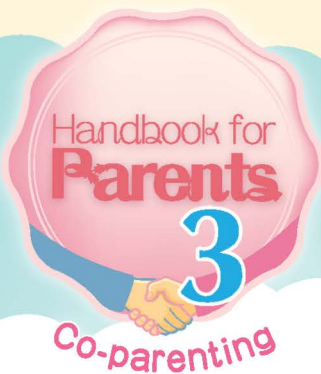




Marriage may end
but parenthood goes on



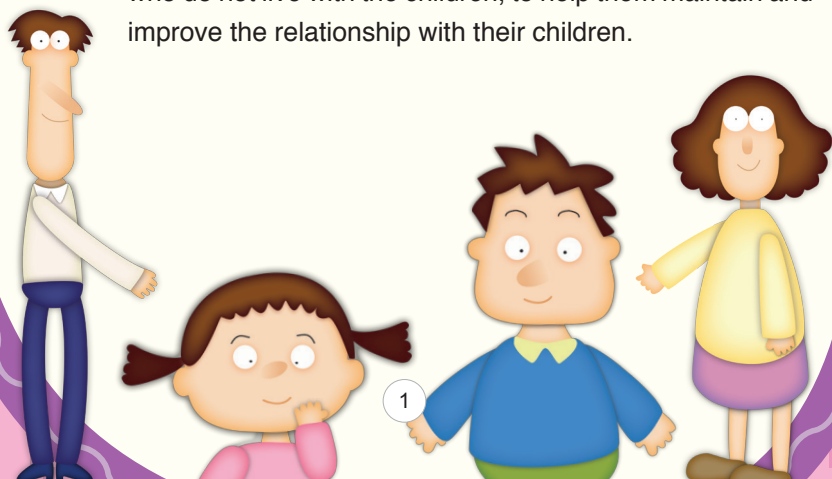
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1) Introduction

‘Divorce’, ‘Separation’, these are tough decisions made by the parents and often lead to significant changes in one’s life. Whilst the parents are adjusting themselves to their new lives, their children will also have different emotion and behavioural reaction as a response to this change. Although you may be eager to move on and cut off any connections with one another, in the best interests of the children, both parents should work together and share responsibilities to contribute to the development of the children. They should work out the caring arrangement that is good to the children and manage their and the children’s emotion. The efforts from both parents will cushion the negative impacts of this separation and also provide the children a stable environment to grow. In the hearts of the children, you will always be their parent forever, and your care and love would be a precious gift for the children.

In order to facilitate the separated/divorced parents to adjust to their new lives and to have a better understanding of the importance of parental responsibilities in raising their children, a series of 3 booklets is produced for parents’ reference. Parents' handbook 3 highlights the importance of co-parenting, and provides separated/divorced parents with tips on how to formulate parenting plans for their children. It also has a dedicated session to parents who do not live with the children, to help them maintain and improve the relationship with their children.



2) Co-parenting

What is co-parenting

Instead of sliding all the responsibilities to just one single parent, co-parenting means both parents are committed to working together in raising their children. This will allow children to have close relationships with both sides of the parents.

Married parents are obligated to raise and look after the children together, through all the good and bad. When the marriage ends, both parents should still work together, share the parental responsibilities and make plans for the future growth of their children. Both parents should ensure the children can still receive the love and care they are entitled for even after the divorce.



