



# The CoParenting TOOLKIT

The Essential Supplement for  
*Mom's House, Dad's House*

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author of  
*Mom's House, Dad's House*  
*Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids*



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San Ramon, California

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**AUTHOR’S NOTE:** The new and expanded tools and guidelines in this book are taken from the author’s workshops for professionals and her work with families since the publication of the second edition of *Mom’s House, Dad’s House* in 1997. For a history of the *Mom’s House, Dad’s House* concepts beginning in 1974, see the *Chapter Notes* and *References* in the first and second editions.

## Before You Begin



Welcome to *The CoParenting Toolkit*, an easy-to-use guide designed for today's busy parent. It's the essential add-on for the comprehensive classic, *Mom's House, Dad's House* and its partner for parents and children, *Mom's House, Dad's House for KIDS*.

These first books embrace those universal heartbreaks, betrayals, conflicts, and dilemmas that invariably touch relationships and families in each generation. They offer time-tested and commonsense strategies and solutions that parents and their children use successfully to this day. Now, there is even more research and experience to fold in. That's why *The CoParenting Toolkit* was written. It adds to these first books, but it doesn't replace them.

This toolkit expands and deepens some of the time-tested solutions from the first books and then adds a series of fresh new strategies for today. It's packed with step-by-step explanations, realistic examples, Guidelines, useful checklists, Quizzes, worksheets, and quotes from parents sharing their wisdom. Its mission is the same as the *Mom's House, Dad's House* books before it—to support you and your children before, during, and after you separate.

Before you begin reading this book, read the section below, “Is CoParenting Right for You Now?” Coparenting can be the best option for many families but for those who struggle with serious problems or allegations, coparenting may not be healthy or realistic right now. This section can help you decide.

### IS COPARENTING RIGHT FOR YOU NOW?

Take a look at the questions on the following page. If they don't apply to you, just skip these pages and go to the Introduction. Sorry to say, the list of questions is not a happy one, but some parents do have to deal with these situations. It's best to think about these issues right up front in order to decide if traditional coparenting is right for you *at this time*.

*Coparenting is a respectful partnership between parents living apart who work together to love, protect, and raise their child.*





# Introduction



*What's Best for Children?*

*Tools for Your Success*

*Quiz: What Do You Have to Work with Today?*

*The Heart of CoParenting Is Commitment*

*How to Use This Toolkit*

## Dear Parent,

Chances are that you have picked up this book because you and your children's other parent are not living together. You deeply love your child and you probably share the same hope, along with millions of other loving parents who live apart, that you can still give your children what they need to grow up strong, healthy, and happy. Maybe you are just starting your coparenting journey and are looking for guidelines and ideas on how it can work. Perhaps you already have a coparenting relationship and are wondering if there are more ways to either improve it or protect what you have now. Or you are familiar with the *Mom's House, Dad's House* books and want to know about the latest developments. Well, you've all come to the right place. This *Toolkit* can help.

## WHAT'S BEST FOR CHILDREN?

You probably have already heard that after separation, children can do well if they have both parents in their lives. Often, this is taken to mean that each parent has a substantial amount of parenting time and that they share decision making. But while these are important, these alone won't help children thrive. How well children manage can depend more on other things parents do or don't do. For example, hard feelings between parents, especially when children observe or hear them, are very toxic for children (not to mention for the parents). This is true whether or not parents share parenting time and decisions. There are other influences of course, like personalities, finances, neighborhoods, living conditions, just to mention a few, but in my experience it is how well you parent and how well you coparent that are at the top of the list. Luckily, these are all things we can do, build up, repair, or learn!

*Lovers may come and go, but your relationship with your child is for life.*

## **The Goal of Healthy CoParenting Is for You and Your Child to Thrive**

Healthy coparenting should give you and your child the chance to thrive, not just cope. It is more than setting up two homes and a schedule. It is also about how you build a life for yourself and your child, your relationship with the other parent, and your individual relationships with your children. As coparents, you'll be solving problems, communicating, networking, making decisions, settling disagreements, and hopefully building a strong coparent team. This *Toolkit* and the *Mom's House, Dad's House* books were written exactly for these situations.

