

Handouts



Contents

Page number

Building self-confidence	174
Personal crisis plan	175
Hi - I'm the real me	176
Guidelines of a child's rights	177
Conflict resolution styles	178
Win/win: Six Steps to problem solving	179
Some of the ways that children can react to their parents' separation	180
Contact guidelines	181
Communication tips	182
Some experiences of grief	183
Positive discipline techniques	184
Conflict resolution notes	188
Talking with teenagers	190
How to tell the children	191
Strategies for building children's self-esteem	192
CSA fact sheet - Information for separated parents	194
Sally's story	196
Tea-time topics for families	197
Developing a parenting coalition between ex-partners	199
Baskets	200
Family shield	201
Stresses for children in repartnered families	202
Guidelines for family meetings	203
Sentence completion sheet	204
Children's feelings in repartnered families	205
Parenting roles in the repartnered family	206
Finance and feeling	207

Building self-confidence

It is your job to build your own confidence.
 You cannot rely on others to do it for you.
 You are you, regardless of what you achieve, own or say.
 Accept yourself because you exist. It is not selfish to be self-thinking.

Getting yourself organised:



Self-talk

Separate 'What I am' from 'What I do'

e.g. I am stupid to what I did was stupid
 I am a failure to I failed at this
 I am tactless to what I said was tactless

Work out what 'ought' and 'should' demand me to do, and replace them with a helpful alternative.

e.g. Change 'I ought to be able to do this faster' to 'it would be helpful to me if I could do this faster, but it's not a disaster if I don't'.



Self-praise

'I did that well'
 'I'm pleased with the way I did that'
 'I didn't do so well, but it was a good try'
 'I did the best I could'



Self-encouragement – brag a bit

When feeling discouraged, stop and work out what discouraging things you are saying to yourself, and choose a healthier alternative.

e.g. Change 'I'll never be able to manage' to 'I'll give it a go and see'. Often we notice the weaknesses in ourselves. We often do not notice our strengths. Celebrating your good qualities will allow you to look at your other qualities less critically.

Getting into action:

- Develop reasonable and achievable goals to avoid setting yourself up for failure.
- Have some goals and interests that are for you, apart from the children and work.
- Don't accept other's opinions without questioning whether they are reasonable.
- Listen when people compliment you, without relying on it to feel okay.
- Make time for yourself. Give yourself permission to relax.
- Do something you really like doing, rather than putting it off.
- Allow yourself to explore new areas.
- Make times when you can talk to someone about your thoughts and feelings.
- Enjoy your achievements!

Personal crisis plan

2



KEEP IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS IN WALLET/PURSE

- Home _____
- Work _____
- School _____
- Family e.g. mum/dad: _____
- Friends _____
- Doctor _____
- Support hotline _____
- Counsellor _____
- Police _____

Keep change for phone calls or buy a phonecard.

Checklist of things I need:

- Driver's licence
- Car registration
- Birth certificate
- Marriage certificate
- Children's birth certificate
- Divorce papers
- Social security/Health care card
- School records
- Medical records
- Money, bankbooks, credit cards
- Keys – house/car/office
- Medications: yourself and children
- Passport(s)/work permits
- House: rental/lease agreement, deeds
- Mortgage payment book
- Current unpaid bills
- Insurance papers
- Telephone address book
- Children's favourite toys
- Items of sentimental value to you.
- Add any extras

Support

- I can ask
_____ Ph. _____

- People I can go to (if possible list several)

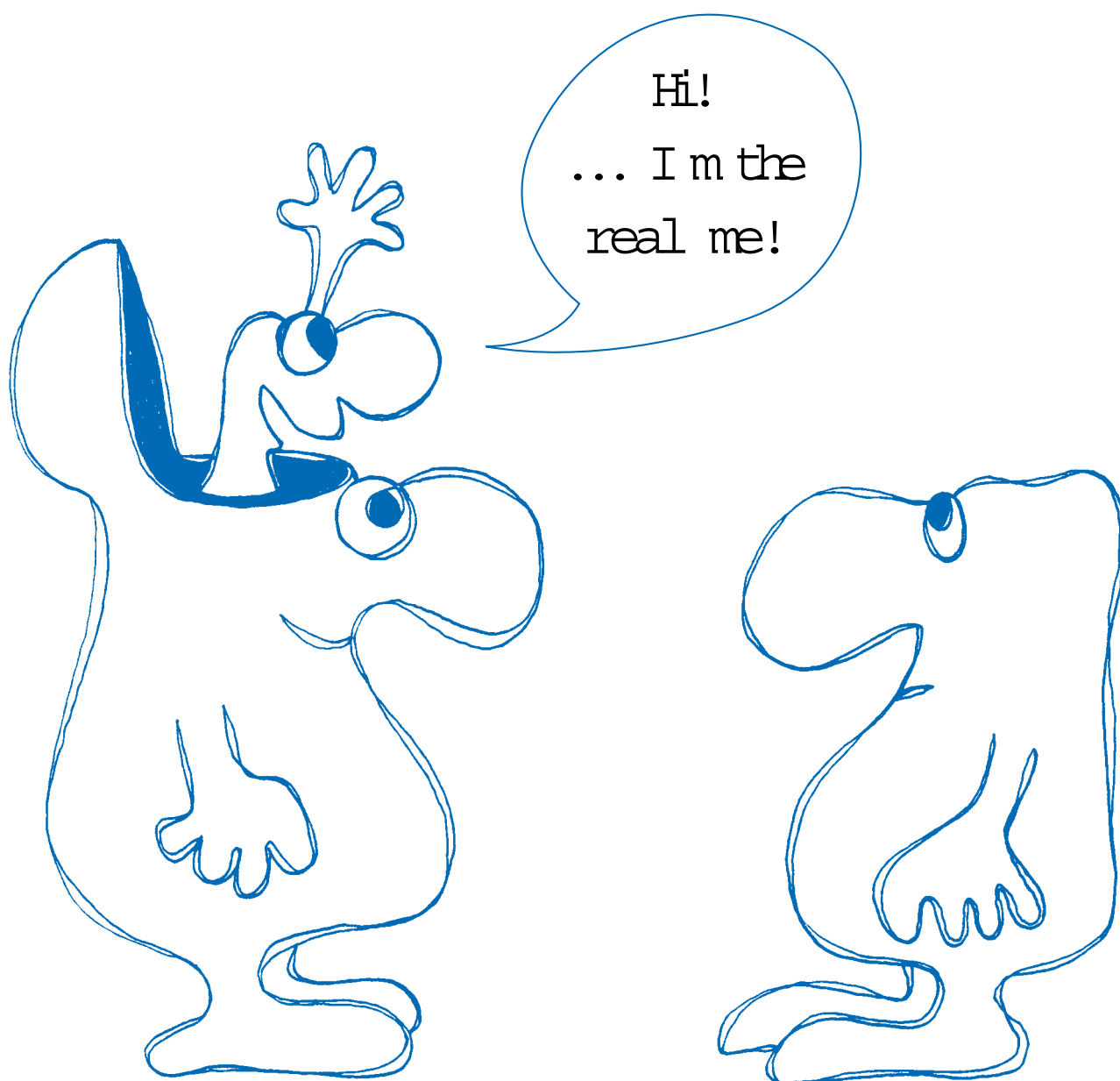
- People with whom I can leave extra money,
car keys, clothes, and copies of documents

- An intervention order can be obtained from

Contact

- Social security
- Bank
- School – ensure they know who else may
pick up the children
- People who take care of my children
For example childcare, kindergarten, family or
friends.
- Work (if appropriate).

