

POSITIVE CO-PARENTING - PUT YOUR CHILDREN FIRST

Children need a relationship with both their parents. So even if your child doesn't live with you, it's important that he/she sees you often. Here are eight tips to make your time together better for both of you.*

1. See Your Child Regularly

To have a strong relationship with your child, spend time with him/her regularly. The best way to do that is for both parents to work out a plan. If you can't talk without fighting, ask for assistance from a family service agency, religious organization, community group or the court.

2. Understand Your Child's Development Level

Many things about the time you spend with your child depend on his/her developmental stage. These include:

- ***The supervision your child needs.*** All kids need to be supervised, but babies and toddlers must be watched constantly.
- ***How often and how long you are together.*** Babies do better with frequent, short time together. School-age children may be ready for overnights. Teens are often busy, so be flexible in planning time together.
- ***Your child's level of understanding.*** Young children need simple instructions and many reminders. But every child is different and needs a different amount of adult help.
- ***What you do together.*** Young children love to play with their parents. Older children often like sports, trips or long-term projects. See Activity Ideas for more suggestions.
- ***What to bring.*** Younger children may need diaper bags and bottles, while older children might just need a coat. Whatever your child's age, don't forget about car seats, seat belts and emergency telephone numbers.

Understanding your child's developmental stage will let you have more fun together!

3. Ask the Other Parent

Sharing information will help both of you be good parents. A parent can update the other parent about their child's likes, needs and special issues such as medicine, allergies or behavior problems. Or a parent can tell the other parent about things that came up during their time with the child.

4. Make Pickups and Drop-offs Easier

Transitions will be smoother if you follow four basic rules:

- ***Be prepared.*** Have the child dressed, rested, fed and ready with a package of things the child will need while with their other parent, such as a change of clothes or medicine.
- ***Be punctual.*** Show up on time. Being late will hurt your child's feelings and is inconsiderate to your child's other parent.
- ***Keep it simple.*** Interactions with your child's other parent will be easier if you don't involve other people in phone calls, pickups or drop-offs (except for someone you have both agreed should be there).
- ***Be kind.*** No matter what your feelings for each other, practice basic courtesy.

5. Set Limits

Your children want to know how to behave. When you spend time together, explain to them what you expect of them. Then praise their good behavior and try to modify the behavior when they don't follow the rules. Don't yell, belittle or hit. Instead use time-outs or redirect your child to another activity.

6. Spend Time, Not Money

What matters to your child is that you are spending time together. What doesn't matter is spending a lot of money. Your child will probably remember playing games, cooking together or listening to your stories a lot longer than a new toy or a trip to a restaurant.

7. Strike a Balance

Your child needs time alone with you, in addition to group activities with you and your friends, your new partner, or your new family. Try to balance both kinds of time when planning your visits.

8. Do Something Fun

Choose an activity you both like. This could be something as simple as reading a book or going to the park. Or it could be a trip to the zoo, beach or an event. You should also make time for everyday parenting activities such as helping with homework and going to appointments.

*These tips are for parents who are parenting a child together and one of the parents doesn't live with the child.

These are general guidelines, so not everything may fit your situation. This is especially true if there is a history of unsafe behavior, high conflict between the parents, or domestic violence. In these cases, the court may need to make recommendations about how to set up a plan to keep everyone safe.