*Coparenting often means "re-tooling" or retrofitting ways we act as parents.*

### **TOOLS FOR YOUR SUCCESS**

#### **What Are These Tools?**

In this book, "tools" are a selection of tips, strategies, ideas, quizzes, lists, guidelines, and checklists that have helped many people with different situations over more than 30 years. Each chapter will have one or more things for you to try. Some tools amplify those in *Mom's House, Dad's House* while many others are relatively new. You can count on at least some of the tools in this *Toolkit* to give you some ideas and options.


#### **You Already Know a Lot**

You probably use your own version of some tools in this book for your everyday life already. But coparenting often means "re-tooling" or retrofitting ways we act. For example, you know that you have to communicate with the other parent, but with coparenting you'll learn there are certain words you can choose to get your point across instead of other words which could shut things down. You'll find specifics about these words in *Chapter 6: Try These Tools to Side-Step Communication Potholes*. Knowing the best words to use is one of the important adjustments for effective coparenting.

**Perfect coparenting is not realistic.** Instead, set your sights on your "best possible" type of coparenting. Make it good enough so that it helps you and your child thrive, not just survive.

This is a very important quiz. Please don't skip this one. Your answers can give you an idea of the foundation for coparenting that you have to work with right now, today. Don't be surprised if you want to change your answers later. Just thinking about things can start a chain reaction of behavior changes.

When you answer these questions, give a separate answer for each child.

 <b>What Do You Have to Work with Today?</b>	YES	NOT SURE	PROBABLY NOT
1. Do you think the other parent loves your child and wants to be an active parent?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Do you think your child is securely bonded or attached to the other parent?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Do you think your child needs or wants the other parent active in his or her life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Do you think the other parent can put your child's needs first?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Do you trust the other parent to take good care of your child?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Is it important to you that your child has a good relationship with the other parent?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Are you committed to making your best effort to have a healthy coparenting relationship?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Do you think the other parent wants you to have a close relationship with your child?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Do you think the other parent will make his or her best effort to have a healthy coparenting relationship?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## How to Use Your Answers

**Your “Yes” answers are your most important strengths for coparenting today. These are some of the essentials of commitment.** Making coparenting work requires energy and effort, and “Yes” answers are good signs that you can make that commitment. They are all the driving forces that can make coparenting a good experience for you and your child. Give yourself gold stars and protect your strengths.

**“Not Sure” answers are your “Slippery Slopes.”** Pay very close attention to these. If you and the other parent can explore these further and find some solutions, you can eventually make these your strengths, too. If you ignore these, even if you only have one “Not Sure” answer, it may eventually fall into the “Probably Not” category. Read the rest of this book and put some of the tools into action. If your progress is slow, then work with a coparent counselor to untangle what’s holding you back.

**“Probably Not” answers are your “Red Flags.”** These are calls to action. If you can still say that you are both committed to making your best effort to have a healthy coparenting relationship, then start working with a coparenting counselor as soon as possible.

## THE HEART OF COPARENTING IS COMMITMENT

It can’t be said enough. Your most important strengths are your commitment to coparenting and your ability to put your child’s needs first. They are the glue that can hold things together when things get shaky. When parents are willing to commit their best efforts to make coparenting succeed, they are well on their way.

## Monika and Roberto

**Monika, age 28, and Roberto, age 39,** lived together for five years and separated three years ago. They have two children, Sam, 8, and Nell, 6. Monika is a former model who is now finishing her degree in education. Roberto is a building contractor who specializes in flipping houses and who coaches Pop Warner football. He has a teenage son from a previous marriage who lives in another state. Roberto reports that he learned his lesson with his first divorce and is doing a better job coparenting this time around. He and Monika answered “Yes” to all the questions with one exception. Roberto said he was “Not Sure” if Monika would give coparenting her best efforts. Up until recently, Roberto would have answered “Yes” to that question, but now Monika is seeing someone seriously, and Roberto has started to feel uneasy. Still, Monika and Roberto do have a strong commitment to their children and to coparenting. These are their biggest strengths for the future.