Source: Lewis-Nicholson A., Unpublished material, LifeWorks.



Source: Gerrard, Howden, Stepfamily Association of Victoria, 1998.

Guidelines of a child's rights

4



A child has a right to:



A continuing relationship with both parents



Not be treated as a piece of property, but as a human being recognised to have unique feelings, ideas, and desires



Continuing care and proper guidance from each parent



Not to be unduly influenced by either parent to see the other parent differently



Express love, friendship and respect for both parents



Freedom from having to hide emotions or be ashamed of them



An explanation that the impending action of divorce was in no way caused by the child's actions



Not be the subject and/or source of any and all arguments



Continuing, honest feedback with respect to the divorce process and its impact on the changing relationships in the family



Maintain regular contact with both parents and a clear explanation for any change in plans and/or cancellations



Enjoy a pleasurable relationship with both parents and never to be employed as a manipulative bargaining tool.

Source: The Wisconsin Supreme Court

Note: Refer to the Australian Family Law Act 1975 (60B) for Australian principles www.familycourt.gov.au

Conflict resolution styles

Style	Characteristic behaviour	User justification
Avoidance	Non-confrontational. Ignores or passes over issues. Denies issues are a problem.	Differences too minor or too great to resolve. Attempts might damage relationships or create even greater problems.
Accommodating	Agreeable, non-assertive behaviour. Cooperative even at the expense of personal goals.	Not worth risking damage to relationships or general disharmony.
Win/lose	Confrontational, assertive and aggressive. Must win at any cost.	Survival of the fittest. Must prove superiority. Most ethically or professionally correct.
Compromising	It's important that all parties achieve basic goals and maintain good relationships. Aggressive but cooperative.	No one person or idea is perfect. There is more than one good way to do anything.
Problem Solving	Needs of both parties are legitimate and important. High respect for mutual support. Assertive and cooperative.	When parties openly discuss issues, a mutually beneficial solution can be found without anyone making a major concession.





Win-Win:

Six steps to problem solving

1. Define the problem in terms of needs rather than solutions

- Each has their say. What they want or need.
- Hear how it is for them. You don't have to agree!
- Explain how it is for you.

2. Brainstorm alternatives

- Write down all ideas you both come up with. They can be off the wall!
- Don't judge them yet, just hear them.

3. Evaluate alternatives

- Begin to consider each idea. Try to be open-minded.

4. Choose solutions

- What would work for both of you.
- Aim for mutual agreement and satisfaction of needs. Choose solutions.
- What would work for both of you?
- Aim for mutual agreement and satisfaction of needs.

5. Action plan

- Who? What? When? How?
- If commitment and energy are lagging, perhaps review the steps... have all needs been expressed, are the solutions practical enough to meet these needs?

6. Assess outcomes

- Make a date to evaluate the solution
 - How will you know if your plan(s) are working?
 - If plans are not working, have the real needs changed? Were there enough ideas? Were some better ones overlooked?
-

Some of the ways children can react to their parents' separation

Age group	Reaction to separation
Toddler	Regression, forgetfulness, bewilderment, aggression and neediness.
3 - 5 years	Guilt, depression, diminished self-esteem and self-image.
5 - 6 years	Anxiety and regression, whingeing, mood changes, tantrums, reluctance to separate from adult.
7 - 8 years	Loss of age-appropriate defences, intense sadness and longing, loyalty conflicts.
9 - 10 years	Conscious and intense anger towards parents, struggle to master self through denial, courage, bravado, support-seeking, fears, identity problems, health and school problems.
Adolescence	Painful feelings, concern about financial needs and own future as marriage partner, de-idealising parents, precipitous independence.

Webber, R., *From Living in a Stepfamily* Leaders resource, p. 63, 1989, ACER Aust.

Contact guidelines

8



Ensure children know you approve of contact with their other parent.



Actively encourage children to attend and enjoy visits.



Interrogation of a child by a parent lessens their enjoyment.



Visits occur more smoothly when the parents can talk reasonably and encourage positive feelings about each other.



Avoid making negative comments about your ex-partner to your children.



Extended visits allow a new relationship to develop in a more realistic manner.



With younger children parents should assume the responsibility for the visits, rather than leaving the children to decide whether they want to go or not.



Make every effort to keep timetables concerning the children which have been agreed upon with the ex-partner.



Children need consistent and stable schedules.



To assist in an emergency, parents need to give an indication of general whereabouts and contact telephone numbers.



If a child withdraws during or after a visit, there may be no problem, they may simply be overwhelmed or adapting to change.

Communication tips



Separate partner issues from parent issues.



Your partner is now a business partner in the parenting business.



Schedule business meeting times, define topics and stick to them.



Discuss one topic at a time until some resolution is achieved.



Work out clear guidelines regarding roles, visits, decision-making.

For example, What types of things to inform each other of

- illness
- important events: school functions
- appointments arranged: dentist, doctor



Do not discuss issues if either person is affected by drugs or alcohol.



Avoid name-calling, swearing, criticism. Avoid yelling!

