



1. Your child's sense of love for himself and others remains intact.

When two people make a child, part of the child's love for himself stems from the love between his two parents. That is, that he was made from a union of love. When parents demonstrate they no longer love each other through divorce, the child can lose some or part of this sense of love for himself. Taken a step further, if the divorcing parents "hate" each other, the child may feel like he hates himself as well.

Alternatively, if splitting parents can both say and demonstrate their continued care, concern, and perhaps even platonic love for one another, the child feels this. When this is the case, the child's love for himself is stronger, despite the parents' physical separation.

Important Note: Since many people who divorce are disconnected from one another and suffer from high levels of dysfunction in the marriage prior to the time of the divorce, a peaceful divorce can actually create an improvement in the child's day-to-day life. This can be the case if the parents use the divorce as an opportunity to heal their own adult relationship so they can effectively and lovingly co-parent.

What you can do:

Once the dust settles after divorce, it is wonderful for a child to celebrate birthdays, graduations, and similar events with both parents, when possible. In daily life, a parent can say about the other parent, "Your mom is so smart." "Your dad thinks of so many great things for you." "Your mom is one of the kindest people I know." "Your dad loves you more than anything. Ever since you were born, you have been his number one priority." "It's so great how your dad does that for you. I love that!" "Your mom loves those. You should get her one."

These and other compliments can be woven into any conversation a divorced parent has with their child.

Children of divorced parents who get hear these messages from even one, but preferably both, parents know they came from love, and know they are still deeply loved and cherished by two people who care for and respect one another. The child feels lovable and worthy.

2. Your children will get the gift of a united front.

Effective discipline requires a united front, whether parents are married or not. When you can effectively co-parent with your child's other parent, you can create and maintain a united front on decisions relating to discipline and boundaries for your children.

These include consequences for poor choices, as well as rules around food, schedules, technology, dating, you name it. When parents cannot co-parent, it is a mess for children. They hear different messages and feel the tension of those differences, even if subtle.

It is wonderful when two parents can get on the phone or meet in person to come

up with a united front for the child. Depending on the number of children you have, this might be a daily occurrence! Regardless of who does the final delivery, or if it is presented together, a united front says to the child, "This is our position."

Once you co-parent this way, your children learn that regardless of which parent delivers the information, the other parent stands behind it. They don't try to manipulate their parents because they know it won't work. Again, it creates a tremendous sense of security and self-love for the child because it speaks volumes about the parents' commitment to parent well. Many children whose parents are married suffer from a lack of a united front as well. In any circumstance, it is detrimental to children.

What you can do: It is important to hold a high vision for your co-parenting and work hard for it, regardless of your marital status. When children are younger, this is less of an issue because children are not being faced with safety and value decisions they are having to make on their own. Once children hit the 'tween and teen years, the united front comes into play at almost every turn.

Teenagers look for guidance from a strong support system. They are looking for you to say what you will do and do what you say. They are looking for you to follow-through on boundaries and consequences, even if they are not aware of this or would admit it. A teenager with high self-esteem and strong inner compass has parents, regardless of their marital status, who provide this level of parenting through the teen years. This is best created through a united front.

Otherwise, the teen may lose respect for one or both parents and begin to look to friends for direction, or may simply become directionless. The ramifications of this can

be life changing for the child, and ultimately, for the whole family.

3. You will get to help your child get along with their other parent better. Children get along with each of their parents differently. Sometimes a particular child might have more trouble getting along with one parent or another, for a myriad of reasons. This can be especially true in the teenage years. Having someone who knows the other parent well can be very helpful to a child.

The parent can help the child with strategies for communicating with the other parent. The parent can give the child a perspective, a background, and a context for where the other parent might be coming from that can help the child understand his or her parent. Additionally, you will be able to talk with the other parent about your child's concerns. You can say, "He feels like you don't listen when he talks about xyz." And the other parent can say, "Oh, I didn't realize that. Ok, I will pay more attention and make sure I fix that."

Parents who are at war may not be able to imagine communicating with an ex-spouse in this way, but it is a tremendous gift to create for yourself, and worth all the ego-checking it will take to get you there.