*Commitment and putting your child first is the glue that holds coparenting together.*



## Laura and Cody

**Laura, age 42, and Cody, age 43,** have been living apart for five months. Laura has a lively, forceful personality and runs her own business as a caterer. Cody is a quiet man who works as an engineer with the city. He became involved in an affair two years ago and left Laura to live with his girlfriend, Hanna. Laura filed for divorce last month and they have started working with a mediator to work out their settlement and arrangements for their children: twins Megan and Alicia, 12, and Matt, 4. They want to coparent, but as Cody says, “Every time we try to communicate, it turns into an argument.” The good news is that when they took this quiz, they both had all “Yes” answers except for two “Not Sure” answers. Laura wasn’t sure that Cody would put the children’s needs first before his girlfriend. Cody said he would make his best efforts for a healthy coparenting relationship, but he was not sure Laura would. Despite the affair and their arguments and distrust about the other parent’s commitment, these parents still seem to have enough heart and willingness to make coparenting work.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

.....

If you or the other parent can't commit your best efforts today, this doesn't mean that coparenting won't work. It may take longer, or it's not something that can happen right now. Go through this book before you decide.

.....

► ***You don't have to try everything in this Toolkit.*** There's enough here to give you plenty of options. If you just choose one idea or action every few weeks, it could help to relieve your stress and guide you toward more success as a coparent.

► ***Go ahead and skip around from chapter to chapter. But first read about the CoParenting Highway in Chapters 1 and 2.*** This can help you focus on what you want from the other chapters.

► ***Keep this Toolkit as your private copy.*** You may want to keep your answers to certain questions confidential. The other parent needs his or her own private copy. Keep this *Toolkit* in a secure place. Your children should not read your answers.

► ***Share some Worksheets.*** You decide which worksheets you fill in by yourself, which you share with the other parent, and which you work on together. You might share some worksheets with your counselor and your attorney since they contain useful information that can help them understand your situation better.

► ***Dedicate a confidential notebook or journal to your coparenting experience.*** You may want to make notes on your feelings or experiences but also your answers to different Quizzes or notes about the various suggested Guidelines.

► ***If you are parenting alone right now, you may still find some useful tools in this book.*** Even though parenting solo is a really tough job, it can also be very rewarding and successful. If you are a solo parent who still has some communications with the other parent and his or her family members, Chapters 4 through 10 may help you set limits, pick tools and strategies for communications, make decisions, and keep strong for yourself and for your children. Ideally, no matter what your circumstances, you have or can build a support group and a sense of community with your friends, church, and extended family.<sup>1</sup> Check out Chapter 11 of this book about Parenting Plans, and certain chapters of *Mom's House, Dad's House*, especially if the absent parent does come back into the picture.<sup>2</sup>

► ***How to find coparenting counselors, family mediators, and family law attorneys.*** In this book, there may be suggestions to talk to

professionals such as an attorney, a coparent counselor, a family mediator, or others. *Appendix 2: Parenting Plans, Online Resources, and Referrals* has information on how to find referrals in your area. You can also check with the National Counseling Association, American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, the American Psychological Association, the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association or your State Bar Association, and your state's list of Licensed Clinical Social Workers. You can find referrals for family mediators by asking your counselor or family law attorney for the names of experienced mediators. Often your local Family Service Agency and Legal Aid organizations are able to be of service.

► **Do you have any of the Mom's House, Dad's House books?** If yes, there are NOTES at the end of each chapter in this *Toolkit* with the exact pages in those books where you can find additional information or the original perspectives.

**A final note:** To protect the privacy of clients, students, and colleagues who have shared their experiences with me, all names, places, and identifying circumstances of any real people have been changed, and examples are representative composites rather than single cases. Finally, you are the parent and the expert when it comes to your life and your children. This book and the other *Mom's House, Dad's House* books offer options, ideas, and guidelines, but only you can make the decision if these options and suggestions are best for you.

The first chapter starts at a quick pace. It's about the Basic CoParenting Guidelines and the recommended rules of the road for the "CoParenting Highway." Everyone needs to know what to expect from the other parent, and what's expected of them.

.....

It probably took years for you and the other parent to get to where you are now. It will probably take a while to neutralize any hard feelings between you, or at the least to find a detour around them. Try to be patient.