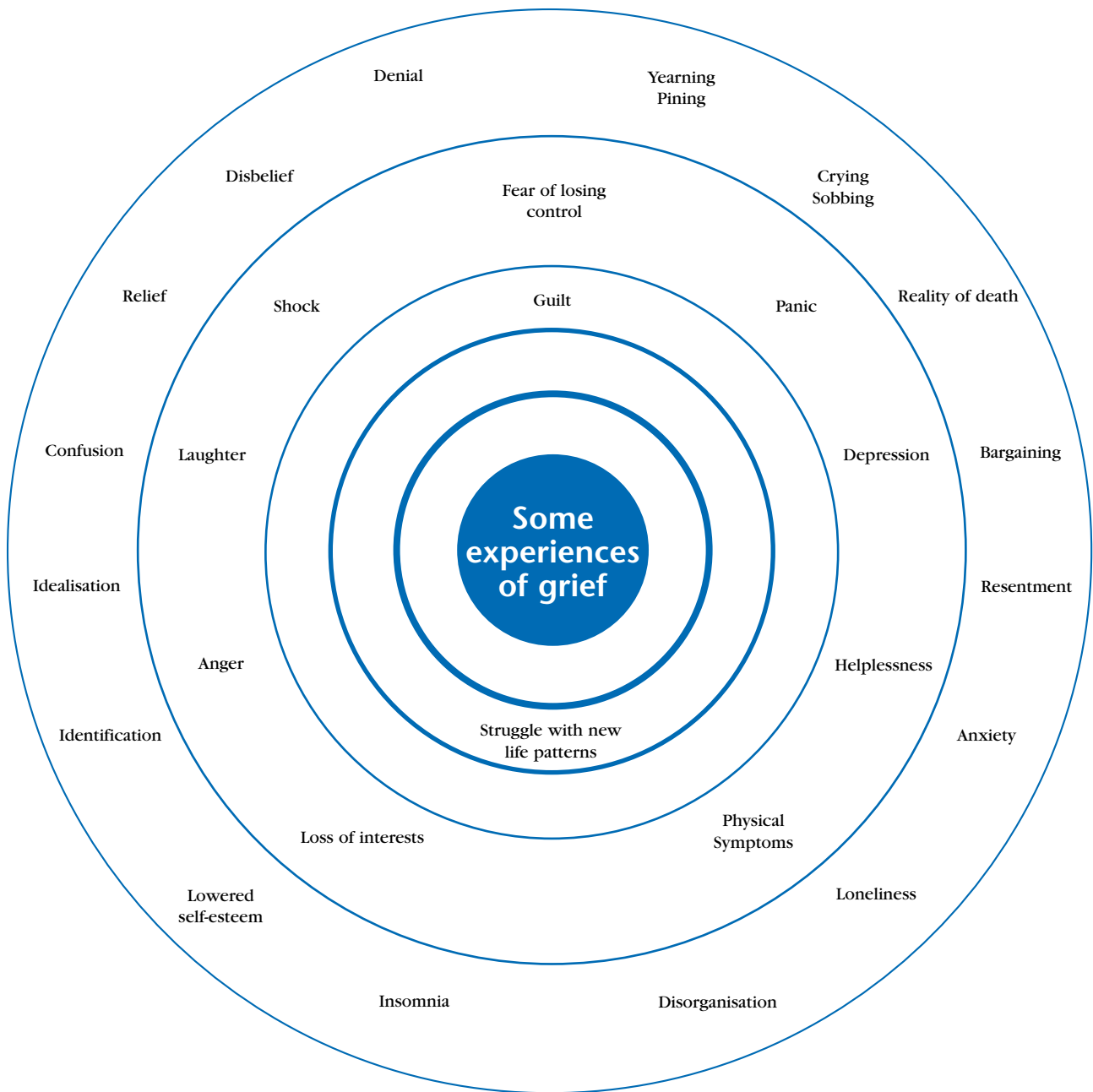


Understand that there are likely to be two perspectives on all issues.



Source: Lewis-Nicholson A., Unpublished Material. Lifeworks. 1998.

Some experiences of grief



Adapted from: National Association of Loss & Grief, *About Loss & Grief & Support*, NALAG Vic Inc. (03) 9331 3555

It is important to experiment and see which of these techniques work for you and your children.

Different things work for different people – and each child is different within the family.

You may need a wide repertoire for handling different children effectively.

1. Let children know what you expect/set clear limits

Be clear and direct about what you want your child to do.

For example, 'You may play with Brian until I call you for lunch. Then you must come home'.

2. Redirect

Children need to know what they can and can't do

For example, 'The couch is not for jumping on, but you can jump on the floor'.

3. Have positive expectations

Use positive language to talk to your children.

For example, 'It would be helpful if you put your toys away'. Compare this with negative talk such as 'You never put your toys away! You are so lazy'.

4. Give a warning

Warn children that you are beginning to tire of their behaviour.

For example, 'I am getting tired of that. If you keep it up, I am going to send you to your room or unplug the stereo or stop you reading the story.'

5. Stay simple

Rather than a long-winded speech, a short statement or word can help a child to cooperate

For example, A stern glance while saying 'I don't like that. Cut it out'.

6. Be clear and emphatic

When you are not prepared to discuss the situation, say so.

For example, 'You must put this jacket on now. You have no choice in the matter'.

7. Say 'as soon as'

Make sure a child is sure of your request.

For example, 'As soon as you brush your teeth, I'll read the book to you'.

8. Use playfulness

Playfulness can be a wonderful way to gain cooperation.

For example, 'Let's pack up the toys before they hide from us, and the toy basket'.



9. Turn the problem into a game (for younger children)

Play a game appropriate to the child's age.

For example, 'If I close my eyes and count to 10, I bet your jumper will be magic and put itself on'.

10. Write a note (this is for older children)

For example, 'It would be a great help if you bring in the clothes before I get home from work. I'll be home at 5 pm'.

11. Solve problems together

Children and parents can work together at problem-solving around a discipline issue.

Children can have some excellent ideas about what should happen to them. Sometimes it's good to wait until everyone has calmed down.

12. Say 'you wish'

Acknowledging a child's wish may relieve their feelings, making them able to accept reality more easily.

For example, 'You wish you were grown-up and could watch this TV show, but now is your bedtime'.

13. Let children air their feelings

For example, 'Mummy I don't want to eat tea, because potatoes make me feel sick, and I hate them'.

14. Be flexible

For example, 'You can put up whatever you like on your walls, so long as you don't use nails'.

Older children need a little more freedom. Give them the opportunity to make their own decisions with clear guidelines.

15. Offer choices instead of threats

Threats are dares. Children find dares hard to resist.

For example, 'If you change the TV channel one more time, I'll...' Offer a choice, 'You can watch channel X or the TV will be switched off'. Follow through with your statement if the behaviour continues: 'You have changed channels again, so I will switch off the TV. Choose another activity'.

16. Be firm but kind

- State the rule and the reason for it, for example, 'Walls are not to write on. Clean walls look nice in our home'.
- Offer an alternative activity, for example, 'Here's a book to colour in'.
- Repeat the limit, even several times. Children do not jump on command. Remember that they are learning.

- Stick to your rules, don't confuse children with mixed messages.

For example, 'You've written on the wall, so I guess a little more writing won't matter'.

- State limits impersonally as it removes the focus from the child and looks at the rule itself.

For example, 'You're really naughty for writing on walls' (focus on child). 'Walls are not for writing on' (impersonal, focus on rule).

17. Don't rub it in

Don't dwell on the matter or say 'I told you so'. To 'rub it in' creates a resentful child.

18. Make realistic requests

Your requests should meet the 'age and stage' your child is at. Parents often expect more than their child is capable of. Recurring conflict over a certain situation could indicate your child isn't capable of doing what you ask.

19. Be reasonable

Make reasonable requests and change rules when they no longer apply.

For example, Young children go to bed early, so as they grow, their bedtime needs to change.

20. Create a distraction (for younger children)

Don't mention the misbehaviour, but take the child's mind off it by diverting their attention.

For example, A toddler is grizzling, and you attract their attention with a colourful ball.

21. Make a deal

Save this for 'time in need'. When you are exhausted and need to make things easier for yourself. The promise of a treat can come in handy.

For example, 'If you are quiet while we talk to our friends, I will take you to the park tomorrow'. (Make sure you follow through with the reward.)

22. Encourage a child to take responsibility

Encourage children to take responsibility for their behaviour.

For example, If a child has hurt another's feelings, ask the child to find a way to make the hurt better.

23. Give chances

If children don't improve their behaviour immediately, give them some more time.

For example, Three chances to meet your request.

24. Count

Most children love to get a job done before you can count to ten.



