

# Steps to Effective Co-Parenting



Parenting is hard work! Under the best of circumstances it takes an enormous amount of energy, we know divorce is not the best of circumstances! Your family is going through many changes at this point, most of what you had not planned on! At the forefront of these changes is the transition from spouses to co-parents. In this guide, you will be given tools and tasks to ease this transition. Research tells us that a strong co-parenting relationship is the best way to ensure that your children's needs are met. The quality of the co-parenting relationship has a significant impact on children's mental and emotional well-being

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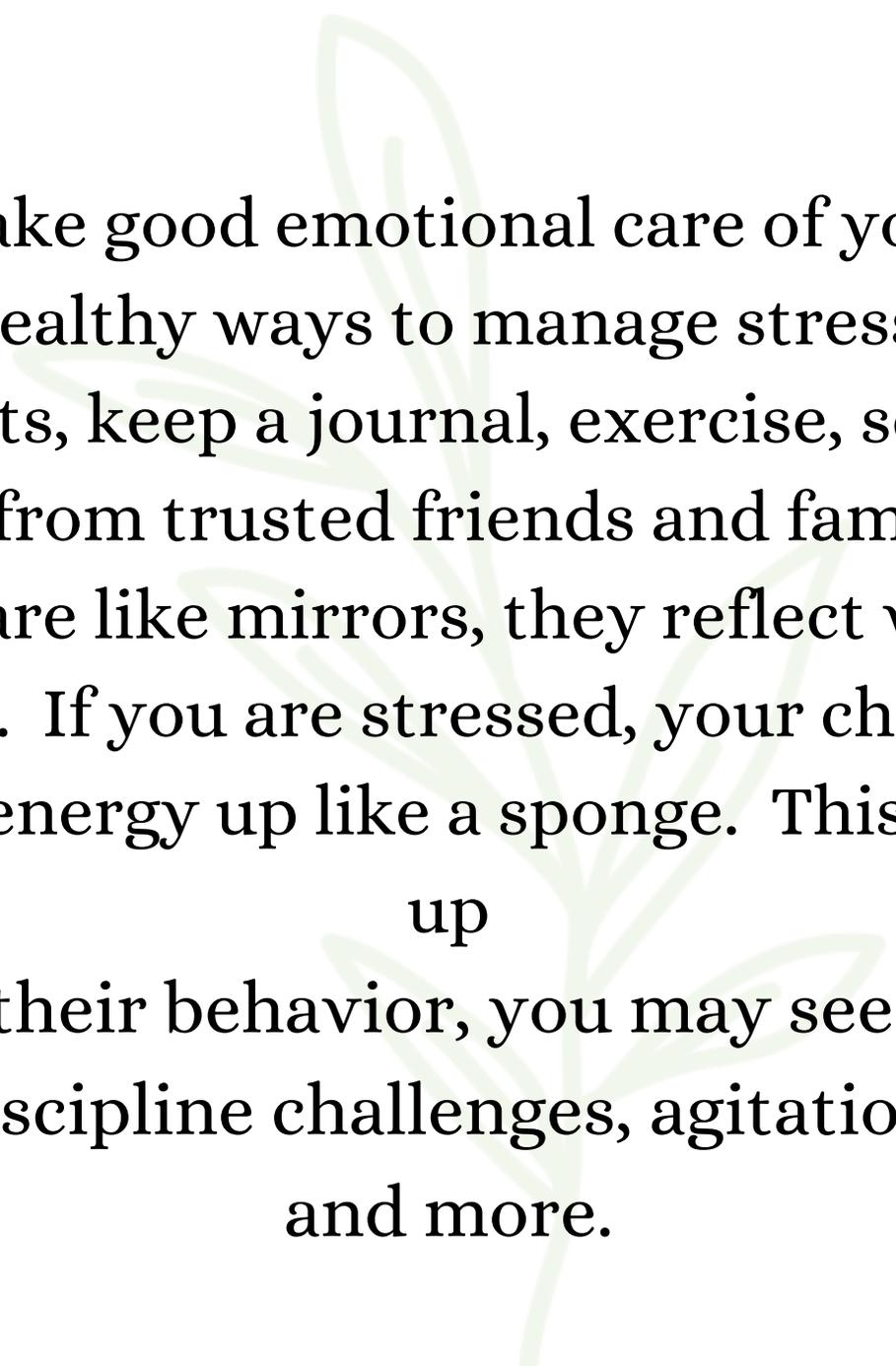
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**Task** Be sure to deal with your own feelings about the end of your marriage and your former spouse.

The anger, resentments, and sadness will dilute your ability to be the best parent you can be. Use your supports, talk about the feelings, write about them, cry, be angry, move beyond it! Your unresolved feelings will create negativity, which will show through in your interactions with your ex. Your children will see, hear and feel this. You do not want your children to be on the battlefield of a civil war between you and your former spouse, there is NO better reason to manage your feelings than to protect your children from this war.

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**Tool** Take good emotional care of yourself, cultivate healthy ways to manage stress. Use your supports, keep a journal, exercise, seek out support from trusted friends and family. Your children are like mirrors, they reflect what they see in you. If you are stressed, your children will soak that energy up like a sponge. This will show up their behavior, you may see discipline challenges, agitation, and more.

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**Task** Establish a new co-parenting relationship. You are no longer married, intimate partners. This brings a shift in what information you share. Think of your new relationship as a business partnership. In many ways it is, you are partners in the business of raising your children. As you need to share information, work together, communicate effectively, and be respectful with a business partner, you must do the same with a co-parent. In a professional setting if this was not the case there would be retribution, in raising children, the retribution is emotional damage to your children.

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**Tool** Create new relationship boundaries, your interactions only now need to be about children and parenting. In general, discussions involve health, school, social and behavior of your children. These boundaries will help you to conduct the business of co-parenting. Remember that rehashing marital issues is not part of your new business venture. Keep interactions short, succinct, polite, and cooperative. Set up routines for the transitions between homes, the structure of a routine helps everyone to know what to expect.

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**Task** Learn effective communication skills.

Co-parenting well requires you to learn ways to communicate that are different, and likely better than when you were married. Communication needs to be calm, focused, and respectful. It must facilitate sharing information, understanding your co-parent's points of view, and making decisions that are in the best interest of your children. Be mindful of your feelings and unresolved issues so that those emotions don't impact your interactions. Be aware of your tone of voice, and non-verbal messages, avoid blame, and listen well. Use please and thank you, don't be afraid to apologize, remember the golden rule! This is very tricky business for which there is a learning curve.

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**Tool** Prepare yourself before a conversation with your co-parent. Be clear about the purpose of the conversation, and remember to keep the needs of your children at the forefront of the conversation. Make some notes if you think this will be helpful. If you need time to think and reflect, say so!



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I look forward to chatting  
with you!

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