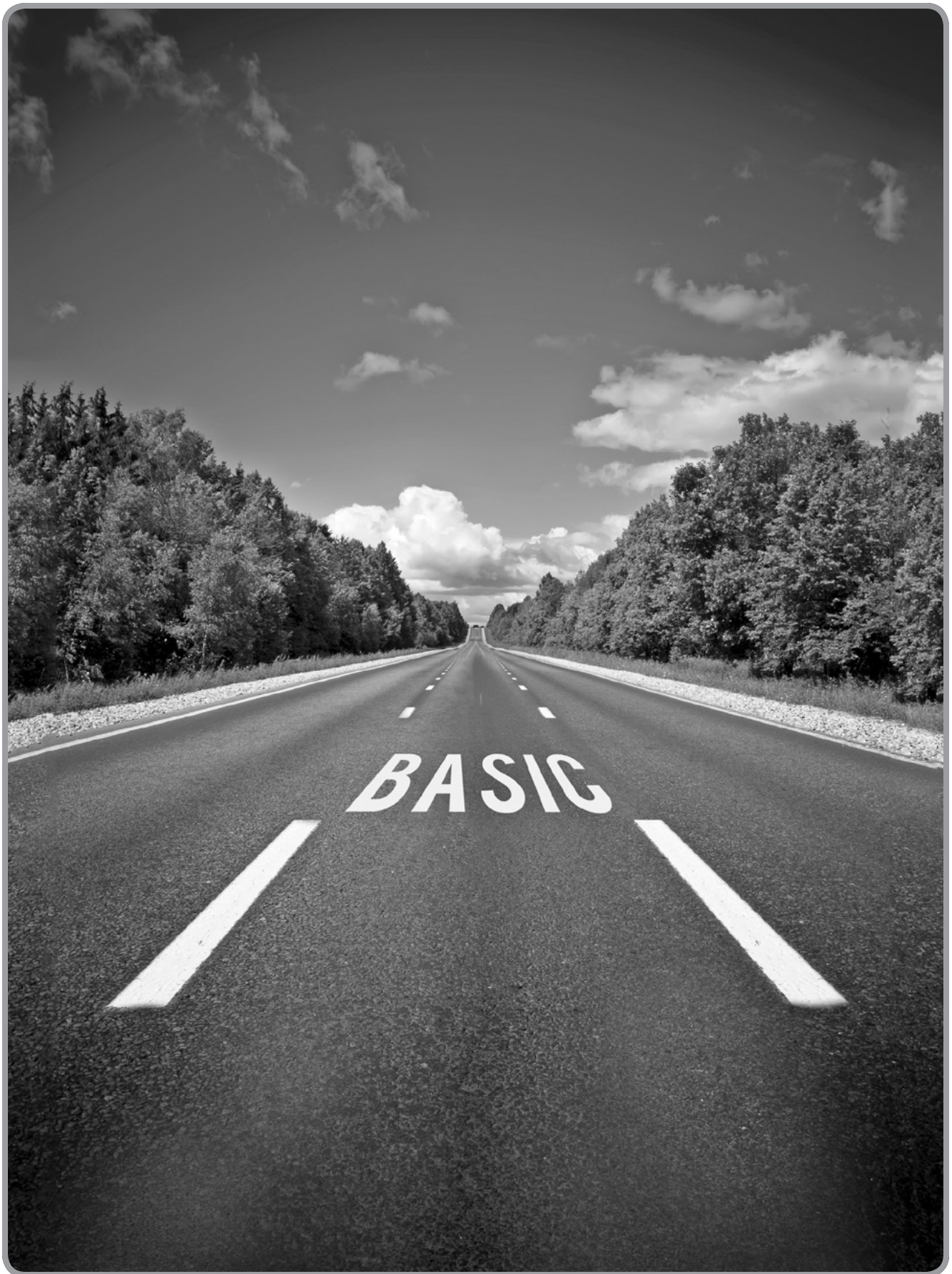
.....

