

TOTAL DIVORCE BLUEPRINT PRESENTS

PARENTING AFTER DIVORCE:

HOW TO DEVELOP (AND SUSTAIN)
HEALTHY, BALANCED, RESPECTFUL
CO-PARENTING RELATIONSHIPS



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“TO DIVORCING PARENTS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO THE
EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF THEIR CHILDREN.”



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"DIVORCE AND THE SYSTEM."

Many divorce professionals equate successful co-parenting with 'oil and water'. Their belief is that couples who couldn't get along well enough to stay married certainly can't get along well enough to co-parent their children. In their view, divorcing parents are automatically at odds so the responsibilities of parenting, support and how much time children spend with each parent after the divorce is best left to others to decide.

But what if I said thousands of divorced parents are raising their children cooperatively because they know something different?

What if there were steps you could take to make co-parenting with your ex easier... And healthier for your children?

Well, it's true, and my teaching divorcing couples how to do this has drawn a lot of criticism. Family law attorneys and others who profit from the conflict of divorcing spouses don't like to acknowledge that successful co-parenting is possible outside of their belief system (unless it includes some degree of legal muscle, but mostly because the less conflict - the less money they earn).

But what makes complete strangers within a legal system more competent than parents to make these decisions?

In this report I'm going to talk about co-parenting, without legal interference or conflict, and doing it successfully.

Children who deal with parental conflict are forced to grow up faster - losing parts of their childhood that can never be recovered.

To add to this, I'm going to frame this subject entirely by the needs and best interests of children and how parents are set up to fail, not the current model of outdated, self-serving legal opinions. [Education, common sense and cooperation](#). When presented together, these things may seem like an impossible combination for divorced parents, but by the end of this report you'll understand their connection and importance in the lives of an entire divorced family.

Divorced parents as 'co-parents' have long been stigmatized by a sure-to-fail attitude within the legal system. Why? The answer, I believe, is because couples are forced to end their marriages through an adversarial process and whether it's amicable or not, this only amplifies whatever differences they do have, eroding their ability to co-parent.

What I'm suggesting is that relationships between divorced parents can, and should, be cooperative. And if cooperation is measured by people's feelings and experiences, then why make getting divorced a process that lays the foundation for conflict?

Before I continue, allow me to bring my viewpoint into perspective. I care about children of divorce and I also care about whether I can get parents to let down their emotional guard and be open to a perspective different from what they may believe.

As a general introduction: I was not a child of divorce, but I am a child of parents who should have never stayed married. That experience is the reason I understand the emotional impact of conflict on children who must reconcile loving the same people who don't seem to understand the pain their behavior causes.

Much of what stands out about my childhood is wishing things were different - or at least better, and coming to resent my parents for their behavior and counting the days until I could leave home.

Children are not emotionally equipped to handle the disconnect and resentment they feel about people who are supposed to make them feel safe and loved. And many go on to spend years of their adult lives in counseling to overcome their anger.

When I left home at 18, I made a silent promise to myself that my children would never be exposed to the dysfunction I endured.

Even though my daughter's father and I divorced I kept that promise and her experience with her father and I and our divorce was very different. Getting divorced wasn't easy but our problems and differences remained between us. Our daughter was given the freedom to spend time with each of us as she chose - in spite of the minimal court ordered 'visitation' granted to her father. This wasn't about us, it was about her.

I began paying closer attention to other parents and children of divorce while working in banking and finance trying to recover from my own divorce. Repeatedly and with increasing frequency I found myself meeting with divorced or divorcing people who were struggling with money and being single parents. In the natural progression of bonding with them they openly shared their own stories of frustration, financial hardships and co-parenting problems. Listening to their stories made me feel fortunate... Grateful for what I had accomplished so far - and wanting to help them, and that's what I did.

That period in my life demonstrated that my struggles and successes had value for others.

I've been working with divorcing people for over 15 years. Either in evaluating and crafting financial settlement options or as a Divorce Mediator helping them create their settlements and parenting plans.

My own co-parenting struggles and victories, staying on top of the latest research about children and divorce, and my training as a Mediator all contribute to the success of the principles I teach.

I've shared this with you because I want you to know me. That I have been where you are. Also, to qualify the different viewpoint I have from many others in the divorce industry. Sharing this information is one more way I can help make divorce easier for both children and their parents.

WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

Words don't teach. When parents aren't fully invested in the well-being of their kids they could be handed the most valuable, proven advice about co-parenting and none of it will matter.

In 2006 when I began mediating divorce cases I found two common themes that put couples at an impasse over co-parenting decisions: their emotions and their conditioning. What every couple had in common is that they loved their children, but that alone wasn't enough to move many of them from resistance to cooperation.

Our emotions and perspectives are the result of our life experiences. Combine them with all the external information we're exposed to and they create our belief systems.

The connection between these factors made it clear why so many parents hit the same wall:

- Unmanaged emotions and unresolved anger prevent them from developing the relationship they need to have as parents.
- They both fear losing 'control' over the relationship they have with their children.
- The false pretense that one of them has more legal parental rights than the other.
- Fear of financial hardship due to a broken and outdated model of supporting children.
- Opinions and misguided advice from family, friends and co-workers.
- A legal system that functions on parental inequality and biases.
- Attorneys who exploit vulnerable people for financial gain.

These are the issues that I have to help parents overcome at a time when they're usually at their worst and closed off to anything outside of their own beliefs. The best part of what I do is teach people how to neutralize their resistance and be empowered by their choices rather than threatened by them... Something I've learned personally and professionally about divorce - and life.

There are a lot of people who dismiss how powerful this is.

Many in the divorce profession have told me the agreements divorcing couples make in mediation are merely band-aids.

Some have equated the success of my approach with math - *mediate enough cases and you end up with a few success stories.*

Their opinions might be true except for a few facts:

First, I'm able to see the difference in the way my couples interact once I give them the right tools to work with and second, many of them keep in touch with me to let me know how they're doing and get a little advice from time to time. (So I'm aware of how this approach works).

Here's what I've found to be true with many of my clients after their divorce:

- Learning a new way to manage their co-parenting relationship resulted in less conflict in their decision making.
- They work harder (and more sincerely) to close the gap between differences of opinion.
- They're more flexible in handling whatever changes are necessary to their parenting plan.
- Their co-parenting relationships become smoother and more cohesive over time.

Most importantly, the impact of the divorce on their children is minimized and they recover much faster. That being said, divorcing parents face two major hurdles:

- (a) the lack of constructive, supportive resources, and
- (b) themselves

If parents are only exposed to input that's divisive, then that's the only tool they'll use and will never achieve the kind of relationship their children need them to have. At the same time, parents who are unwilling to separate their feelings about each other from doing what's best for their children will struggle through every aspect of co-parenting, and so will their children. Here are the steps to successful co-parenting.

1. THINK BEYOND YOURSELF

How do some couples transition into co-parents effortlessly?

As parents we all like to take credit for knowing exactly what's best for our children. At the same time I see them struggle with their own beliefs, and each other, when the only tools they have widens the gap between them. Yes, divorce permanently changes the dynamic of a family. Yes, divorce is difficult for children and yes, there will be changes for you too.

But divorce in and of itself isn't what damages a child's relationship with their parents. What creates problems for children, prevents them from adjusting, and changes the parent-child relationship is their environment and the conduct of their parents.

Essentially, every aspect of how a couple handles their divorce integrates to form how their child experiences and recovers from the divorce. Parental conduct also sets the example for a how a child handles conflict in their own relationships.

As a Divorce Mediator I have to focus just as much on what's really below the surface as I do on the words my clients exchange. Peaceful, unified co-parenting relationships cannot be achieved by pacifying different points of view or conflicts - it needs a solid foundation.

There are a number of options parents can utilize to help them build a cohesive co-parenting relationship:

Option A:

Working with a Mediator trained and skilled in divorce/family mediation.

Option B:

Utilizing co-parenting counselors or family therapists.

Either of these options can work quite well and they each provide their own distinct benefits depending on the level of help needed. The success of any of them however, will depend entirely on the level of commitment each one of you has to utilizing them.

For example:

- Professionally trained Mediators can help parents improve their communication by teaching active listening and constructive problem solving skills, which essentially provides a better foundation for their interactions.
- Co-parenting counselors address conflicts that exclusively effect the relationship, roles and conduct of parents while empowering them to function in ways that nurture their child's growth and development.
- Family therapists work to foster understanding, constructive communication and cooperation between the entire family.