25. Make a request

Save commands and orders for when they are truly necessary.

For example, A dangerous situation.

Try a polite request to get other things done.

For example, 'How about cleaning things up?'

26. Give in

Sometimes it's not worth the battle. If you decide this you could say.

For example, 'I guess this really doesn't matter after all'.

27. Use role reversal

You be the child, let the child be you. Children can sometimes understand the rule better when they are 'the parent' and tell it to you 'the child'.

28. Provide a versatile environment

For example, inside, outside, quiet times, stimulating activities (such as loud dancing music). Make your home more child-friendly or child-proof.

29. Notice effort and improvement

Tell children when you notice they are trying to improve.

For example, after forgetting to put their plate on the sink after meals, a child begins to do this. You could say 'Thank you for putting your plate on the sink'.

30. Appreciate and acknowledge good behaviour

Spend a great deal of time praising good behaviour. This encourages its continuation.

31. Family meetings

Have a regular time to get together as a family (without the TV on) to discuss issues and plan things together.

32. Ignore some behaviour

Some behaviour, if not harming others or the child, will stop when ignored.

Why conflict resolution?

Conflict is a normal and natural part of family life. As young children learn to express their wants and needs, conflict with parents, siblings, friends, and others often results. Young children can learn many positive things from these conflicts — how to deal with other people, how feelings affect behaviour, and how to be assertive. The aim of creative conflict resolution is to handle these conflicts in ways that will meet the needs of everyone involved. The more young children see and experience this kind of conflict resolution, the more likely they are to handle their own conflicts positively and non-violently.

There are many ways to handle conflict and most of them have potential uses and limitations. Negotiation is talking things out and solving problems. Being directive is the opposite of negotiating, it's saying, 'This is how it's going to be'. Compromise is when both parties give something up to reach an agreement. Avoidance is not dealing with the conflict at all. Mediation involves a neutral third party helping you to negotiate a solution. All can be appropriate depending on the situation.

The example you set shows your child that conflict need not escalate into violence and aggression. This is particularly important for young children who are developing their understanding of how the world works, based on what they see around them. How you handle conflict can help your child learn critical skills like problem solving and negotiation. Conflict doesn't have to destroy relationships — it can actually improve them.

Conflict resolution with your child

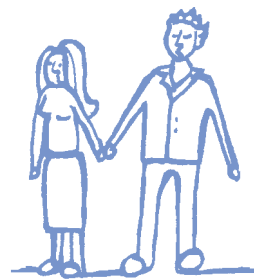
- Acknowledge your child's feelings. Children can't always get what they want in a conflict, but they can have their feelings recognised. Saying, 'You sound pretty angry' or 'I can see you're upset about this,' lets children know that their feelings are important, whatever the outcome of the conflict. It also helps them learn to name their feelings.
- Young children have difficulty understanding how their actions affect others. Re-enact a conflict using puppets or stuffed animals. You can use these toys to help your child name the feelings in the conflict, identify the sequence of events, and develop new solutions to the problems.
- Avoid making personal attacks ('You're such an idiot') or global statements ('You never get ready on time'). Such statements will make the conflict worse and increase the strain between you and your child. Instead, give your own perspective by starting your statements with 'I,' such as 'I'm frustrated when you aren't ready on time because it makes us late'.
- Look at the conflict as a problem to be solved instead of a contest to be won. Involve children in the solution. Say: 'Here's the problem as I see it. How do you see it? What are we going to do about it?'
- Young children are often confused by too many choices. When you have a conflict with your child, present two or three possible options that are acceptable to both of you. Then, with your child, choose the one that seems to be best.



- Using conflict resolution does not mean giving up your authority. Young children need limits.
- Be aware of how you usually respond to conflict. Do you avoid it? Fly off the handle? Take charge? Negotiate? If you find yourself relying on the same methods for handling conflict, try to expand your range of peacemaking skills.
- Know your 'angry triggers,' the words, behaviours, attitudes that set you off. Knowing your angry triggers can help you manage your feelings during conflicts. Children need to see that people can be angry without being abusive or out-of-control.
- Aim for win-win solutions in which both you and your child get part of what you really wanted. With young children it's helpful to call these 'thumbs up' solutions. These are when both of you can give the solutions a 'thumbs up' sign.
- Set up a way to deal with conflicts that affect the whole family. You might have family meetings to discuss problems and come up with mutual solutions. Some families have a 'conflict jar' — conflicts or family problems are written down and placed in the jar for a family meeting.
- Let your children know the family's values about conflict. Say: 'In this family, we don't hit when we're angry,' or 'We talk things out instead of fighting'. Make it clear that violence is not acceptable in or out of the home.
- Make common courtesy a family value. Good manners are a mark of respect and can help to ease tensions in conflicts both at home and in the community.
- Read stories to your children that show characters resolving conflicts in constructive, non-violent ways. These reading sessions can be a wonderful way to build family closeness and teach conflict resolution.
- Young children are often attracted to play that uses pretend violence, toy soldiers, and weapons. This is normal part of growing up. While it may be tempting to try to ban this play, many parents have found that this isn't effective. Instead, suggest compelling alternatives to engage your child in constructive, non-violent play.
- If your child has seen or experienced violence, it's important to talk to them about it. Young children will often assume that the violence they see in the world, both on television and in person, can happen to them. Listen and reflect their feelings 'That must have been scary.' It's important to assure your child that the adults in their life — parents, school staff — are working hard to keep children safe.

These notes are closely based on a guide developed for the American Public Television Outreach Alliance by the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) National Centre, an initiative of Educators for Social Responsibility. (Funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.)

- Give positive feedback regularly.
- Explore an issue, looking for options and consequences rather than giving advice. Talk less and listen more.
- Don't remind them of past mistakes — if they make mistakes, have faith that they will do better next time.
- Let some things go by. Only argue over 'the big stuff'.
- Let them know they are special and loved.
- Help them set short-and long-term goals.
- Don't ask too many questions. When you do ask questions, explain why you are doing so.
- Set clear boundaries.
- Avoid giving ultimatums.





Talk to them together to avoid confusion.



Take age and level of understanding of each child into account.



Then speak to each separately, check understanding, let them ask questions.



Tell them they will be told about all major decisions.



Tell them it will not be easy, but they will survive this.



Let them know that the decision is final.



Remind them that they are really important in your life. Remember though, children are quick to pick up on the difference between what you say and what you do, especially at times when there are major events and changes in their lives.



Understand that they may want to ask questions more than once.

Strategies for building children's self-esteem

Statements that show your children that you appreciate them:

- I'm lucky to know you
- You are a pleasure to know
- You are important
- You are unique
- I like to see/hug/hold/rock/kiss you
- I love you
- It's good to see you
- Good morning
- I'm glad I'm getting to know you
- I am glad to share this time with you
- I'm glad you are here
- I'm glad you live in our house
- I'm glad you came today
- I enjoy being with you
- I like to sit by you
- I'm glad we are riding/walking/playing/working together
- I thought about you during the week
- I like you
- I'm glad you are in my house/class/group/life
- I think you are a great kid
- I'm glad you are my friend
- Will you play with me?
- Thanks for being you.

