

Lesson #3: *Start setting the foundation of a co-parenting situation*

**Divorced Fathers Network
Advocates Of Shared Parenting
'Because Children Love Both Their Parents'**

We hear often from fathers that they have a goal of joint custody. We feel it's important to realize that even before reaching a joint custody situation; it's a good idea to start setting the foundation of a co-parenting situation.

Here are steps that can be followed to achieve a co-parenting situation with the other parent, even if that person is reluctant or unwilling to share the parenting with you:

1. Educate yourself:
 - a) through reading books. Some suggestions are "Fathers Are Forever," "Mom's House, Dad's House," "The One Minute Father." Any other suggestions?
 - b) Through DFN meetings and church groups
 - c) By learning from other parents, especially those who have had similar experiences.
 - d) By taking the co-parenting class that Santa Cruz County offers
 - e) Observe three days' worth of family law court proceedings
2. Learning and developing good communication skills:
 - a) Listen actively
 - b) Frame questions by offering a brief explanation before asking a question, making a proposal, or making a request.
 - c) Familiarize yourself with different approaches, and learn when and how to use them (hard vs. soft)
 - d) Exercise patience
3. Recognize and accept that achieving shared parenting is a long process, and will not happen overnight. Also important to remember that when it is attained, it needs to be maintained
4. Try to remember that it may take a lot of small steps to improve the communication, interactions and relationship with the other parent:
 - a) Try changing your tone. For example, consider making it more positive and non-aggressive
 - b) Exercise restraint
 - c) Offer supportive comments and positive feedback
 - d) Offer your help and assistance
 - e) Try to talk about interests and goals you have in common. Examples include the children's education, activities and medical care
 - f) Keep your conversations focused on the children
 - g) Choose to get off the phone during a positive moment
 - h) Stick to the planned topics. Try not to stray into other subject matter or old habits

5. Be as active, involved and informed in the children lives as possible.
6. Remain focused on the goal, which is achieving a shared parenting relationship. Though it may seem far off, you have the ability to develop and maintain a cooperative co-parenting relationship and even be the one to lead the other parent into shared parenting. You have the power to change your children's lives for the better.

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