The commitment to a healthy co-parenting relationship is the first step, and the foundation, to making that relationship happen... Even if there are obstacles to overcome.

Getting parents to utilize the tools that are available to them is how I'm able to help couples become *dispassionate about their differences* and unified in doing what's best for their kids.

But here's my disclaimer: I cannot guarantee that just reading this post or using this information alone will seamlessly transform your relationship with your (soon-to-be) ex into the perfect co-parenting relationship - because I don't know you, but I do know that it takes effort, commitment and patience... With a lot of letting go of the past and focusing on the future.

If all of these resources and effort seem unrealistic or overwhelming, consider how much of what I've outlined that you've tried on your own, and look at your success. If you haven't been able to establish even a marginally successful co-parenting relationship - even if you're not divorced yet, something is in your way and you need some assistance.

Somehow, in the legal world, though, any problems a couple has making this relationship shift is considered an absolute indicator of their inability to co-parent. I personally find this troubling because it speaks to how divorcing couples are all perceived with the same cynical bias.

Co-parenting is an emotional adjustment during a time of high stress and fear... An indisputable fact which is conveniently ignored and conveniently manipulated into the need for legal intervention.

If I'm asking parents to do anything, it's to elevate their awareness of their child's well-being and realize that achieving a healthy co-parenting relationship is not an option, it's their responsibility.

This means I'm asking you to be proactive parents, or what I call *'child-centered'*. The way to do this is to acknowledge that you're not 'super-mom' or 'super-dad' (and that's okay!), - and get whatever assistance you need from the right sources.

I tell parents, "make every decision as if you were the child that had to live with them".

If you don't, every aspect of your co-parenting will be based on only one perspective - yours, and it just doesn't work that way.

2. CARE ABOUT YOUR CHILD MORE THAN YOU DISLIKE YOUR EX

What prevents most parents from achieving a healthy co-parenting relationship isn't their capability, it's their perception of what they *think* is normal.

I have emphasized 'think' because a lot of divorced parents function outside of what actually constitutes parenting after divorce.

Getting divorced doesn't change your relationship, rights or responsibilities as parents.

Here are some steps to leveraging a healthy co-parenting relationship:

1. Emotionally separate yourself from the relationship you had with your spouse. Whatever happened between you personally is not relevant in your relationship with your children, so take the steps necessary to make the relationship shift whether it's individual, family or co-parenting counseling.
2. Commit to making your children your first priority from the very beginning. This means all parenting decisions come before every other divorce related decision.
3. Distance yourself from any influences that don't support parental unity, or encourage conflict. Advice or actions that are divisive to you as a couple are divisive to you as parents.
4. Utilize a Professional Mediator who is skilled in divorce and family mediation, co-parenting counselors or a qualified parenting coordinator to help you create your parenting plan instead of lawyers.

These steps work so well because they keep the focus on constructive solutions, which in turn, reduces or eliminates the overall conflict between spouses (whether about their personal issues or their children), shifting their interactions in a more positive direction and expanding their ability to work together differently and more effectively than they had in the past. The model for co-parenting isn't, "Why should I do anything for my ex?", it's, "How do we do the best for our children?".

This strategy is how I've helped hundreds of divorcing couples become great divorced co-parents as well as reduced the necessity of court intervention. It's how I work with all of my divorcing parents and minimized the trauma for their kids. (And this is where I have to ask you, "How can your family benefit from my approach?").

3. *KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILDREN NEED AND WANT*

Only when you understand what divorce means from a child's perspective and learn how to listen to them will you be able to provide an environment for them to thrive.

Having the best of intentions is a great place to start, but it's not enough.

Not knowing the best way to help your child through a divorce is NOT a sign of parental failure... In fact, acknowledging that you don't know what to do - and taking the steps to get that information, is exactly what your child needs!

Since every child is different, there is no one 'perfect' method, however; there are numerous factors that define a child's divorce transition & recovery and they are: (a) parental behavior, (b) the conduct of extended family/friends, (c) the level of conflict in their entire environment and (d) whether or not their parents have the proper knowledge and resources to support them emotionally.

The most effective strategy I have found that helps parents is tailoring the resources they need to their unique situation. Basically, I pinpoint where they are in need of help and we work to reinforce those areas with the appropriate resources.

Why does all of this matter?

