

Five Tips for Co-Parenting and Winning Custody of Your Child

It is easy to say that you want what is best for your child. Sometimes, however, parents facing divorce find it more difficult to “walk the talk” as a result of the personal pain they feel toward the other parent. Whether you are involved in a “custody battle” or merely trying to effectively co-parent with your child’s



mother or father, your conduct can make a real difference in the life of your child. Children are affected by the quality of their parents’ relationship. Children thrive when parents have a cooperative relationship. Judges know this and are likely to penalize parents involved in conflict (e.g., a “custody battle”) because children of high-conflict parents are more likely to suffer from anxiety, aggressive behavior

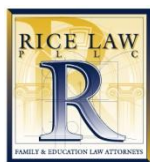
and poor social skills (see the [Urban Child Institute](#)). Not surprisingly, parents who demonstrate that they can co-parent are more likely to “win” custody of their children. If both parents can effectively co-parent, the children win and the parents spend their money and their energy on more constructive issues than a custody “battle”.

1. **Communicate** — It is important that both parents communicate with each other about issues affecting your child. When the school sends home information concerning a parent-teacher conference, grades, a book drive, etc., notify the other parent and give them a copy so that they can participate. If you schedule an appointment for the child like a doctor’s appointment, notify the other parent so they can participate. The more information that flows from one parent to the other (and *vice versa*), the better. Many custody orders require the “free flow of information” between parents about the child. When you do communicate, use the telephone! You can’t believe how negative it is to go into a custody trial and have a parent testify that they try to call the other parent to discuss their child but all they get is voicemail with no return calls or worse that both communicate exclusively by text or email. An exhibit showing the texts and emails exchanged can be disastrous especially if they include barbs and jabs at the other parent that have nothing to do with raising a child. The judge simply does not want to see comments about the father’s “whore girlfriend” and will hold that type of bad conduct against the parent who can’t get past her hard feelings to focus on what is best for the child. Also, communication is not just talking but also listening. Ask the other parent for his or her opinion about issues and listen to what he or she actually says. One tool that helps some parents communicate (and third parties like mental health therapists or attorneys police the communication) is [Family Wizard](#).
2. **Don’t put the child in the middle** – The child is a child and should not be burdened with the parents’ problems nor empowered to make decisions as if they are an adult. While children can have a say in where they want to live, it is ultimately the judge’s decision and the judge will usually tell the child it is his or her decision and the child’s input will only be a factor and not the final say. Simply put, you are putting too much pressure on a child of any age to ask them to choose. Moreover, if you empower the child to decide this issue now when things don’t work out with the parent they chose, they may think they can change their mind and move to the other parent’s house causing disciplinary problems in both homes and playing one parent

against the other. Parents should refrain from discussing the litigation with the child. Also, never say anything negative about the other parent in the presence of the child. Neither party should do anything that diminishes the bond that the child has with the other parent. And don't use the child to send messages to the other parent (don't even send the child support check in the child's backpack).

3. **Be accountable** – Children are smart. Don't pretend to be something you are not. If you are fighting for custody because your lawyer told you that you will not have to pay as much child support or because you are concerned about what your mom or some other family member might think, your child will know that you truly do not want to have them with you 24x7. If you are living a lie under any circumstances, you may be alienating yourself from your own child.
4. **Make transitions easy** – Remind your child they will be spending time with their mom or dad in advance and help them look forward to the time with their mom or dad. Help get them packed and ready for pickup on time. Allow the child to take toys, cell phones, clothing and other items back and forth between the houses so that they will be comfortable having their stuff. When your child returns, don't question them about the other parent, their house, what they did, etc. If they want to share, they will.
5. **Have faith in the other parent** — you picked him or her to have a child. Have faith that this person you choose will not put your child at risk. If you have genuine concerns that he or she will put your child at risk, that is something you need to address with the other parent and/or with your attorney.

You should speak with your attorney because every situation is different. For example, if there is domestic violence, these tips may not be practicable. However, generally following these tips will improve circumstances for your child whether you are in a battle for custody or not.



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