What is the purpose of co-parenting

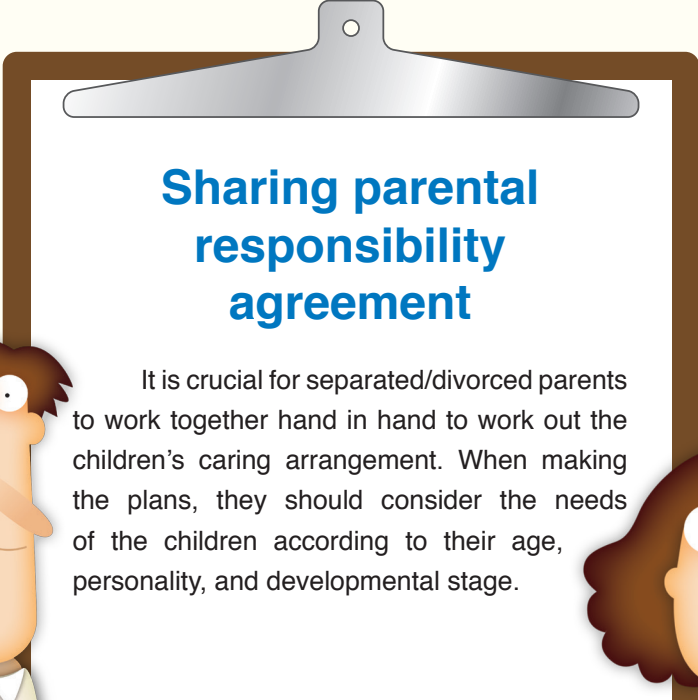
Children will experience different kinds of unsettling feelings when their parents separate. Some of them might be too young to comprehend or acknowledge adult's problems, naively believe that as long as they stop fighting, or if mom stops asking dad for money, the problems will go away. In some cases, they tend to blame the parent who initiates the separation.

As a parent, you should understand your children's fear and anxiety of leaving either one of the parents. The thought of losing parent's attention and love makes them feel insecure, which will make it harder for them to trust other people in the future.

If both parents can peacefully resolve and overcome their disputes, cooperate and take on their shares of parenting duties, ensure the children receive love and care from both parents, the children won't feel being abandoned. This can set a good role model for the children and lessen the negative impact on your children's emotions, studies, as well as behaviors. This can also assist them to adjust to the changes of the family and help them to develop a positive self-image.

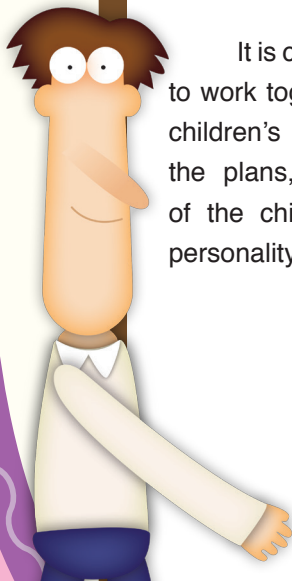
Allow your children to grow under both parents' love and care

Divorce is an end to a marriage, but that doesn't change the role of you as the parent of your children. No matter with whom your children are living, they should never have to lose the connection and love of the other parent; and it is your job to help sustain and nurture your relationship with your children. A divorced family does not mean the family is broken. Parents are blessed and are obligated to take care of their children, and this doesn't end with the marriage.



Sharing parental responsibility agreement

It is crucial for separated/divorced parents to work together hand in hand to work out the children's caring arrangement. When making the plans, they should consider the needs of the children according to their age, personality, and developmental stage.



Children's needs include:

The right to know the truth and any up-coming plans -

explain the situation and future arrangements in a way that they can understand.

Stable life routine -

such as maintaining relationship with family and friends, living environment, social network, as well as any social activities.

Communication -

encourage them to stay in contact with people they care via phone calls, emails, or even meet up with them face to face.

Parents' active listening and acceptance -

listen to and accept your children's thoughts before making any major decisions.





Parental responsibility agreement outlines the responsibilities of both parents in raising their children and the share of the bonding time with their children. The focus should be on what is in the best interests of the children. In majority of cases, allowing the children to have close, stable and continuous relationships with both parents is in their best interests. The definition of “children’s best interests” will vary in different households, for example, both parents taking up the equal amount of bonding time might seem ideal for some families, but not to the others.

There are a lot of things to look out for when making care arrangement plans for your children, and it might be overwhelming at first. For that reason, we have created a chart below on co-parenting with all the essential items listed on the left, which will help separated/divorced parents divide and conquer, making this process smoother and more comprehensive.





