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LAW FIRM

## **Navigating co-parenting after separation**

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Separation or divorce is never easy and when children are involved, the process becomes even more complex. Co-parenting will be different for everyone; however, it is always important for separated or divorced parents to navigate co-parenting in a way that minimizes conflict and prioritizes their children's well-being.

It goes without saying that your child's emotional and psychological well-being must come first. In the legal world, courts will base their decisions on what is in the best interests of the children, and this concept is well ingrained in family law legislation. Although many ex-partners may have different views or unresolved issues, parents must try to put these issues aside and keep their child's needs at the forefront of their decision-making. Keeping the focus on their needs, rather than personal frustrations, will set a positive example for your child and help them feel secure in both homes.

Family law legislation also places a duty on parents to minimize conflict and shelter their children from any dissention that is caused when parents separate. For this reason, it is essential to maintain a respectful and positive attitude when discussing your co-parenting arrangement, especially when talking about your ex in front of your child. Legally, parents cannot force or persuade their children to "take sides" by talking negatively about each other. Beyond that, children love both parents and want to maintain good relationships with each, so avoid putting them in the middle of any disputes. If you need to address issues with your ex, try to do so privately, without involving the child.

Effective communication between co-parents is another key to a successful co-parenting relationship. In situations where parents do not get along, it is essential to keep your communication focused solely on the child. This means limiting discussions to the logistics of childcare, school events, medical appointments, and other child-related matters.

To avoid misunderstandings or arguments, keep your communication as formal and clear as possible. It can be helpful to have communication in writing, such as text message or email, where possible. When in doubt, stick to the facts and avoid diving into personal emotions or issues unrelated to your child's well-being.

Lastly, one of the most important steps to successful co-parenting is implementing a clear and detailed parenting plan. A well-crafted parenting plan outlines the responsibilities of each parent and sets expectations for things like parenting arrangements, visitation schedules, holidays, and decision-making related to your child's education, healthcare, and general welfare.

Working together with your ex to create this plan (or seeking the help of a mediator or lawyer if needed) helps ensure that both parents are on the same page and that there are clear boundaries in place. Having a parenting plan can reduce misunderstandings and prevent conflicts before they arise. While the plan should be flexible enough to adjust to life's changes, it should also set firm guidelines for how decisions will be made and how disputes will be resolved. This makes the co-parenting process smoother and gives both parents the framework they need to prioritize the child's needs.

It is important to remember that co-parenting will be different for everyone, and parents will need to adapt to the fluid and ever-changing lives of their children. If you find that you are struggling with your co-parenting situation, there are many resources available to parents such as the "For the Sake of the Children" program meant to provide parents with information about what to expect during separation both legally and emotionally, the needs of their children, and different ways to meet those needs. Additionally, there are many parenting coaches or programs available in our community which are designed to help parents navigate their individual co-parenting situation and new family dynamic.

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