

## Parallel Parenting to Co-Parenting

Parallel parenting is a form of parenting in which a divorced couple assumes, or they are assigned specific parental duties while minimizing or eliminating contact with each other.

Co-parenting is a parenting relationship in which the two parents of a child are not romantically involved due to separation, divorce, or break up of a romantic partnership, but still assume joint responsibility for the upbringing of their child. This also includes when any two people are jointly raising a child, regardless of whether or not they are both biological parents or have ever been romantically linked (i.e. a single parent raising a child with the help of their parent or relative, etc.).

In the most high-conflict cases, the arrangements are put in place with the idea that with the right contract or court order to guide them, both mom and dad can care for their child independently or with approved supervision, without ever having to exchange more than polite regards when in each other's presence. Limited contact gives each parent time to heal from stressful life circumstances that have hindered positive parental relations until such circumstances have resolved. Parallel parenting is a way for parents to regain personal stability in order to provide co-parenting in the near future. Co-parenting offers the best possible parenting situation for the child when parents must part ways and dissolve their intimate relationship or marriage. Some relational circumstances may be better left as parallel parenting such as when a parent lives in an institutional facility due to criminal conviction, mental illness, protective needs, or long distance circumstances. In these situations the parent will not be available during the child rearing years due to physical absence.

Co-parenting is only considered an option when the parents are able to be present and can get along with each other. Parallel parenting is where each parent makes all the decisions and does all the parenting when the kids are with them; schedules are usually close to 50/50 and laid out in great detail. Contact between the parties is minimal, utilizing a business approach through memos when communicating more than polite regards. Negotiations are discouraged and used only as needed to benefit child's needs or unavoidable circumstances. They are done through written communication to lessen emotional reactions and to create mature responses. The memos may be able to become legal documents that can be reviewed by a third party if needed.

Although some divorced couples have been able to create parallel parenting arrangements themselves when life circumstances became hectic (death of loved one, chronic illness, loss of job, divorce, loss of home, etc.), this two-track parenting is usually court mandated or part of the couple's separation agreement. It may be presented as part of a written parenting plan in which the responsibilities and duties of each parent are spelled out in writing and the plan is signed by both parties and notarized if needed. Parents that are unable to agree on responsibilities often negotiate in the court system. Co-parenting classes have proven to reduce the need for court proceedings by teaching parents how to negotiate "win-win" situations for their parenting circumstances. In these classes parent's learn to utilize parallel parenting guidelines with the hope of a common future goal to utilize co-parenting approaches. Mature and reasonable parental role modeling through co-parenting offers the child an opportunity to learn to positively negotiate relational circumstances. The successful end result of co-parenting provides the best possible support for the child's future independence as a positive productive member of the community.