

Dear Parent,

I am so sorry that you are going through this difficult time in your life. I've worked with dozens of parents going through separation, and I have lived through it myself, so I know how this feels. It is a scary time, especially as you try to figure out what is best for your children.

As a child advocate, I also know this is a terribly scary and unsettling time for children. The good news is that as their parent you have enormous power to assist, and help them get through this ok.

If your ex-partner does not seem to be focused on the children that is all the more reason they need you to protect them. Its best if both parents are cooperating, but only one can make a huge difference by him or herself.

The main thing to remember is that conflict is the most destructive thing for children. Refuse to argue in front of the children. It is terribly hurtful and confusing to children when their parents say bad things about each other. Always talk of your ex-partner respectfully when talking with your children.

Remember, all you can control is your own behaviour. If your ex-partner is being unreasonable and unkind, respond by being reasonable and kind. If your ex-partner is refusing to communicate, be as open and honest as you can. And if you stuff up, be kind and loving with yourself. You are human, and this is a difficult time.

Try to avoid family court; it is a terribly destructive process. Work on coming up with a parenting plan through mediation, or if that fails, through Family Resolution.

Remember that your children are not responsible for the separation, and they should not be deprived of their right to a home because of it. 50-50 shared parenting is the modern equivalent of cutting the baby in half – it is "fair" to the adults but destructive to the child. Its great for both parents to be as involved with the children as possible, but the children deserve to have a primary residence, a place they call "home".

Lawyers sometimes say that "the truth doesn't matter, all that matters is what you can prove". In parenting after separation, the exact opposite is true. All that matters is the truth: the choices you and your ex-partner make in dealing with each other and in co-parenting your children. At the end of the day, you and your ex-partner are the only people who can protect your children. If you can be loving to them (and to yourself); tolerant of any behavioural / emotional issues they express as a result of the insecurity and keep them protected from being exposed to conflict or ever hearing anything unkind about their other parent, you will go a long way towards providing them the strength and support they need.

I wish you and your children the very best, now and in the future.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Bob Jacobs

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