

Better Communication in Co-Parenting

Mediator Erik Wheeler offers tips to improve communication with the other co-parent to reduce conflict, reduce stress, and make things easier for the children

BURLINGTON, VERMONT, UNITED STATES, March 6, 2022
/EINPresswire.com/ -- Better Co-parenting Communication

You can co-parent effectively after divorce or separation — if you are aware of some of the common pitfalls that get in the way.



Photo by Gustavo Fring from Pexels

Mediator Erik Wheeler offers tips from his practice on how to have good communication with the other parent.

1. Get specific about parent-child contact details:

One issue that I see frequently as a mediator is disagreements about parent-child contact time (aka “visitation”). The disagreement usually arises because there is a lack of clarity in the parenting agreement. The most challenging situation is when the agreement specifies that all or some of the parenting time will be “as agreed”. In other words, “we’ll figure it out as we go”.

Well, unfortunately people often have trouble figuring it out later.

Other vague language creates problems, too. For example, one phrase I have seen written by a judge is, “The parties shall alternate holidays from holiday to holiday and from year to year by agreement of the parties.”

Which holidays are included? Is July 4th considered a holiday? What about President’s Day? On which holiday will the alternation start? What happens if they alternate each holiday for the first year, but that results in each person having all the same holidays the following year?

All these issues came up for some clients of mine with a court order that had the sentence

above, and it created a significant amount of misunderstandings and conflict.

However, even with a specific plan in place, it's inevitable that one of you will want to request a change. So it's important to have a plan for how to handle those requests.

2. Make a plan for handling schedule changes:

No matter how well you plan your parent-child contact time (also known as "visitation" or "custody") in your parenting agreement, you will encounter situations in which you or the other parent requests a change to the plan.

Sometimes it's because family is in town visiting; or there's a unique opportunity for the kids involving travel that would require a change to the routine schedule.

Each time you deviate from the schedule, you'll need to discuss it, and this is an area where a lot of people get into conflict after divorce. So it's best to have a plan for how to handle those requests.

First, consider what mode you'll use for communication: phone call, email, text message, or in person.

It's tempting to send off a quick text, saying "Hey I'd like to have the kids a few extra days through next weekend while my parents are here". Text messages are very convenient — and they are frequently problematic. Because texts are best suited to very short messages, it's really easy for the recipient to misinterpret the message because of a lack of information. What seems like a simple question to you may trigger anger and resentment in the other person, and spark an argument.

In general, I recommend you never discuss schedule changes by text, and instead use phone or email. If you tend to get into arguments when talking on the phone, then use email.

When requesting a change, be sure to ask the other parent when he/she would like to make up the time. Resentments are often created when the other parent fears that the request will result in lost parenting time. By addressing this as part of the request, you make clear that you are respecting their parenting time.

3. Use business-like Communication:

With a former spouse, it is easy to let resentments or tensions complicate your communication. We often want to remind them of past transgressions or place blame. When things get heated, we might use a criticism or insult, which of course makes everything worse.

One way to change the tone of discussions is to approach them as you would a colleague at work. In a work meeting, you wouldn't insult the other person (at least I hope you wouldn't!). You'd keep the tone professional, and when you get frustrated, you'd breathe deeply and try to

find a way to reach your goal, while communicating politely.

Now, just to be clear: in this context, “business-like” doesn’t mean “cold” or “harsh” or “aggressive”. It means “professional” — the way you would behave at your job.

In a meeting at work, you’d be professional, patient, collaborative and polite as you work to achieve your goal. You’d also have reasonable boundaries.

So when you need to have a discussion or meeting with the other parent, make it as business-like as possible:

- Set an agenda ahead of time: Providing some structure will help the conversation stay on track.
- Make a request: Your request is most likely to be successful if it is brief, informative, and forward-looking.
- Don’t lean on the past to justify your request: If you start your request by listing your frustrations about the other parent’s past transgressions, you’re setting yourself up for failure — it will just put the other person on the defensive, making them less likely to agree to your request. They’ll be more focused on refuting your statements than listening to your request! It’s easy to fall into this trap. Don’t start with your frustrations about the past!
- Focus on the logistics, not on the feelings: Even if you’re angry about past events or the other person’s behavior, stay focused only on the logistics. Focus on the details of who, what, when and where.

For more tips, see "[15 Tips for Effective Co-Parenting](#)".

Family mediator Erik Wheeler is a [mediator in Vermont](#) who offers [divorce mediation](#) and post-divorce mediation.

Erik Wheeler

Accord Mediation

+1 802-391-4121

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/564828927>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2022 IPD Group, Inc. All Right Reserved.