Actions that show your children that you care about them:

- Smile
- Hugs, pats, kisses (if they are comfortable with this)
- Handshakes
- Listening to your child
- Sharing something important
- Spending time with your child
- Being the one who calls/start conversations/suggests things
- Using your child's name.



Strategies for building children's self-esteem

Statements that show your children that you approve of their behaviour:

- 'I like the way you handled that'
- 'I like the way you tackled that problem'
- 'I'm glad you enjoy learning'
- 'I'm glad you're pleased with it'
- 'Since you're not satisfied, what do you think you can do so that you will be pleased with it?'
- 'It looks as if you enjoyed that!'
- 'How do you feel about it?'

Statements that show your children that you have confidence in them:

- 'Knowing you, I am sure you will do fine'
- 'You will make it'
- 'I have confidence in your judgement'
- 'That's a rough one, but I am sure you will work it out'
- 'You will figure it out.'

Statements that recognise your child's efforts and improvement

- 'It seems to me that you really worked hard on that'
- 'It seems to me that you have spent a lot of time thinking that through'
- 'It seems to me that you are improving'
- 'It seems to me that you may not feel you have reached your goal, but look how far you have come'
- 'Look at the progress you have made.'

Phrases that focus on your child's contributions and abilities:

- 'Thanks, that helped a lot'
- 'It was thoughtful of you'
- 'Thanks, I really appreciated that because it makes my job much easier'
- 'I know you are really good at that, I was wondering if you could help me with it'
- 'I really enjoyed today. Thanks!'

16 Information for separated parents

“If you have recently ended your relationship and there are children from that relationship, you need to make arrangements for the financial support of your children.”

The Child Support Agency has a range of services and information products available to help separated parents manage their child support responsibilities.

When parents separate they need to make arrangements for the financial support of their children. This fact sheet outlines a range of services and information products available through the Child Support Agency (CSA) to help separated parents manage their child support responsibilities.

Support for parents

Separation is a stressful time, however there are many services available to help you deal with the issues involved. These services include certain government benefits such as Family Tax Benefit and entitlements to housing.

CSA also provides a number of services to support parents:

- **Mediation** — mediation means using a third person, a mediator, to help both parents discuss and reach an agreement. It is about making important decisions for the future. Mediation can assist parents in sorting out decisions about parenting, property, finances and debt. Both parents will need to agree in order for them to try mediation.

Mediation is not counselling and it is not about helping separated people get back together. For more information, including mediation brochures and details of mediation service providers, call CSA on 131 272 (for the cost of a local call).

- **CSA fact sheets** — these publications cover many issues surrounding child support including *What is Child Support, Agreements, Non-Agency Payments and Change in Income*. Call CSA on 131 272 for these fact sheets.
- **Community Services Directory** — this is an information database that contains contact details and general information on community services across Australia. By contacting CSA on 131 272 staff are able to provide information about service providers in your local area for:
 - Counselling — for separation issues, grief, crisis;
 - Mediation — assistance with coming to an agreement about child support, property;
 - Legal — including property settlement issues;
 - Financial;
 - Parenting skills; and
 - Welfare and emergency — emergency accommodation, food, clothing, welfare.

Arranging child support privately

Where possible CSA encourages parents to manage their child support responsibilities themselves. Private collection allows parents to decide on a flexible, private system of payment. While the amount of child support is sometimes set by CSA or by the courts, parents are encouraged to arrange payments in a way that suits them both.



ChildSupport
Helping parents manage
their responsibilities



Court Order

If parents separated before 1 October 1989 and all their children were born before that date, you must ask the Family Court to order how much child support is to be paid. You may apply to CSA to collect the child support until the child turns 18, once the court has made a decision on the amount of child support payable.

**Please note that the court may decide that child support is still payable after the child turns 18.*

Child Support Assessment

If one of your children was born on or after 1 October 1989 or you separated after that date, you may apply for a child support assessment. CSA will use a formula based on the incomes of both parties to calculate the amount of child support payable.

If you are a payee and you receive a payment through the Family Assistance Office (FAO) at more than the base rate of Family Tax Benefit, you must apply for an assessment from CSA. Contact the FAO on 136 150 for more information.

Child Support Agreement

If both parents agree, they may choose to register a child support agreement. A child support agreement can be used to set out different ways of working out how child support should be paid. For example, an agreement could be registered to recognise ongoing payments to third parties (mortgage payments, school fees).

An agreement may replace the need for you to contact CSA each time you make a payment to the payee or a third party. This would apply for the period that the agreement is registered.

If you need further information on agreements call CSA on 131 272 for a copy of the Agreements fact sheet.

Payment Options

Parents have 3 options to consider for the collection of child support:

1. Self Administration

If you are a parent receiving only the base rate of Family Tax Benefit, or you do not receive a benefit, you do not have to apply for a child support assessment. You can make a private arrangement to support your children. CSA will not be directly involved but will help you calculate the child support payable.

2. Private Collection

If the payee receives more than the base rate of Family Tax Benefit, they will be required to apply for a child support assessment. Contact the FAO on 136 150 for more information. Parents may choose to have an administrative assessment issued by CSA but collect the amount privately. Where these private arrangements are not successful, CSA will act as a safety net and recommence collection.

3. CSA Collect

The payee may make an application for child support and ask that CSA collect the amount payable. CSA Collect payments should be made directly to CSA—not directly to the payee.

For help and information, call CSA on 131 272.

www.csa.gov.au

Definitions

Payee – person who is eligible to receive child support.

Payer – parent who is liable to pay child support.

Family Tax Benefit – a benefit to help parents with the cost of raising children.

Family Assistance Office – a government agency which provides services for families and sole parents.

Private collection allows parents to choose a flexible, private system of payments.

Sally lived in the suburbs with her family. She had an older sister Louise who, when she started school, was found to be clever and beautiful. Sally had a brother, Tom, two years younger than she, who was a handful for his mother. Sally was never any trouble.

When Sally went to school, she did not find the lessons quite as easy as her sister.

Sally was a child sandwiched between two very noisy, strong-willed siblings. In Sally's early teens, her mother became sick and was hospitalised frequently. Sally took care of her younger brother, often cooked the family meals and did most of the housework.

Louise did not help much as she had a new boyfriend and was always going out. Sally's father was busy and had little time for the family and no time to help. Sally took on the extra work without question or complaint. Tom began to go out with his friends and spent less time with Sally.

Sally spent a lot of time in the kitchen and enjoyed experimenting with cooking foreign food. While she took care of everyone else she daydreamed.

Sally left school at 18, and looked for work. Louise was then at university and Tom was getting extra help with his studies. Sally found a job that she didn't like much but it covered her living expenses and enabled her to buy a car when she turned 20. She continued living at home and taking care of the family.

Then she was invited to a 21st birthday party and a new chapter in her life unfolded. She met a young man called Gerry. He was drinking quite a bit and on his way out he fell down the steps and needed to go to the hospital. Sally was one of the few sober people left and she volunteered to drive him to the casualty department. They later began to go out together and became engaged six months later. Gerry thought Sally would be the perfect wife and mother and they looked forward to having children.

