

8 **DO'S** and **DON'TS** in Parenting Matters

Sometimes parents can lose sight of the small occurrences that can lead to large rifts and irreversible harm when trying to exist in a separation involving children. If each party remembers the following simple rules then co-parenting effectively post-separation will be maximised.



DO ...

- 1. Treat the other parent with respect** – don't speak down to them or unduly criticise them – it is not going to usurp your position to treat the other parent's position with respect even if you don't agree with it.
- 2. Treat the other parent as you would like to be treated** – nobody likes receiving critical notes about their parenting ability in a communications book, nobody likes to be yelled at, abused, denigrated, sworn at or just plain ignored. If you wouldn't like to be subjected to this treatment, don't subject somebody else to it.
- 3. Be Inclusive** – if a note comes home from school, put a copy of it with your child's bags for contact changeover, if they have received an award be sure to mention it to the other parent (even if they seem uninterested – at least you tried!). If something happens with your child when they are in your care mention it to the other parent or put it in your communications book for them to read – even a funny little anecdote about something they've done or some funny thing they said – this helps take the focus away from the dispute and reminds you both about the most important thing – your child.
- 4. Take a Step Back and Deep Breath before responding** to a proposal, a criticism or a suggested idea. Don't respond in the heat of the moment as this is when the most hurtful statements are said. Try to think about how you would have resolved these issues when you were in a caring, happy relationship and try to apply those steps now.
- 5. Be Child Focused** – remember that at the root of any proposal, the basis of any response should always be formed

by what is in the best interests of your child.

- 6. Put yourself in the Other Parent's shoes** – so he hasn't seen his kid for 2 weeks – what does another week really matter? How would you like to be on the opposite end of a statement like this? How would you feel if you only had that amount of time with your child? Sometimes it helps to take 5 minutes imagining that you were the opposite party in the scenario and how that person may be feeling.
 - 7. Be Encouraging** – parents have a positive obligation to encourage and support their child's relationship with the other parent and their extended family. No matter how much it might gall you to do so you must actively and positively encourage such a relationship.
 - 8. Enroll in a positive parenting course and a parenting orders course** which are designed to provide separated parents with the correct tools for managing their relationship with the other parent and also how to appropriately deal with children when separations occur.
- ## **DON'T ...**
- 1. Denigrate the other parent** to other people or particularly in areas where you could be overheard by your children. You might be very angry and have good reason for being angry, however your children do not need to be exposed to it.
 - 2. Involve the children by discussing parenting arrangements with them.** The children do not need to know that you are going through Court; they do not need to know what each parent has said about the other parent in Affidavit material or in general. Your job is to shield your child from the ongoing dispute as much as possible or risk psychologically and emotionally harming them.
 - 3. Give the children the power to decide parenting arrangements.** They are not the parents – you are! Never should a child be questioned by parents or relatives as to who they would prefer to live with or how often they wish to see one parent. These issues should only ever be carefully examined in the appropriate setting by a court-ordered child expert. You should never put your child in the position of feeling that they have to choose one parent over the other. You risk damaging your child's ongoing emotional health and wellbeing by doing so.
 - 4. Be Constantly Negative.** Sure it is certainly the easier path to travel, but in the end you will only be making co-parenting more difficult for yourself and your child. Try to think of at least one good thing to put into your communications.
 - 5. Involve third parties.** New partners and family members should not be included in parenting arrangements. You may have formed a 'new family' with these people but the primary parenting relationship will only ever be between you and the other parent. Often, without meaning to, the involvement of a third party can lead to more acrimonious relations with the other parent and can de-stabilise the situation further. By all means use them for emotional support for yourself but they should not be telling you what decisions to make, they should limit their involvement in discussions and negotiations between the parties and they certainly should not be included in mediations, etc.
 - 6. Be Exclusionary** – do not deliberately hide school event notices, do not deliberately refuse to allow the other parent to be aware of, and participate in, sporting activities, functions, events, important medical and health discussions and schooling issues. No parent wants to feel excluded from the small, but important, regular events that make parenting so enjoyable (unless there are Domestic Violence issues).
 - 7. Talk to the children in negative tones about the other parent.** This is damaging to the children and they receive conflicted information. A child can perceive many words as having a 'negative' connotation. For example don't say "You have to go to your Mother's house". This is negative to a child. Say "Come on you are going to have a great time at your Mum's house and do lots of fun things".
 - 8. Exclude the other parent's extended family.** This is unfair on your child who deserves to have a relationship with all of their relatives and extended families. If you really do have great difficulties in communicating with your former family members, then try to ensure that the other parent maintains communication when the child is in their care. Some nice small, but meaningful touches to be inclusive in situations where you may not want to engage in verbal communication is to ensure that your child sends birthday and Christmas cards and a seasonal 'newsletter' containing some updated pictures of the children and a few lines about what they have been up to over the last month or two would go a long way to bridging hurts and maintaining the lines of communication for when your child is old enough to pursue the relationship on their own.