

Domestic Violence & Divorce



Co-parenting after divorce

If you have continued contact with your children's other parent as a result of the custody arrangement or visitation, consider the following ways to ensure the safety and well-being of you and your children:

Recognize continued abuse and control attempts

If abuse continues, document it. Continue to document interactions with your former spouse. (Written records of all interactions with the abuser, including exact times and dates children are picked up and returned, dates and amounts of child support paid/owed, and any violations of court orders of protection. Include documentation of abuse, including police reports, medical records, photographs, and claim)

Set boundaries

Change your locks if your former partner has a key. Decide who is and is not allowed to enter the house. Decide what topics you will talk to each other about and what methods you will use to communicate (in person, by telephone, by e-mail, leaving notes or messages for each other, etc.).

Prioritize safety

Exchange children in a neutral public place and consider having a third party present. Inform teachers and other care providers exactly who does and does not have access to your children.

Foster positive adjustment for you and children

You or your children may continue to experience symptoms of stress after the divorce. Some symptoms that are commonly reported by people who have experienced domestic violence are:

- Fear of closeness or difficulty trusting others;

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (signs include re-experiencing the traumatic event, feelings of numbness and constantly feeling "on edge");

- Depression;

- Anxiety;

- Low self-esteem.

The divorce transition may be difficult for your children, even though it may ultimately result in a healthier and happier life for them. Also, children may continue to experience distress even after the domestic violence has ended.

Some **signs of stress** to look for in your children:

- Fear or anxiety;

- Sleep problems;

- Physical complaints (e.g. stomach aches or headaches);

- Aggressive (e.g. biting, hitting, kicking) or defiant behavior;

- Delinquent behavior;

- Problems at school;

- Withdrawal or depression.

Encourage your child to communicate his or her feelings. Seek support and help for yourself and your children. Professional counseling can be very beneficial to adults and children who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence.

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Online Dating Safety

Use these tips to protect yourself from being an easy prey to someone who may have ulterior motives.

Online dating is fast becoming an acceptable way to meet people who share your interests and passions. Every year, several million people are doing it and tens of thousands of people get married as a result of meeting through an online dating service. However, there are inherent dangers. Rather than dwell on these, here are 10 tips to being safe during your online dating experience.

1. Trust your instincts. Your instinct is a powerful medium for knowing when something doesn't feel right. It is also a great way to measure when to move forward with someone and when to turn and run. As you read profiles, responses to emails, have phone conversations, and meet in person your instincts help tell you if something is 'right' or if something is out of alignment. The 'out of alignment' message is your cue to be careful, back off, or proceed with extreme caution. Prayer plus instinct is the most powerful psychological tool you have at your disposal.

2. Don't provide personal information too soon. Your home phone number and full name provide easy ways to track who you are and where you live. Armed with just your home phone number, a person can easily gain access to your income information, home address, and even learn the value of your home. Armed with your first and last name, a person can do searches to determine quite a bit of information on you – where you work, what you do, and even what your home phone number is. So in the initial stages of communication, guard your personal information.

3. Use a free email account. If you decide to move your communication from the anonymous email feature provided by the majority of online dating services then provide an email address that isn't your regular one. Sign up for a free Yahoo!, Hotmail, or Gmail account that you use just for online dating. Don't put your full name in the *From* field – only your first name or something else. This protects you from a person being able to search your normal email address to find out more information about you.

4. Chose your telephone service. When it's time to move your communication to the next level (talking on the phone), never give out your home phone number. Either provide a mobile phone number or use a service like Skype.com to communicate. It's just an added protection barrier until you get to know the person better.

5. Beware of married people. It's unfortunate, but a lot of married people do use online dating services and go so far as to meet people. A few years ago, NBC reported that a study found that up to 30% of people using online dating services are already married!

6. Look for questionable characteristics in your communication. As you chat via email and on the phone you may be able to start to pick out characteristics of the other person. Are they controlling? Do they seem to anger easily? Do they avoid some of your questions? These can be questionable characteristics that tell you it's time to move on.

7. Ask for a recent photo. There's nothing wrong in asking someone if their photos are recent. If they don't have a photo, request a recent one. It's important for you to get a good look at the person you may eventually meet. Plus your instincts from your communications and their photos may provide you with valuable insight into the person. Plus, if they tell you the photo is recent and you meet and see a major difference, then you'll know the person lied and can cut the date short. If a person lies about any aspect of their photo or profile then that is a red flag to no longer pursue the relationship.

8. Choose carefully your online dating service. Free online dating services provide a greater opportunity for potentially dangerous individuals as they don't have to provide a credit card or other information that identifies them.

9. Don't get a false sense of security. Some online dating services claim to offer 'background checks' and when signing up for such a service you may find it easier to let your guard down. Don't. Laws differ from state-to-state and country to country when it comes to background checks and in some jurisdictions privacy laws prevent checks from being effectively performed. Because of the inconsistency, criminals or wrong-doers can and do get into services that do 'background checks'. Never let your guard down.

10. Meet in a public place for your first meeting. When it's time to schedule that first exciting face-to-face meeting, arrange to meet in a public place and provide your own transportation. Your initial meeting will tell you a lot about the other person, including whether or not he or she lied in their profile. Your instincts will kick in. Never accept an offer to be picked up at your house. Make sure that a friend knows who you are with and where you are.

How to smoothly transition in step-parenting

What should stepparents-to-be discuss before jumping into a second or third marriage?

There are several things parents can do to help their children adjust to the fact that they are introducing a “new parent” into their household.

1. Read and understand basic child development so you don't mistake developmentally normal behaviours as inappropriate, uncooperative or as personally against you. “If you are nonparents, what do you know about kids and their developmental stages?” By understanding basic child development, the stepparent will know that a two-year-old's ‘NO's, for example, are developmentally appropriate, so that the stepparent won't take the lack of cooperation personally.

2. Be aware that the first couple of years of marriage are chaotic. Typically, it takes five to seven years for a stepfamily to become cohesive. Initially, everything is up in the air – people are trying to understand each other and find their position in the group. It can be difficult.

3. Lower your expectations. Stepparents do not have the power or authority to “fix” their stepchildren or the family. Only a biological parent has that ability.

4. Discuss discipline and make sure the biological parent is the one carrying out the discipline of his or her child.

5. Make the discipline roles clear. Talk with your to-be spouse about what the household rules are going to be (i.e., Bed-making required? Clearing your plate? Watching TV before homework? Which church to attend?) and personal rules (will you allow them to borrow your clothes? If so, are the clothes to be returned to you dry-cleaned?).

6. Discuss the external household rules, such as how will you handle medical care if the biological parent isn't there to sign a release. Stepparents do not have legal authority, unless it is given to them.



7. Talk about money issues. Look for information concerning financial issues and figure out as many as you can before you're married.

8. Keep you and your spouse's bond strong. The couple bond is the core of the success of the stepfamily. People have to build their relationship, alone. That way kids can see how a healthy adult relationship works.

9. Get creative. Friendships are created through a shared history in the family. You have to create shared memories. Snap pictures of the family doing things together and display the photos around the home. Find ways to do things with your stepchildren to create a shared memory. Baking, planting, skiing on a trip, whatever creates those special moments should be encouraged.

10. Make changes slowly. You don't want to change things all at once. Make your own traditions, but do it over time.

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