

## POSITIVE CO-PARENTING STRATEGIES FOR DIVORCE PARENTS

*By Sylvia Denise Greenbaum, LPC, LCDC*

*For additional information and services, please contact me at [Deniselpc.com](http://Deniselpc.com)*

This also applies to parents who were never married or married and now separated. These are general guidelines. Please consider your child's age, level of maturity, personality, and context of circumstances when applying these strategies.

1. Be consistent and follow through with plans and promises you make with your child. If on rare occasions (such as emergencies) plans are cancelled, make sure you make them up by setting alternative plans as soon as possible.
2. Take time to listen to your child's thoughts, feelings, concerns, and values. Your child might have different views than you do on many topics. Allow your child the opportunity to express his/her own thoughts and opinions so he/she may learn and practice critical thinking skills.
3. Be fair and give your child choices and allow his/her choices to be implemented. This teaches your child that his/her opinion is important, and that relationships involve effective communication and compromise. This also helps your child learn positive social skills and develop mutual respect in relationships.
4. Focus on building trust in your relationship with your child. When there is trust in relationships, intentions are not questioned and communication is clear, consistent, and reliable.
5. It's okay to be vulnerable and admit when you are wrong. Parents are human and not perfect. It's okay for parents to make unintentional mistakes and learn from them.
6. Refrain from bad-mouthing your ex, especially in front of your child. If you have unresolved feelings toward the other parent, be honest with yourself about it and seek help. Children notice parent's attitudes, tone of voices, body language, etc. Children want both parents in their lives. When they are caught in the middle of conflict between parents, they end up hiding positive feelings they have for the other parent. As a result, they do not feel safe expressing how they feel and are afraid of experiences consequences for having normal and positive feelings.

7. Make an effort to understand that your child may not have the same feeling(s) that you have toward your ex. If your relationship with your ex did not end well, but your ex treats your child well, be grateful that your child has support from the other parent. Your child benefits from adult support from family members. This could also include: grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, etc.
8. Let your child know that he or she is not at fault if the other parent does not keep promises, neglects responsibilities, or reacts negatively in any way. Validate your child's feelings and explore alternative options. Place less attention on the other parent, and more attention on helping your child develop healthy coping skills.
9. Children sometimes express anger toward a parent who they feel safe enough to express negative emotions towards. If your child is upset with you, explore what is behind it. Try not to take it personally and avoid getting into power struggles with your child. If this pattern has played out, focus on rebuilding the relationship by: listening to your child, showing support, addressing problems, and exploring solutions.
10. Point out at least 5 of your child's positive behaviors and/or give compliments before you address a problem or negative behavior. When you need to address a problem behavior be brief (by using few words), direct (sticking to the main point/issue) and positive (focusing on the solution). This way, the focus is less on the problem behavior and more on the solution/preferred behavior.
11. Make a serious effort to seek out and express positive qualities in your ex (even if you can only think of a few), and emphasize them when conversations arise with your child about your ex.
12. Avoid allowing your child to communicate for you to the other parent. Children are not responsible for mediating conflicts between adults. Explore alternative options in handling adult problems without placing the responsibility on your child.
13. Think about what is best for your child when making parenting decisions that involve the other parent. If the other parent doesn't cooperate, keep striving to do what is best for your child. Your child will take notice and appreciate your efforts. Problems may not always get solved or have

favorable outcomes, but children notice the character of each parent and how they react to others and situations.

14. Do not expect your child to validate your feelings or side with you (even if you have valid reasons) when you disagree with the other parent. When parents (together or not) do not get along, children are pressured to take a side. This is called, triangulation. When this happens, children are placed in a "no win" situation that they can not fix. They may try to fix it, but end up failing. As a result, they begin to experience feelings of shame and worthlessness. This leads to symptoms of anxiety and depression. It also affects their self-esteem and decreases their ability to function in many or all areas of their lives.
15. Keep in mind, a parent might really believe he or she is rescuing his or her child by avoiding the other parent and/or cutting off communication with him or her. However, the child interacts and is still connected to both of his/her legal parents. The child is caught in the middle, and is put in a position to navigate interactions between parents. Also, the child is learning that it is okay to cut people out of their lives instead of working through conflicts. Consequently, a child could one day repeat this behavior by cutting off a parent or an ex-spouse. This then becomes a generational problem, and leads to disconnected family relationships. The goal is to teach children healthy coping skills and work through problems to strengthen relationships.
16. Educate yourself on parental alienation. Become of aware its dynamics, and change your responses from reactivity to proactivity. Remember, as an adult, you have resources and coping abilities. Your child is in survival mode. Even when children reach adulthood, they may have unresolved and unhealed feelings from past family experiences. They may have normalized unhealthy interactions, and focus on avoiding fear and consequences. Therefore, they sometimes align with the most feared parent.
17. Your role is to assess the family history, situation, and problems; and show up as a mature, confident, and compassionate parent. Keep in mind, your love for your child is more important than your anger toward your ex.
18. Parent alienation is often a generational problem. If you were alienated from one of your parents growing up and/or caught in the middle of

conflict between your parents, you were more at risk for repeating the same pattern and/or choosing a spouse who alienates you. A spouse who engages in parent alienation has unresolved issues from childhood and lacks coping skills. Try to see the big picture.

19. Focus on empowering yourself in healthy ways. Build your relationship with your child. Focus more attention on your child and less on your ex. Trust that your positive efforts are meaningful. Find strategies to increase your level of confidence and security, as a parent and person.