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## NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. *Chapter 17, "Your Family Network,"* in *Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for Your Child* can be helpful.
2. In *Mom's House, Dad's House*, there is an entire chapter called "When an Absent Parent Returns: Things to Consider" (pp. 298–306). Also see the five chapters in Part III on the Legal Business in *Mom's House, Dad's House*.





# CHAPTER 1

## Use the CoParenting Highway's Basic Guidelines

*From Live-Together Parenting to Mom's House, Dad's House*  
*The CoParenting Highway*  
*Basic Guidelines for CoParenting*  
*Tips for Using the CoParenting Guidelines*  
*How CoParenting Guidelines Can Help Avoid Hassles*

### FROM LIVE-TOGETHER PARENTING TO MOM'S HOUSE, DAD'S HOUSE

Coparenting after separation is more complicated than live-together parenting! It is a *major* lifestyle change. Even though many things about daily life with your kids will seem the same as before, many others are not. When there is just one parent taking on all the responsibility on a given day, there's a lot more to do, even if you are coparenting. On top of all this, you also have to follow the court order, the Parenting Plan (see Chapter 11), try to get along with the other parent, and help your child through this major transition. Whew! It's a lot.

**Guidelines to the rescue!** This chapter is all about using Basic CoParenting Guidelines to help you on your journey. It's only fair that both of you play by the same rules and that each of you know what to expect. Besides, these Guidelines might also help you avoid some expensive and painful detours while you shape your best possible arrangement for your child. If you are having trouble meeting these Guidelines, check out the next chapter for extra help. If things are going smoothly, the next chapter also has Guidelines with more flexibility. No matter what your situation, the Basic CoParenting Guidelines describe what good-enough, healthy coparenting can look like.



## CHAPTER 3

### Use Your Strengths and Set Your Course

*Use Your Strengths*

*Quiz: What Are Your Strengths?*

*What Do You Want for Your Child?*

*Quiz: What Worries You?*

*Wakeup Calls*

#### USE YOUR STRENGTHS

Successful coparents shine a light on strengths, acknowledge them, and protect them. This is a very important tool for helping them meet the Basic CoParenting Guidelines. In the Introduction to this book, you answered some questions about your commitment to coparenting, your child's need for the other parent in his or her life, and the other parent's commitment to parenting and coparenting. Your "Yes" answers there are your most important strengths. Commitment is the glue that holds things together when coparenting gets shaky. Once you have the foundation of basic commitment, there's a lot more good stuff that follows.

**You have strengths, and so does the other parent.** These may be hidden right now under the rush of daily life or perhaps painful experiences, but they are there. The Quiz that follows is a way to remind yourself of your own strengths and the strengths of the other parent. Once these strengths are in the spotlight, the next step is to find ways to acknowledge them.

*Commitment is  
the glue that holds  
things together when  
coparenting gets shaky.*

Check the box in the column that has your answer. *Give a separate answer for each child.*

Take this quiz again in a few months and see what's changed.



## What Worries You?

### Do You Have Any of These Worries?

YES    SOME    NO

- |   |                       |                       |                       |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. The other parent's parenting style   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. The other parent's attitude toward you   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. The other parent's values or lifestyle   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. A stepparent or live-in partner causing problems                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Your child's serious health or physical challenges                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Your child's emotional health and stability  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Your child's academic or learning challenges   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Your child's friends or lack of friends  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Your child's poor adjustment to two homes  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. Your child's troublesome behavior and attitude                                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. Your child has taken a side, either with you, or with the other parent against you. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12. Add your own.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |



**Negative intimacy is when an intimate relationship has turned hostile.** It is the flip side of positive intimacy behavior. *But it is still intimacy.* Everyone seems to have at least a little of this “bad blood” negative intimacy before and after they separate. People are still deeply attached and invested emotionally but in a hurtful way. Instead of loyalty, there is disloyalty. Instead of trust, there is distrust. Instead of acceptance, there is rejection. No one knows how to hurt you as deeply as a former intimate. Negative intimacy is more than a momentary irritation or a flash of anger. It has an edge with momentum, an emotional punch that can spiral into an intense (but negative) emotional connection. It has the power to keep “enemies” attached to one another. Some people may think that when they hate or are disgusted with the other person that it is proof that they are not attached anymore. But their strong emotions give them away. The opposite of “love” is not “hate,” it’s neutral, with no intense emotions one way or the other.

