emotions to make decisions on significant choices that will determine the course of your life is not recommended. Whether you take these choices to a trusted family member or friend, therapist or life coach, make sure to weigh out all options and consequences before making a final decision. When making decisions, use logical thinking instead of emotional thinking to guide your decision making. Give yourself time and be patient with the decision-making process.

Real estate agents, tax experts, and an experienced attorneys can all be invaluable resources during this important period in your life.

8.Expectations

When you're in a co-parenting situation, you might feel as though you've lost control over everything. Remember, no one has any control over the feelings and actions of another person. Don't try to control any aspect of what your co-parent might feel or what actions they will take. Let go of what you feel the outcome should be and learn to accept whatever might happen.

If you are faced with an uncomfortable or painful situation, learn to let it go. Take some time to figure out what is best for you and then come back to it. Stay focused on what you have control over and let go of the rest.

Moving from Hope to Acceptance

There often comes a point in coparenting when you must shift from trying to control the relationship to accepting the reality of what it is. This transition can be one of the most challenging aspects of co-parenting because it requires grieving the cooperative parenting

relationship you hoped to have. You may have spent months or even years trying different communication strategies, attending mediation sessions, or making concessions in the hope that your coparent would eventually reciprocate with more reasonable behavior. Recognizing that these efforts have reached their limit and that your coparent's patterns are unlikely to change is not giving up, it's choosing to redirect your energy toward what you can actually control.

This acceptance doesn't mean you stop protecting your children's interests or that you tolerate truly harmful behavior. Rather, it means you stop expecting different outcomes from the same patterns and begin building strategies around the reality of who your coparent is today. When you release the emotional investment in changing your coparent, you free up mental and emotional resources that can be better used for your own wellbeing and your relationship with your children.

Case Study

Our first case study concerns Mark (51), a successful financial analyst, and his wife Kathy (48). When they had their first child, James (now 9), both agreed that Kathy would give up her part-time job as a bookkeeper. This arrangement worked out well and allowed the couple to raise James in a loving and comfortable environment.

Mark's job meant that financial matters were never a major issue and the couple were able to move into an area they had always wanted to live. Over time however, cracks began to appear in their relationship and ten years into their marriage, Mark admitted that he had been unfaithful.

Kathy's response was to file for divorce and this was soon granted. Although both found the situation particularly stressful, their ultimate fear concerned how James would be affected in the long-term. That is why they came to me.

James is now 11 and, as we have discussed, the crucial response required here was that both parents assert their parental roles such that James did not equate his parent's divorce with a separation that involved him. He needed to know that both parents intended to continue *being* parents. This may seem pretty obvious, but I find that parents need to be reminded to make this explicit to their children of this age.

There were, as always, complications. Mark had traditionally been the bread-winner in the family up until the divorce, and this left Kathy in a precarious position. Kathy had to decide whether to seek out independent employment, or have faith that Mark would remain committed to their agreement concerning child support.

This is a classic scenario that one encounters post-divorce, but it need not be a constant source of angst for either party. Ex-partners that respect one another are more than capable of reaching basic financial agreements concerning their children, and fortunately, Mark is an example of a father aware of his duties. This is not always true, and there are times when

single-parents find themselves fending for their children alone. This worst-case scenario presents a different set of difficulties, and we will deal with them later.

In this case study, the solution was linked to ironing out the precise and exact responsibilities of each parent, and this involved communication between both sides. So I knew to place the emphasis on reassurance and avoid placing blame on either party in order for the most important person in the process to be addressed: namely James.

In turn, I helped them to develop ways to get this message across to James in a language that was appropriate for his age, and to this particular end, they were successful. I suggested they speak in terms that were appropriate for an eleven-year-old. It was not necessary for them to share every detail of their marital struggles and subsequent divorce with James. It was, however, most important for them to share how the divorce was in no way his fault. They needed to reassure him that they will always love him and be part of his life. I also reminded them that James, like all kids, will have different feelings and understandings about the divorce as he gets older. It was not necessary for him to have an adult understanding when he was only eleven years old.

Through our counseling sessions, Kathy and Mark developed a positive parenting plan that allowed them to clearly delineate boundaries, responsibilities and duties. They decided to equally share tasks, and on this basis, allow each parent quality-time to spend with James. They agreed that the best solution was to set out what they expected from each other, and to make clear to one another than any problems that might arise would be openly discussed. They even made a contingency plan for (inevitable but normal) disagreements that would provide ways for them to make compromises. We also predicted areas of potential conflict and strategized about some possible outcomes. Such areas included, future dating and dealing with unexpected expenses, among others.

In opening up this space for effective communication, Kathy and Mark ironed out a monthly planner, but also made sure there was a degree of flexibility in their plan. These days they remain divorced, but James is well-looked after, and is growing into a healthy young teenager due to the foresight and level-headedness of his parents.