1) Arrangements on schooling, living and daily caring arrangement

Remarks

Living arrangement

Caring arrangement on school days

Caring arrangement on holidays (non-school days)

Caring arrangement during long holidays
(e.g. Christmas, Chinese New Year, Easter and summer vacation, etc.)

Caring arrangement for special occasions
(e.g. birthday, Chinese New Year Eve dinner, etc.)

Medical appointment and treatment

Caring arrangement in case of emergency
(e.g. parents/children are being hospitalised)

2) Child contact arrangement

Remarks (frequency, time, form, how and where to pick up etc.)

Contact arrangement with the non-residing parent on a school day

Contact arrangement with the non-residing parent on a non-school day

Other ways to connect with the non-residing parent besides visitation

Contact arrangement with both parents' relatives

Others (e.g. contact arrangement if anyone is late/sick, when unexpected issue pops up or relief arrangement)



3) Children's expenses

Remarks (amount, who, how
and when to pay etc.)

Daily expenses (e.g. meals, clothing,
transportation, pocket money, etc.)

Educational related expenses (e.g.
school fee, school textbook fee,
tutoring fee)

Medical/Dental cost

Insurance fee

Extracurricular activities, vacations,
and other expenses

4) Academics arrangement

Remarks

School contacts (by mother or father)

Daily supervision

Study plan

Tutoring class

Extracurricular activities



5) Parenting arrangement

Remarks

Parenting discipline

Reward and punishment

Religion

6) Parent's communication

Remarks (types of messages, communication frequency etc.)

Sharing information (e.g. notice from school, academic report, photo, medical report, etc.)

Communication medium and arrangement (e.g. face-to-face, phone call, email, text message, etc.)

7) Others (feel free to add other items when you see fit)

Remarks

Application for children tax deduction

Out-of-town vacation arrangement

Solution when not being able to fulfill the agreement occasionally

Other arrangement if there is the need to amend the agreement.





Co-parenting

Tips



★ The biggest obstacle in co-parenting is your emotions. Shifting the focus on your children can help you let go of the negativity.

★ Instead of figuring out ways to win the fight or argument, your priorities should be around what's best for the children.

★ Avoid having heated conversation or conflicts in front of your children (such as during child contact or exchange). If needed, schedule another time and someplace else for settling controversial issues.

★ When discussing about your children with your ex-partner, try to let go of old grudges and not to bring up what he/she has done wrong in the past. Criticism, mocking, and threat are also unhealthy for the relationship.



★ Focus on the present and the future, stay in the reality and aim for efficiency. Try and build a co-worker type of relationship with your ex-partner.

★ Listen to your children's thoughts. Do not force your children to pick side between you and your ex-partner.

★ You and your ex-partner will most likely have different parenting disciplines, but you both should always try and do things in a consistent way. If compromising seems impossible, embrace the difference and make sure your children are clear of the rules in different homes.



★ Consider scheduling regular meetings (could be once a month) with your ex-partner to discuss about your children's life and their school performance.

★ Align on a way of communication that can work for both you and your ex-partner when discussing about your children, may it be face-to-face, via phone, text, or email.

★ Both parents should communicate with each other on a frequent basis, and update one another of any new contacting method.

★ Both parents should get together every now and then to evaluate this co-parenting arrangement, make new plans or adjustments according to the development of your children.



★ Inform each other of any change of status (could be financially or about marital status) in order to keep both sides up to date and discuss way out.

★ If agreements are impossible to be reached, please seek help from third parties such as your trusted relatives, social worker, or mediator etc.

3) How to maintain your relationship with children who don't live with you

If your children do not live with you, it is natural for you to worry about the potential distanced relationship, which leads to kinds of negative thoughts. For example, you may think they are better off without you, or reduce meeting your children because of your reluctance to see your ex-partner, or because of children's indifferent attitude towards you. Please remember, children need parents' continued support, love, and nurturing. Your children might be scared from the shattered relationship or intense fights you had with your ex-partner, therefore you will need to spend extra time and effort to rebuild their security and trust. If children are able to receive love and maintain stable relationships with both parents, they are more likely to have better self-esteem and healthy development.