Negative intimacy can be at a low level, simmering under the surface. It can grow to become more and more intense.

### **The Negative Intimacy Spiral**

Many if not most couples struggle with negative intimacy, sometimes for many months or even years. It’s understandable. People are in deep pain and it’s difficult to think straight. It’s easy to sink into negative intimacy over just about anything. It can be over big issues like child support or how many days or overnights they should have with the children. But it can also begin over garden-variety events that are annoying, even somewhat unfair. A Dad grumbles that Mom doesn’t help the kids bring all their schoolwork to his place, and he slips into negative intimacy as he thinks about the times he has had to drive to her house to pick up homework because she forgot to remind the kids to pack it. Within a few minutes he is furious and sends off a nasty email to her. Perhaps Mom is irritated that Dad makes such a big deal out of the forgotten homework. When she reads his email, she becomes more and more angry as she thinks about how he likes to find fault with her, so she shoots off a blistering answer.

Hopefully one or both of them will come to realize eventually that picking at every little thing is a way to keep the negative attachment going and not worth the hassle. But sometimes, this insight is slow coming. There are other ways to solve irritations. Besides, they could save their energy for other more serious issues.

### **Divorce Handcuffs**

Negative intimacy has the power to keep “enemies” attached to one another with emotional handcuffs. The opposite of “love” is not “hate,” it’s neutral, with no intense feelings one way or the other.

*... picking at every little thing is a way to keep the negative attachment going and not worth the hassle.*

**WARNING****IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR  
NEW RELATIONSHIP**

**Negative intimacy can easily contaminate your chances of having a successful new relationship.**

When someone spends negative energy on a former partner, this takes away energy and time from a new partner—unless that partner also buys into the negative intimacy system. It's no wonder that many potential partners of recently divorced persons break it off. Anger and resentment strain the new relationship. Besides, if someone can be so hateful toward or pushed around by a former spouse, that person can also turn on them down the road. Who wants all that trouble, anyway?

## **Negative Intimacy Can Be Addictive**

Even though intense emotion and confusion is a common but painful reaction to separation or divorce, after a while that negative intimacy behavior can become an addiction. Because their negative intimacy spiral started several years before they separated, both Cody and Laura are addicted to seeing each other in a negative way. When people freeze their negative beliefs about someone, they can't really hear what the other person is saying or give credit to his or her positive attitudes or actions. One or both of them can't consider information that would question their negative beliefs about the other. To make matters worse, negative intimacy can become a powerful and destructive drug. Most of us know someone who has made their experience of negative intimacy the main story about their life.

### **Danger**

If left untreated, negative intimacy addiction can injure the adults and traumatize the children. The longer it sticks around and the more intense it is, the deeper and nastier it can get. Trying to turn it around is a major, sometimes impossible task. A marriage can end, but divorce, when there are children, is forever. And if you're stuck in negative intimacy, it's hell. It's worth the effort to neutralize its effect on you and get on with your life.

### **Learn How Negative Intimacy Operates in Your Life**

Do any of the following things happen to either you or your coparent?

## GUIDELINES

### FOR E-ETIQUETTE

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*The internet is not perfect and no message, tweet, or post is totally confidential. It can be a postcard to the world.*

#### **Just the Facts: No Attitude, No Meltdowns, No Arguments**

**Texts, Emails, Tweets, and FaceBook** are quick ways to communicate but also risky. It is very tempting to write things you wouldn't dare say in person. So think "CCD". Remember, it just about the children.

- Make these business-like but not cold. Just the facts. No sarcasm, blaming, or threats.
- Stick to one or two subjects. This is especially important when there's conflict.
- Try to be specific. Avoid general and vague answers.
- Answer within 24 hours if possible. Or say when you will answer.
- Avoid using CAPITALS. They are interpreted as shouting.
- If the exchange is about an agreement, use email so you can have a written record.
- Remember to honor confidentiality. More on this below.