Gerry was very ambitious and worked long hours. Sally continued to work and waited patiently at night for Gerry to come home, making sure there was always a hot meal for him to come home to. Babies did not come, and Sally discovered she was infertile. The couple were devastated. They began to have arguments over petty things and Gerry began to stay at work even longer. They spent little time together. Finally Gerry had an affair and the couple decided to split up.



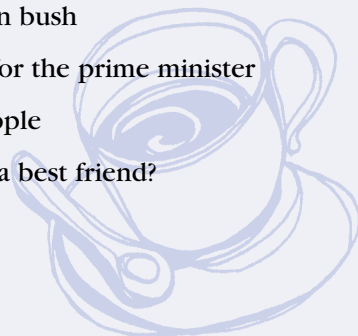


The following topics are suggestions for mums and dads and step-parents to have ‘up their sleeves’ when having meals or spending time with their children.

Make sure you have something to say to start the ball rolling. Look for opportunities to share your experiences, to inform, to teach and to encourage. Children will learn to listen, share, take turns and be curious along the way. Remember to actively listen to your children without preaching, criticising or putting them down. During these conversations everyone must feel free to say what they like without being offensive. It’s okay to be silly, irrational or unrealistic.

General tips

- Favourite songs
- Clothes
- Favourite drinks
- Favourite meals, fruits, sweets, or take-aways
- Funniest movies
- Saddest movies
- Best special effects in movies
- Holidays you have had
- The first ride you’d go on at a theme park
- Best sand castles
- Dolphins and whales
- Savings and money
- Hobbies
- Things to collect
- Jobs and careers
- Enthusiasm
- Meanings of sayings, for example: ‘pleased as punch’, ‘with flying colours’, etc.
- Riddles
- Jokes
- Discrimination
- Courage – what is it, where have you experienced it or noticed it?
- Sharing the load – chores and how to be grown up about them
- Fire-walking
- Parachuting
- Football (or some other sport)
- Hang-gliding
- Acting
- Saying ‘sorry’
- Saying ‘goodbye’ – losing friends and pets. Keeping in touch with friends by letters and phone
- Teachers
- Doctors and dentists. What do you think is the hardest/best/yuckiest thing about their job?
- Aliens
- Time machines
- Computers
- The Australian bush
- Suggestions for the prime minister
- Labelling people
- What makes a best friend?





Creative topics

- If you could be an animal, what kind of animal would you be, and why?
- If the house was burning down, what three things would you like to save? (things, not people — we know you would save the people first!)
- What are your favourite names, what will you call your children?
- If you were lost on a desert island, what things would be most useful? (For example, matches, compass, rope, first aid, recipe book, teddy bear, doona, seeds, games, books, Tim Tams.)
- Mimicking famous people, for example, can you talk like Arnold Schwarzenegger?
- Poetry — create short instant rhymes. (For example, 'Angela the tarantula')
- Celebrate something, a completion, a success, an anniversary, the dog's birthday.

Personal topics

- What have you been dreaming about lately? (Sleep dreams or daydreams)
- What is your best quality? What is your mum's, brother's, sister's best quality?
- What is the best news you have heard this week?
- If you could be the best at any sport, what would it be and why? What medals/awards would you like to win?
- What is embarrassment? When have you been embarrassed? How can you help someone to feel better when they are embarrassed?
- Are you ever taken for granted? What do you do that you would like to be thanked for?
- Are you good at anything that your teacher doesn't know about?

- Play a 'feelings' game. Remember a feeling, say when you felt this way. What colour was the feeling, how big was it, how strong was it (out of 10, or as strong as a big truck), what was it like in nature (a storm, a kitten, birds flying on a calm day, a mother cow nuzzling her calf)?
- Family history — and the stories that you have heard about your ancestors, for example, how did Grandma meet Grandpa, what countries did they come from?
- What do you really believe in — what is worth fighting for?
- Looking after your body — nutrition, smoking, exercise, junk food, sport, sleep.

General topics

- What place in Australia would you most like to visit?
- What place in the world would you most like to explore?
- What is the most exciting thing you can think of that you would like to try? For example, caving, surfing, bungy-jumping, parachuting. What would this feel like? How old would you have to be? How scary would it be?
- Talk about a famous person. For example, who are Nelson Mandela, Helen Keller, Anne Frank?
- Plan an imaginary party. Who will you invite, what theme will you have, what would you eat, how will you decorate, what would you wear?
- Plan an outing or a holiday.
- Weather. Don't laugh! — Talk about hailstorms, what is the hottest month (February), the wettest (October), tidal waves, monsoons, willy-willies and tornadoes.
- What would you like to do for others? What would you like to invent that would make the world a better place?

Source: O'Brien, Carmel, Unpublished material, LifeWorks.



Developing a parenting coalition between ex-partners

A parenting coalition is a business arrangement between households.

Advantages:

- Adults can cooperate with each other. They do not have to remain defensive.
- Children's divided loyalties are reduced.
- Children are more comfortable and less fearful because anything they do or say will not cause hostility towards either household.
- Responsibility for raising children is shared.
- More flexibility between households is possible.
- Step-parents are included in decisions which affect their lives.
- Extra adults working on issues means ex-partners are less likely to fall into past, negative patterns.
- Having all adults working together informs children that their lives have now moved on. The new couple (or couples where both ex-partners have formed a relationship) is now the adult unit that the child responds to.

What gets in the way

Adults may fear that their children will want to spend more time in their other household. If both households feel fearful and threatened it is unlikely that they will be able to cooperate.

Adults may be talking openly in critical ways about an adult in the other household.

Remember not to make critical comments in front of the children. Where children report criticisms made of your household, explain that you are sorry this opinion is held because the other parent does not live here and so may not be aware what it really is like. By not putting down the other household, children are free to develop their own opinions.

Having a high level of contact in relation to the children, leaving the step-parent out of situations, responding to many unexpected requests, can indicate that one or both ex-partners have not fully separated. This can lead to the step-parent feeling insecure. If this happens contact between ex-partners can then be experienced as upsetting, rather than positive.

