

Positive Co-Parenting Do's and Don'ts

This information is for co-parents who are able to collaborate with one another, or parallel parent, as a way to safely manage and limit the opportunities for co-parental conflict.

Note: Emotional and physical safety are the first priority for families who have experienced intimate partner violence or abuse. Specialized parenting plans can be tailored to the family's needs and safety concerns. Parents can be reassured that practicing responsive, positive parenting will continue to support children's growth and well-being as they work towards healthier overall relationships in their lives. For information on supports and resources available to co-parents and families dealing with family violence, visit:

www.manitoba.ca/msw/fvpp/resources.html or www.manitoba.ca/familylaw/safety/safety-resources.html

DO's:

- Support and facilitate your child's relationship with their other parent and the extended family.
- Understand that both parents are responsible.
- Handle exchanges safely and with care. Where there are concerns around safe contact and exchanges, review the information and options available at: www.manitoba.ca/familylaw/safety/safe-contact-and-exchanges.html

HOW:

- Follow through on agreed upon parenting and family access arrangements.
- Speak positively about one another in front of the children or remain neutral. This will make things easier for the children.
- Have, or work on having, a safe communication plan that provides for the timely exchange of information regarding a child's health, social functioning, and developmental, learning, and emotional needs. Timely exchange of information is especially important and necessary for co-parents with younger children or children with special needs. Your co-parent will appreciate the timely exchange of information no matter the age of your child(ren).
- Coordinate basic rules and expectations about bedtimes, hygiene, diet, curfews, homework, chores, screen time and discipline wherever possible.
- Model respect for each other's parenting efforts and styles, providing space for differences. Back each other up wherever possible. If parenting differences are so significant, agree to disagree and let it go.
- Model kindness, tolerance and compromise. If these qualities are hard to put into practise initially or longer term, remain civil and courteous when speaking about the other parent, extended family members and new partners in front of the children or when in contact with one another. Good manners are an important part of your co-parenting DNA. Getting used to new boundaries, that is, moving from an intimate, attachment-style relationship to a safe and workable business-like relationship is a challenge!
- Have a plan as to how you will attend a child's activities that will ensure a calm and positive experience for your child and the family members that are important to them.
- Work together to make transitions easy on your child(ren).

- Ensure children have what they need as they go between homes – keep a list of shared items for reference.
- Help younger children stay connected with their other parent via FaceTime/video chats, especially as they are getting used to having two homes.. Be considerate when confirming the best time to contact a child in the other parent’s home. Keep the video chats brief.
- Be on time for pick and drop offs, wherever possible.
- Be flexible, wherever possible, and practical – changing days/times and shifting weekends on occasion, or as needed, are a part of meeting the challenges of everyday life as a two home family.
- Look for, and stay focused on, the positives, even if a particular plan needs to change (i.e., how a child might celebrate a special occasion with a particular parent and extended family; where transitions might occur).
- Look for opportunities to express appreciation to one another and extended family members for their help with the child(ren) (i.e., transportation to appointments/special events, speaking with a teacher as planned/agreed to).
- When differences arise, try to understand your co-parent’s point of view or why they may feel the way they do about an issue. This requires active listening. Understanding one another often leads to resolution.
- Take responsibility for your behaviour. Learn from misunderstandings.

For Parents in Higher Conflict Situations:

- Take the high road. Do what’s best or right for the child(ren), whether or not your co-parent does the same.
- Keep the focus of parent-to-parent communication and decision-making on your children’s needs.
- Have an effective decision-making and dispute resolution process in place.
- Find healthy self-care ways to manage your ‘emotional commotion.’

DON'TS

- Do not refuse to have any contact or communication with your co-parent regarding the needs of a child because of your own feelings of hurt, frustration or anger. Your child’s feelings matter and your actions should always be in their best interests. Refusing contact or communication because of your own feelings of intense upset is not recognizing your child’s best interests. If you feel you are unable to manage these feelings and want to refuse contact or communication, there is help to discuss these feelings. Refusal of contact should never be used as a way of trying to control your partner. For a list of community resources, go to: <https://mb.211.ca/>
- Do not refuse to share information about a child’s ongoing health, developmental, learning needs, and activities as if your child has only one involved parent.
- Do not refuse to consent to counselling, therapy, other supports or family counselling when suggested by your co-parent to help a child, and there are no safety concerns for the child(ren) or parents.
- Do not insist on contacting a child at a less convenient time in the other parent’s home (in the midst of making dinner) unless unavoidable. A once a day text or phone call should be enough if agreed upon and workable, unless it’s an emergency.

- Do not insist that when a child is in your care, “It’s your time” – shutting out/down communication for a child with their other parent unless this is an agreed upon practice between homes.
- Do not insist on counting time, i.e., the hours and minutes a child is in your care. Children don’t keep score.
- Do not expect to have access to certain kinds of information (i.e., who was in your co-parent’s home during their parenting time), unless certain individuals are prohibited by child protection directives/court order/parental agreement.
- Do not refuse to pass along gifts, cards or letters to a child from their other parent or extended family members.
- Do not refuse to accept your co-parent’s sharing of information regarding a child because it makes you feel offended in some way.
- Do not deal with uncomfortable co-parenting communications by avoiding the situation.
- Do not discuss child support issues in front of the children, regardless of a child’s age.
- Do not ask your child to pass messages to the other parent, even if they are the eldest, or an adult.
- Do not introduce a new partner or discuss a possible plan to move with the children without first informing the other parent. Children may feel they have to keep the information a secret or if not, be on the receiving end of a parent’s unguarded initial reaction and upset. Change is hard.