Perhaps you have been too busy in the past or for other reason neglected your children. You can build a close relationship with your children by spending time with them one-on-one, and in many different ways.



Learn more about your children

Try to familiarise yourself with your children's daily routines, for example their after school activities, daily schedule and social activities etc. You will be able to have more topics to talk to your children about if you know the details of their daily lives. You can also keep notes of any special occasions such as birthdays, Father/Mother's days etc. Plan your schedule around it, think about what to do, what present to buy, and whom to invite etc.

Ways to stay in contact with your children

Child Contact Arrangement



Arrange bonding time in advance, plan the activities with your children so they can feel more involved and enjoy every moment of it.



Try collecting interesting news articles or small items into a box, or put together a scrapbook or album so you can share them with your children.



Try doing activities that both you and children can participate in, such as playing chess, drawing, exercising, or watching movie.

Phone call



If you don't get to see your children often, you can maintain the relationship with them through the phone. Keep each other up to date and ensure they can feel your love and care.



Call your children on a regular basis so they can look forward to having the call with you. Try and do it only when they are free, not when they are doing homework, having dinner, or on their way out for activities.



If you don't quite know what to talk to your children about, try and give it a think before picking up the phone. The more you talk to your children, the more you will get to know them and therefore will have more topics to talk to them about.



What have they done since the last call? Let them know you are interested in the things they do when they are not around you. Mark them down on a notebook or calendar. Share your childhood memories with them – this can encourage your children to share things with you as well. You don't have to know the correct answer to everything all the time, just listen to them and show that you are interested.

SMS text / email / mobile instant messaging



A very convenient way to reach them anytime, anywhere, letting them know what you are up to recently.

Maintain contact with school / organisation holding extra-curricular activities



- 💡 Contact your children's teacher to get a better understanding of how they are doing in school, that way your children will know that you care about them.

- 💡 Attend school events such as parents' day or other extracurricular activities.

Be a part of your children's lives



- 💡 Discuss with your ex-partner on ways to help or participate in your children's sports events or activities.

- 💡 Keep them company when heading to practice, performance, activity, or social gathering.

- 💡 Assist your children with their homework and exams preparation; help them gather the materials they need.

Let your children feel they have a second home

- 💡 Your children now have two homes, one with mom; another with dad. If you ever want to move, consider moving to an area that is close to them. If possible, provide your children a room to themselves, and help them decorate their own space.

- 💡 You should provide your children some private space if having their own room is not quite an option; for example, give them their own bed, desk, and cabinet. Decorate them with some family photos and small items that they like, it could be their favorite toys, books, or games.

- 💡 Set some basic rules for your children, it could be on their resting schedule, what tasks to be done, or general discipline, etc. (It would be ideal if you could discuss with the other parent beforehand, and come up with a plan that is tailored for your children).

There is no need to take your children to special places or buy them expensive toys in order to maintain the parent-child relationship if you don't live with them, what matters is the amount of time you spend with them. Doing ordinary things such as chores or going out for a walk is good enough for them to feel your presence in their lives. If you have more than one child, try and spend quality time with them individually, tell them stories, watch movie or TV with them, or tell them any interesting news you know.

Facing challenges

Accept short child contact arrangement. Younger children might not want to spend the night outside of home, but they will be willing to spend the day with you.

You may feel devastated if your children refuse to spend time with you. Please understand this could be a result of being stuck in the middle of two parents, and that they are fear of the potential conflicts between you two. Be patient and respect their views. Let them know they can reach you anytime they want, through phone, text, or email.

Understand teenagers may not want to be stuck at home as they want to spend time with their friends.

Understand your children might not like staying with your new partner or friend together at first, as things like this will take time.





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