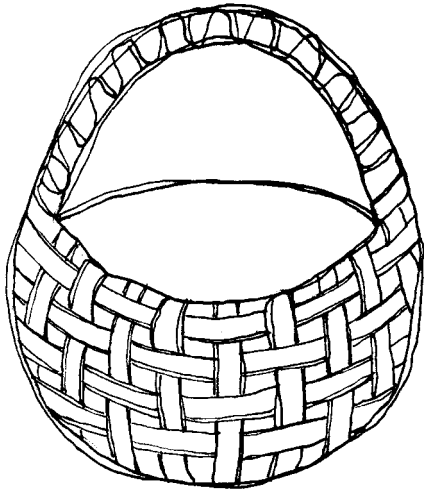
How to get a parenting coalition started

Begin by building up trust between households by:

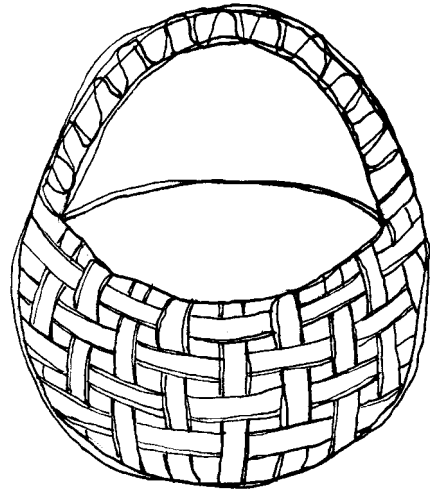
- Making positive comments to the adults in the other household, for example 'Thank you for driving Jan to basketball'.
- Keeping the other household informed about important events. For example, when a child is ill, let the other household know what the doctor has advised and the treatment that was recommended.
- Using a third party such as a local mediator to help you agree on school and other arrangements involving the children, if this proves difficult to do on your own. A mediator is a person who will assist both parties to come to a mutually-acceptable decision, without siding with one party against the other. A mediator does not offer advice or make decisions for the people. They will assist people to come up with their own ideas or solutions.

Adapted from: Visher E and Visher J *How to Win as a Stepfamily*: 78-81

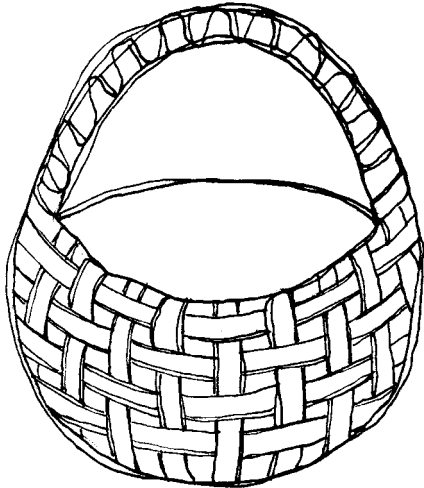
Baskets



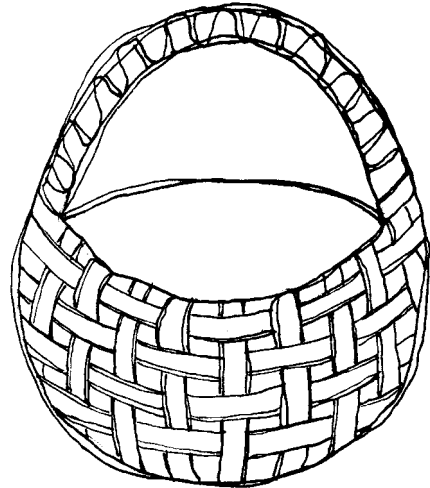
Whole stepfamily



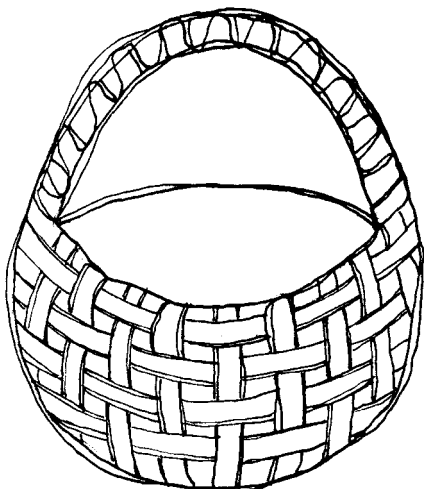
Myself



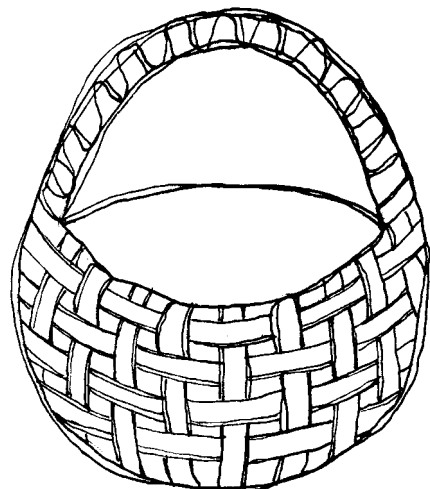
Couple



Biological parent and children



Step-parent and stepchildren

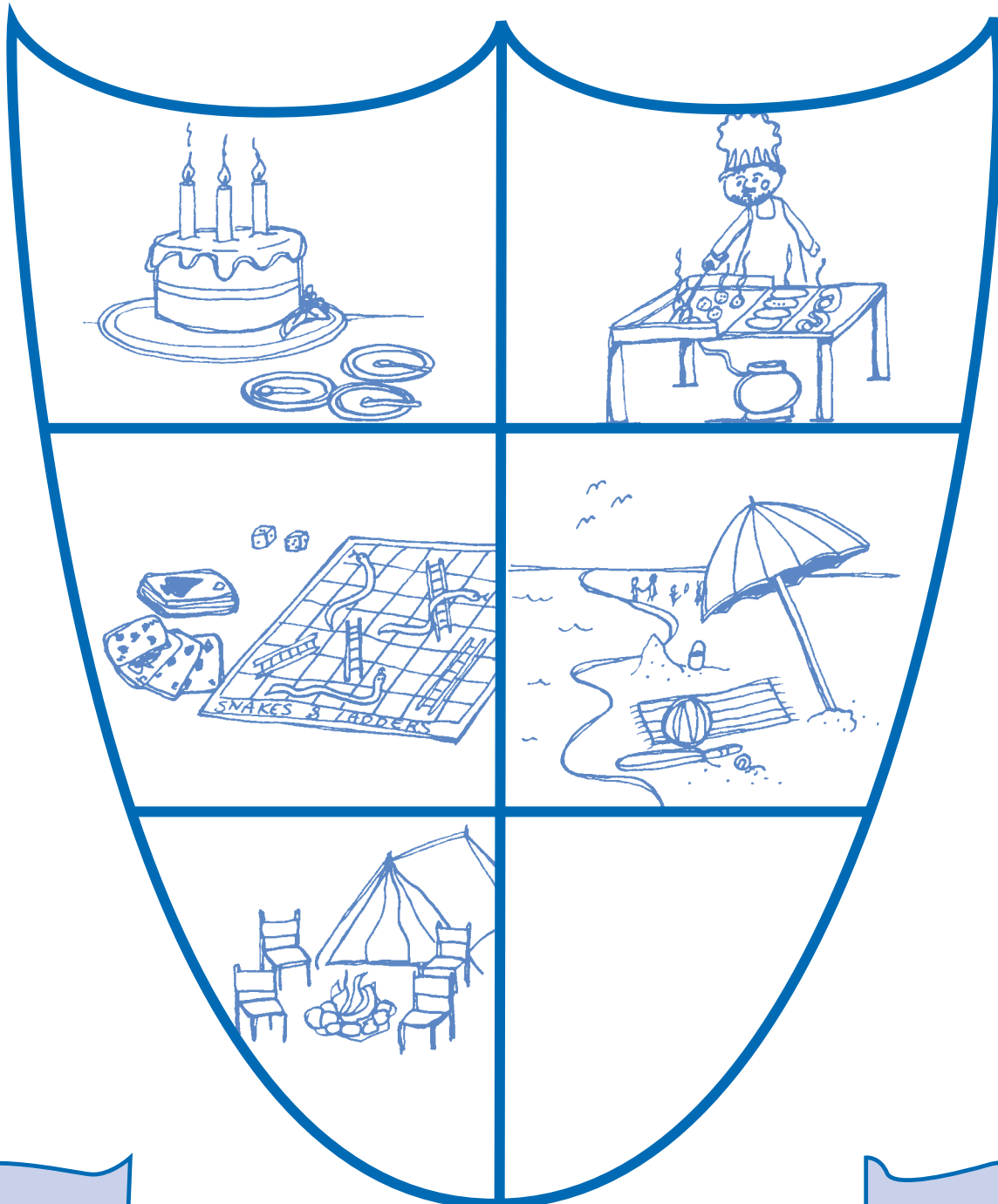


Adult with any individual child

Source: Gerrard, Howden, Stepfamily Association of Victoria 1998.



