

ULTIMATE GUIDE

To Effective Co-parent Communication
After Separation Or Divorce





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For over 15 years, Stephanie has been committed to working exclusively with families in a non-adversarial setting, focusing on creating healthy, thriving two-home families.

Her passion is to help families secure positive outcomes by putting their children at the center.

So often when families are separating or divorcing they lack the resources and knowledge about the transition process.

Her goal with this e-learning community is to be a one-stop support hub both for separating & divorcing families as well as for divorce professionals.

She believes that by empowering families with positive & constructive resources, they will both be able to see their journey as a transition rather than as an end, and have the tools to become healthy co-parents raising resilient children.

Stephanie is committed to collaborating with divorce professionals as contributors to enhance the free resources in the community. It is her passion for thriving families that has motivated her to encourage divorce professionals to share our resources with the families they serve, to reinforce and to enhance their work with their clients.

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! Why Is Communication So Important?

Communication is the foundation of every relationship – if you have good, effective, healthy communication with set ground rules and boundaries, then you will be well-equipped to be separated co-parents.

One problem is that most co-parents weren't great communicators during their relationship, so once separated their communication tends to erode even further. This guide is designed to give you essential tips that will help you on your way to having better communication with your ex-spouse / your co-parent.

Plan for Exchange of Info About the Kids

It's important to set out mutually-agreed expectations about the communication that will happen post-separation. If one parent expects daily updates while the other parent expects no communication until exchange time, then conflict is inevitable – it's simply about differing views on too much vs. too little communication.

If you can set out the communication expectations, you can prevent conflict before it starts.

You may want to consider:

Who: Who will be kept updated on kids' on-goings? Parents only? Step-parents? Grandparents? Children? Generally, who will be part of the discussion thread?

What: What type of information will be shared? Level of detail? Here's some examples: If kids have appointments, are both parents' calendars considered or just the parent where the kids are staying? If kids have plans with friends / birthdays / commitments – what are the expectations around making plans during the other parents' time? What defines "injury" for the other parent to be notified – a cut, a bruise from a sibling, tummy-ache/headache, or not until a hospital visit?

When: How frequent will the communication be? Every day? Consistent time? Whenever anything occurs that needs to be communicated? Often separated parents will complain that the other parent didn't contact them soon enough about a particular issue, or that they contact them too often. Get consensus to prevent issues from arising.

How: What method of communication is agreed to by both parents? Text? Parenting app? Email? Phone? In-Person? Fax (what the heck is a fax anymore)? There's no default – there should be agreement between parents. I have some recommendations below.





Shared Calendaring

If there's an expectation between parents to keep each other apprised of the happenings of the kids – appointments, hot lunches, sports schedules, activities, school events, etc. – then a shared calendar is a must! As parents, receiving notices about kid stuff is constant. How else to keep track of things while under two or more roofs than to use a shared calendar.

There's tons of free calendars out there – if you use any type of electronic calendar (iCloud, Google Calendars, Microsoft Office, and many more), you should be able to add a calendar – call it “kids calendar” and share it between you and your co-parent. Depending on your kids' ages, you may even want to share it with the kids on their devices. If there are other adults involved in the kids' lives – established new partners, extended family, nanny, etc. – you may want to share it with them too.

I consider shared calendars a way to communicate without the need for a conversation. Each calendar holder will get a notification on their devices (if notifications set to “on”) and no one can claim that they “didn't know” or “weren't told” about an event relating to the kids. Unless otherwise agreed upon or the event is non-negotiable, be cautious about simply inserting events into the shared calendar during your co-parent's time, as that could certainly create conflict unnecessarily.

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Create Expectations on Responses to Messages

"FYI Only" or "Response Required"