First, because the only way to solve a problem is to know what it is. Second, adding anything that's unnecessary to the plates of stressed out and overwhelmed couples will only result in frustration and resistance. Addressing what's relevant is important.

This is how I prefer to work on parenting issues because, frankly, this is about helping parents adapt the skills they need, not forcing them to conform to a legal mandate that hurts more than it helps. Parenting is personal. The whole idea is to create a healthy, balanced and cooperative environment. So when parents understand how to support their children age appropriately, everyone thrives.

4. THE BIGGER PICTURE - YOU'LL ALWAYS BE PARENTS

With the way many Family Court systems still function, no importance is placed on children's emotions, the effect this system has on them or the relationship divorced spouses will have as co-parents. There is no better reason than this for *you* to know what's best for your child. This should go without saying, but you'd be surprised how many people go into their divorce naive about lawyers and how the Family Court system works.

Let me be totally honest here, I know how difficult it can be to create an entire relationship shift with someone you have so many conflicting emotions about. But, when you consider that your children are *why* you need to make this shift, doesn't that change things?

Co-parenting is just like every other relationship... You only get out of it what you put into it. It may not be easy at first. Setbacks aren't failures, and the more effort you put into it the more you'll end up succeeding.

Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Accept that you and your spouse now have differing points of view. Don't try to change that.
2. Focus on your spouse's positive qualities as your child's other parent. See them as your child does.
3. Great parents enrich their children's lives by demonstrating how to handle sadness and challenges, not by telling them. Consider what your children will learn from how you handle your divorce.
4. Never let anyone tell you peaceful, cooperative co-parenting isn't possible. Just because they couldn't or wouldn't doesn't mean you can't.
5. Be open to constructive points of view, but always walk away from those who are jaded, cynical and divisive.
6. Care. The more you do, the more your children will thrive.

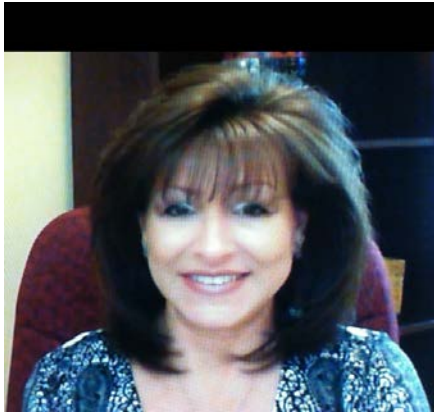
Here's what I know:

Divorced parents can be great co-parents, they usually just need a little help getting started. Judges and lawyers don't love your children: they're responsible to a system, you're responsible to your children. And, you as parents have more power to define your child's divorce experience than you could ever realize.

Our system of divorce and how it handles families is fundamentally flawed but you can make a choice about how much it effects your children - and you.

I hope this information has inspired you to think, make the best choices and perhaps see co-parenting differently. This is what I help people do everyday, it's the message in my book, *Separate Homes, Connected Lives*, and I hope it makes a difference in your life and the lives of your children.

- Lori



LORI GROVER is the author of the co-parenting book *Separate Homes, Connected Lives*, owner & President of the RI Divorce Mediation Center, a founding member of the Academy of Professional Family Mediators and creator of Total Divorce Blueprint: a first of its kind program that walks couples through every aspect of divorce from how to properly prepare to negotiating successful settlements, making sound financial decisions and creating healthy, sustainable parenting plans, all outside of the court system.

Lori is nationally certified as a Professional Mediator & Mediator Trainer and recognized as one of the most skilled and effective Mediators in the field.

Lori struggled through her own divorce - at the hands of the legal system - where she lost her business, nearly lost her home and had to start over from almost nothing. After that experience she realized that there was a better way and since then she's dedicated herself to helping couples and children go into a divorce better informed, without making the same mistakes she made.

Lori is a tireless advocate of keeping children out of divorce conflict, changing how divorces are conducted and educating couples on how to avoid caught up in an unpredictable legal system. With more than 16 years experience in divorce related finance, Lori has helped thousands of divorcing people make their best financial decisions and lay the foundation for better, more stable futures.

After being in private practice for over 15 years, Lori has made her experience and guidance available online through Total Divorce Blueprint, putting the same proven strategies and techniques she uses in her private mediation practice in the hands of anyone facing a divorce.