Brown-Jones



Appreciation of diversity

Source: Gerrard, Howden, Stepfamily Association of Victoria 1998.

Stresses for children in repartnered families

1. Hearing the separated parents argue (over the telephone, at the door, etc.) and saying negative things. They may wonder if they're to blame for this.
2. Not being allowed to see their other parent, and resenting their step-parent for this.
3. Feeling blamed for everything that goes wrong in the new family.
4. Hearing their parent and step-parent fighting, and fearing that this relationship will break up too.
5. Seeing their parent do more for the stepsiblings than for them.
6. Having stepsiblings get into their belongings and intrude on their space and privacy.
7. Dealing with the feeling of not being wanted (often testing to see if either household wants them).
8. Feeling angry and depressed, and wishing it could all be the way it was before.
9. Having a step-parent who tells them what to do. Feeling resentful about this.



Adapted from: Gerrard, I., and Howden, M., *Making Stepfamilies Work - A Course for Couples*, Stepfamily Association of Victoria Inc., 1998 Melbourne.



Have a special box for family members to place written grievances and ideas for family activities. Call a meeting when there are several slips in the box.

OR

Set aside a regular time each week for all members to meet together to talk.

OR

Let it be known that any family member can ask for a meeting when they think it necessary.

Plan a specific amount of time (20 or 30 minutes), depending on the age of the children.

Rules

The feelings of every family member count equally, regardless of age.

Feelings are accepted, not judged as right or wrong.

Accusations are not allowed.

Encourage 'I' messages rather than 'you' messages.

Complaints should be discussed with everyone present. A complaint about an individual may not be made if that person is not present.

Use problem-solving to formulate the best solution (For example, who should pick up a child from school or after school events).

End the meeting with positive and encouraging comments. (For example, 'I really liked the way you were able to hear me out when I spoke about that touchy subject'.)

Guidelines for family meetings

Rotate the responsibility for leading the meetings so that all family members have a turn.

Ensure that meetings are not just gripe sessions. Allow time for positives and compliments as well as complaints.

Decide on household chores. Have everyone make a list and discuss how these are to be shared fairly.

Meetings allow for everyone to bring up issues (not just adults).

Having an agenda ensures that everyone is encouraged to raise issues.

Use this time to arrange for fun family activities so that it is also seen as a planning time.

Adapted from: Visher, E., and Visher, J., *How to Win as a Stepfamily*.

1. I feel excited when _____
And then I (what I do) _____
At this time I would also like to _____

2. I feel angry when _____
And then I _____
At this time I would also like to _____

3. I feel jealous when _____
And then I _____
At this time I would also like to _____

4. I feel happy when _____
And then I _____
At this time I would also like to _____

5. I feel guilty when _____
And then I _____
At this time I would also like to _____

6. I feel excluded when _____
And then I _____
At this time I would also like to _____

7. I feel proud when _____
And then I _____
At this time I would also like to _____

Children's feelings in repartnered families



Resenting the step-parent: seen to be replacing their natural parent
seen as heralding the finish of the original family.

Being disciplined by someone with whom they have little relationship.

Grieving the loss of their original family.

Feeling replaced by new family members for example step-parent, stepsiblings,
new baby.

Confusion about new ways of operating in this family.

Missing the non-residential parent and other significant family members such as
grandparents or siblings.

Feeling in competition with step-parent for parent's love and attention.

Experiencing loss of familiar surroundings, friends, school, neighbourhood.

Parenting roles in the repartnered family

1 As the parenting team in your repartnered family, get together often as a couple to talk about child-rearing values and practices.

2 The biological parent needs to support the step-parent's authority in front of the children and have discussions or disagreements as a couple in private.

3 Step-parents need to avoid the disciplinary role initially, while their relationship with their stepchildren is developing.

4 Adults need to stop and reflect (in relation to children's behaviour). Step-parent needs to ask self 'Does it really matter?' Biological parent needs to ask: 'Am I being too accommodating?'

5 Don't expect the feelings for your stepchildren to be the same as the feelings you have for your own children. Remember emotional bonds can take a long time to develop.

6 Spend time alone with your stepchildren. This can often be quality time because there is no competition for the biological parent's attention. However also be ready to accept it if the children are not ready for this.

7 Remind the child that their parent still loves them, regardless of the new couple relationship.

8 Attempt to be a good role model whether the stepchildren appear to accept your values or not. They will benefit in the long run.

9 The step-parent is encouraged to separate their own sense of self-esteem from what they sometimes perceive to be the children's negative perceptions of them.

10 Explore, as a step-parent, the myriad of roles you can take with your stepchildren. For example: friend, confidante, mentor etc, rather than attempting to take on the role of a biological parent. (Webber 1994)

11 Step-parents need to decide how involved they want to be and how much responsibility they want to take with the children. They also need to be encouraged to maintain interests apart from the repartnered family life.

12 Be patient, remember it takes time to make a repartnered family work and often takes at least two years for individuals to feel comfortable.



1. What does money mean for us in our relationship?

- How have I been influenced by my past experiences with money?
- Am I aware of the influence that our peer group has on our spending?
- Am I accustomed to buying expensive gifts? How much is expensive?

2. What do we intend to do about savings and investments?

- While saving, what sacrifices am I prepared to make?

3. Are we going to budget? Who will be involved – one or both of us?

- Who will pay the bills and when?
- Will we use credit cards or charge accounts?
- Will we have one or two cheque accounts? If only one, who writes the cheques?

4. What is our understanding and feeling about assuming each other's outstanding debts and ongoing commitments incurred before this relationship, for example, car loans, education loans, and child support?

5. What is our financial planning regarding a reduction from two incomes to one income, if children are living in the household or we have children of our own?

- How would I feel if I became unemployed?
- How would I feel if my partner became unemployed?
- How would you feel if your partner's income was higher than yours?
- How would you feel if your children and your partner's children had unequal financial support (for example, schools, holidays, clothes).
- How would you feel if commitments to existing children resulted in less financial resources being available to start a new family?

6. Do we have to be accountable for everything we spend?

- Will we both have some money that we can spend independently?
 - How much can we spend without talking it over first?
-