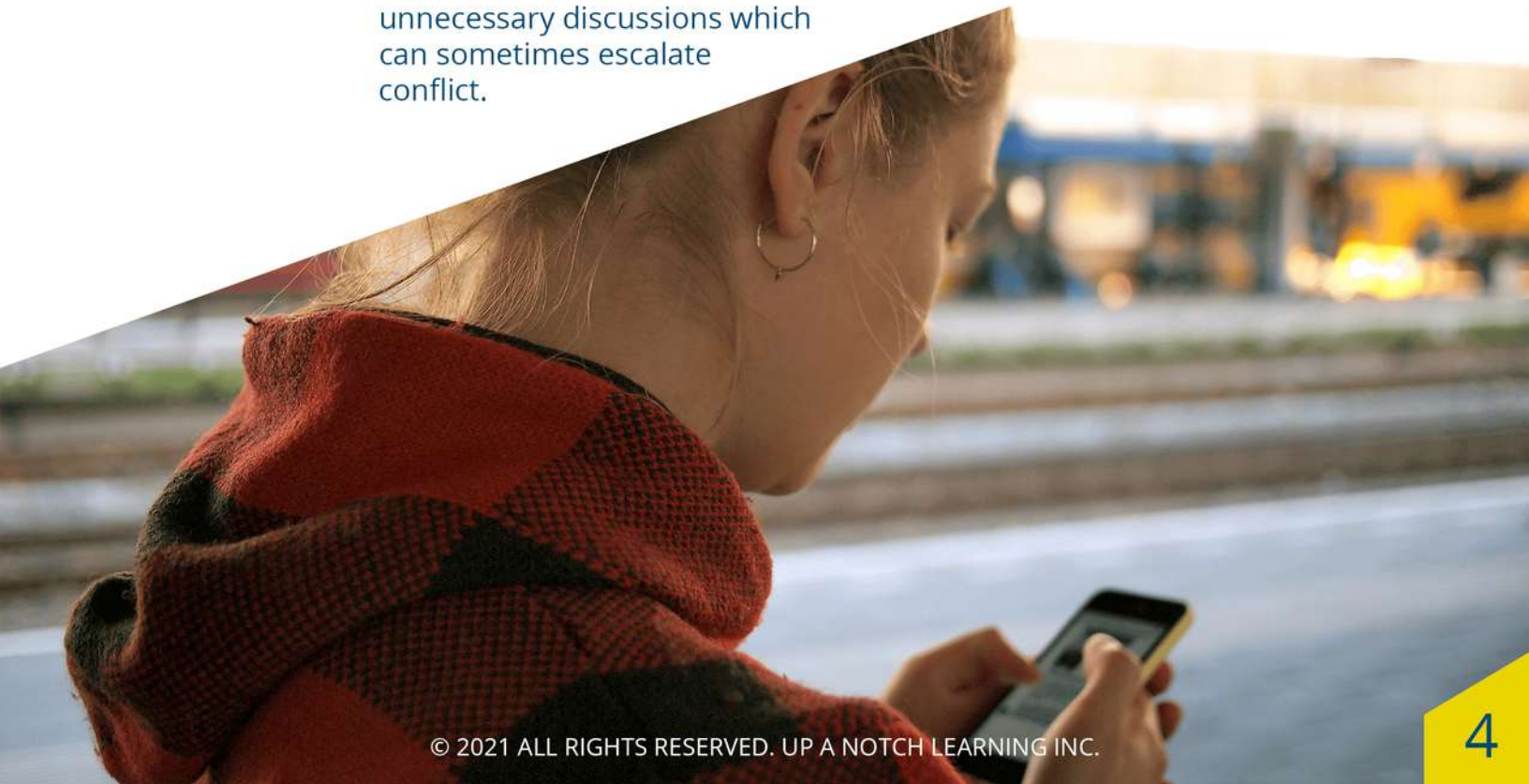
You and the other parent may not want to communicate often, but as you know, there will be information you need to periodically let your co-parent know about. Sometimes you need to tell the other parent something, but you don't necessarily want to engage in a dialogue.

One way to exchange information in written form without creating a conversation can be to add the subject to the start of the message – this can be in the subject line of an email or the first few words of a text.

By adding "FYI Only" to the subject line, you are letting your co-parent know you're not looking for a response (except maybe an acknowledgment of receipt – something like "ok" or "sounds good"). You're not looking for their opinion or to discuss the topic, but you need to provide them with kid-related information.

Adding "Response Required" to the subject line tells the other parent... guess what?... you're looking for a response.

Adding these subject lines adds clarity to your communication and avoids unnecessary discussions which can sometimes escalate conflict.



Commit To A Response Timeline

Nothing can be more irritating than asking for a response, but not getting it in a timely fashion. Some parents keep their devices on them at all times, while others go for an entire day only checking their device once or twice. It can be helpful to set mutual expectations regarding your commitment to replying to communication for the other parent.

Consider the subject matter - does it make a difference to your response timeline commitment? You may want to agree to a shorter timeframe if it's about the kids rather than if it's about other aspects of your separation or divorce. Or, if we think about the method of communication, is it better to have text / phone for immediate response, but email for issues which take more consideration before responding? This may mean that you would commit to responding to text messages / voicemails within a few hours but emails within a few days, for instance.

You can always agree to break the pre-arranged "rules" if you both agree. So if you need more time than what you committed to for a response, your only commitment would be to reply to let the other parent know that you need more time. Separated parents always seem to get frustrated when they get the sense they're being ignored.





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Check Out A Co-Parenting App

My #1 ultimate tip would be to encourage you and your co-parent to get set up on a co-parenting app. Most apps are accessible from any mobile device (phones or tablets) as well as by logging in on the computer.

There are a variety of apps out there with different price ranges and features – some are subscription-based (some have a variety of subscription levels) whereas others are free. Some you can use on your own to organize life, and some require both parents to sign up. Some have a free trial period, while others have a money-back guarantee.

These apps are a way to organize a huge amount of information into what I'd call "**filing cabinets**". Features vary by the app, but some examples are: WeParent, Our Family Wizard, 2Houses, AppClose and Cozi.

Most of the apps have features such as a shared calendar, scheduling organization (change requests, etc), information bank, shared to-do lists, journal, file storage, messaging (most have parent-parent and parent-child secure messaging or even family group messaging in some cases), expense tracking, notification settings, photo albums, shared contacts relating to kids, access provided to your divorce professional (lawyer/mediator/etc), and a "tone meter" (the item that can cause you to pause before pressing send to check yourself!).

There are many reviews of co-parenting apps, and any online search will bring up tons of options to choose from - with all of the features spelled out, as well as cost-comparisons.