#### **Wait! Before you hit "Send" or post it—**

- Re-read your message several times. Ask yourself, is it businesslike? CCD? Confidential?
- Save "Urgent" or "Important" flags or words for those rare occasions that are actually urgent.
- When you reply to an email, hit "reply" instead of "new mail message" to keep the "thread" of a discussion in one place.

**More About Emails.** Use emails for discussions, negotiating, reaching agreements, and giving detailed updates or reports. They can be archived, filed, or printed. This can save time and frustration later.

- Make your emails short. Long emails may not get read all the way through. They can feel like lectures.
- Spell correctly and punctuate. It's easier to understand. It shows respect for the reader.



- If an email is about an agreement, use bullets or numbers for each action. Be specific. It actually helps people to remember. Here's an example of a Mom confirming an agreement about their daughter's transition to be with Dad. The bullets targeted these points:
  - “She will go with you after band practice on your days.”
  - “If you are delayed, she'll come home with me and you'll pick her up here.”
  - “You will be sure to text me or her about the time you'll be arriving.”

**More About FaceBook.** Never post any confidential or personal information about the other parent on your wall or your pages—not even to family or close friends. You do not have a right to do that. No exceptions. Even if it's general information about the kids and the other parent like a trip or an event, still mark this information for family and very close friends.

**About Texts.** Use all the guides above for texts too. Don't overuse texting. It's intrusive and annoying.

**More About Twitter.** Use all the guides above here too. While you can send private tweets, Twitter is basically public so everyone can join in. Again, like FaceBook and emails, be sure to mark your tweets private and don't tweet about sensitive or confidential information that includes the other parent.

**Try to make it a habit to follow the *Basic and Limited CoParenting Guidelines* and the *E-Etiquette Guidelines*.** It could save you a lot of time and misunderstandings.<sup>3</sup>

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**Words Are Powerful  
And Expensive**

An angry word not spoken is rarely regretted. Be careful what you say and how you say it.

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**NOTES FOR CHAPTER 6**

1. This Chapter expands and updates the section on communications in *Mom's House, Dad's House*, pp. 98–102.
2. *Mom's House, Dad's House for KIDS* has a series of “Words to Try” sections for kids listed on p. 250. Parents who read these can gain further insight into how and why children find it difficult to express their feelings and fears.
3. There is a section on direct and indirect communications, responses from the other parent, and assessing your communications on pp. 98–104 in *Mom's House, Dad's House*.

- call her. Paul feels his mother's fear for him, but feels disloyal to Dad.
- Esther hears Dad make snide comments about her mother to his friends. Esther wonders, "When I grow up will he hate me the way he hates Mom now?"
  - Andre's father wants to know if his mother has a boyfriend who stays overnight. Andres knows Dad shouldn't ask about Mom's private life, but he doesn't want Dad to be mad at him so he feels he has to tell him.
  - Mom tells Catherine that she has to get that support check from Dad before she comes home. Catherine knows Dad will be mad when she asks and Mom will be mad if she doesn't ask. No matter what she says or does, one parent will make her wrong and yell at her.
  - Relatives may put kids in the middle by talking trash about a parent to a child and by showing disapproval when a child talks about their other parent.

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### **The War Inside**

Children have both their mother and father within them. The "middle" is where one side of them is hating or at war with the other. Some children feel so torn apart, they must pick a side just to be able to function.

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## **EAVESDROPPING, TELLING TALES, LYING, REFEREEING**

### **When Kids Put Themselves in the Middle**

Do any of these sound familiar?

- Diana and Terrel are experts at hiding around corners and eavesdropping when Dad talks to his friend about Mom. Then they tell Mom what they think he said.
- Omar is in middle school. He stands between his mother and father when they argue and shoves them apart, sometimes telling one of them they are wrong.
- John lies to Mom saying that Dad is buying him a car on his 17th birthday, knowing that Mom has said no driving because of his grades.
- 8-year-old Noah tells Mom only part of what happened at Dad's and bends the truth just enough to alarm Mom. Mom calls Dad and accuses him of something that didn't really happen that way.
- Five-year-old Kelly wants to get her parents back together so she lies to Mom that Dad kisses her picture every night and lies to Dad that Mom says she still loves him.

In extreme cases, some kids will get into a parent's emails and written documents. It's understandable even though it is unacceptable. Their life

is at stake, and they don't trust their parents to make the best decisions. They want to know what's going on even if they are not yet mature enough to know what the information means or how to use it.



### When Family Members Behave Badly.

Laura's father did not approve of Laura's marriage to Cody. Once he learned about Cody's affair, he was outraged. Even though he admits that the girls love and need their father, the grandfather is still sarcastic and critical of Cody in public and in front of the girls—especially at the soccer games. Laura and other family members should speak to the grandfather and explain that his behavior is hard on the girls and a bad example. But, some have convinced themselves that it is not important, or that Cody has it coming, or that it's not their business. So, grandfather's hurtful behavior continues.

In this next Quiz, there are different examples of how parents can shield their children from becoming involved in adult issues. Think about your behavior. Maybe you don't do one or two of these things. What about the other parent? Do you believe that he or she does these things?

# CHAPTER 11

## Put Together a First-Rate Parenting Plan

*A Useful and Solid Legal Plan*  
*What Do You Have Now?*  
*What Can Go into Parenting Plans*  
*Other Things to Consider*  
*Optional Private Agreements*  
*The “Who Does What” List*

### A USEFUL AND SOLID LEGAL PLAN

A Parenting Plan (also called a Parenting Agreement) is usually a formal legal document that details your responsibilities and rights as parents and how you will share time with your child. A solid Plan provides you and the children with security, operating instructions, and predictability. It's not the only legal document about you and your children, but it is usually the most detailed and useful for the months and years ahead. Every state's requirement for family law documents can be different, and this book cannot offer you legal advice, but it can say that you and your child need your Plan to be first-rate—well-thought-out, easy-to-understand, useful, and crystal clear. You will refer to it often, especially when you and the other parent disagree.

You may already have a court order about parenting time and your rights as a parent to make decisions for your child. If you do, you can browse this chapter to see what you might want to add or delete the next time you update your arrangements. Also check out how to design your own private informal agreements to sort out the daily details. If you do not have a Plan, then this chapter can help you with resources and tips for constructing one. Be sure to consult with a family law attorney licensed in your state.

***A Parenting Plan is probably the most important legal document you have about your children. It's also part of your “job description” as a coparent.***

## CHAPTER 12

# Design a Winning and Workable Family Schedule

*A Winning and Workable Parenting Schedule*

*Your Child's Temperament*

*Sharing Time with Your Child*

*Designing Your Schedule*

*How Some Parents Share Time*

*When More Overnights Are Not the Answer*

*More Secrets to Successful Scheduling*

### A WINNING AND WORKABLE PARENTING SCHEDULE

When you and the other parent were together, you may not have planned your calendar ahead for 12 months, 18 months, or longer, but once you no longer live together, this planning is necessary. Having to divide your children's time with their other parent may not be what you want, but here you are.

The basic message of this chapter is just common sense. The best schedule for being with Mom and Dad is not just what the children can *tolerate*, it's one that allows them to develop in a healthy way so they have their best chance with life. The way to success is to design a schedule that gives your children time and frequent communications with both of you. It gives them a routine that works for their age, needs, and personality, is flexible when it needs to be and is not tiring. It is one that's easy enough to understand and follow. A doable schedule is a big achievement!

Children in two homes can do very well with a schedule that meets their needs. But if the schedule asks too much of them or they don't see as much of a beloved parent as they need, they may not do well at all. It's a little like plants that grow strong and beautiful in full sun but don't do well in partial shade. The message here is that parents want to design a schedule that will allow their child to thrive.

*Children are resilient but everyone has a breaking point. Don't press your luck.*

## Appendix 1

### ***Never-Married CoParents***



State laws may be different so it's important that parents check out the requirements for establishing paternity by consulting with a lawyer in their state. In some places, the father and mother may only need to sign an affidavit soon after the birth of their child to establish the father's legal paternity. Ask these questions:

1. Is the father's name on the birth certificate enough?
2. Does the father also have to file a court form to register himself formally as the father?
3. Does filing this court form establish a legal basis for requests for parenting time and other parenting rights?
4. Does filing this court form also establish the father's responsibility for child support?