Taken to the next level, you can also request feedback about how you show up as a partner from your former spouse. Imagine helping your former spouse get along better with his or her new spouse because of insights you can share. When your solicited input comes from a place of love, it can be perhaps more helpful to your former spouse than feedback from any other source.

Being able to communicate in this way is very healing for split couples who can do it.

What you can do: Check your ego at the door. Realize that when something your former spouse says about you is upsetting, it just may be true. Rather than being defensive, listen with an open mind and see how you can use the information to improve your relationship with them, your child, and your new partner.

4. You will be able to help your former spouse's new spouse (and their children, if any) get along better with your children. Similar to number 3, you can share what your children tell you about issues regarding a stepparent with their other parent so the relationship can be improved. Often times, stepparents do things that upset children, but the children do not have the comfort level to communicate this with their stepparent or the parent who is married to that person.

When can a child can share their concerns with the other parent, the parent can help the child with strategies for getting along with the new stepparent. Additionally, the parent can let the parent who has remarried know what the child's concerns are so they can be addressed. Otherwise, these issues can often go unresolved. The issues may fester and grow into substantial problems for the stepparent-stepchild relationship, as well as the new marriage. This is perhaps part of the reason why second marriages with children on one or both sides have divorces rates of 75 – 85 percent.

What you can do: As the other parent, you have a vested interest in helping the new marriage succeed. Why? Assuming it is a relatively healthy relationship (void of abuse and addiction), your child will benefit from the stability of its continuance, rather than another divorce and subsequent upheaval. As unpleasant as dealing with stepparents can be for a child in some situations, it does teach them a great deal about getting along

with other people and tolerance.

5. You will be able to team and offer support to one another during a time of crisis.

Life is unpredictable, and tomorrow isn't promised. Dealing with health issues, serious issues, emotional issues, and mini and major crises is difficult enough.

Being at odds with your child's parent just adds stress to already stressful situations such as these. When you effectively co-parent, your child's other parent becomes a buoy during a difficult time. While you may have a new relationship and feel the love and support you need from it, it is still a gift to be able to also feel support with your child's other parent.

Effective co-parents are able to reserve all of their creative energy for problem-solving and for supporting themselves, one another, and their children during crisis because they are not wasting that energy on ego-wars with their former spouse. This yields better outcomes for all during life's most trying times.

What you can do: Make a plan for what you would do in the event of a crisis. What hospital do you want your children to go to for regular and emergency care? What plan do you have for both care of the children and finances in the event of the death of either parent? What would you do and where would you meet in the event of a natural disaster or other crisis in your area or in our world? Discussing relevant topics that you normally would have discussed if you were married is an essential part of effective co-parenting.

6. Your new partner or spouse will know you have healed from your divorce and are ready to fully love again. Being at war uses up a considerable amount of emotional energy and is an indication of attachment. That's emotional energy that be better be

spent on your children and your new partner or spouse!

When you effectively co-parent, your current partner or spouse knows you are no longer expending important emotional energy on your former spouse. It sends a message that you are able to work effectively with him or her. Your new spouse will see you work in a pragmatic way with your former spouse, meanwhile saving your emotional investments for them and your children.

In some situations, it can be a red flag if someone is still at war with their former spouse. Watch out! The road ahead could be very difficult.

What you can do: Get professional therapy and coaching in order to embrace the gifts of the marriage you lost as well as to release your grievances so you can once again play full out in life.

One strategy I use with my clients is to have them write a Thank You letter and an Apology letter to their former spouse. This letter does not have to be written with the intention of giving it to the other person. It is actually best completed as a personal, private exercise. The letters should be very detailed and begin at the very start of the relationship. Doing this in an honest way helps tremendously when it comes to emotional healing both during and after divorce.

7. You will achieve something for your family that you will feel very good about, and your children will see and feel this achievement, too. Divorce can be one of the most painful experiences you can have in life, exponentially so if you have children. Creating a system of co-parenting can help you raise, healthy, happy kids who feel much more secure, loved, and solid. Sometimes, even more so than their friends from intact

families.

What you can do: It's wonderful when your children can see you as two people who love them more than anything else in your lives. They will see you as two strong, intelligent people who consistently check your egos at the door so you can effectively parent your child—together.

They will see that when things that come up that might cause emotional issues and fights between other divorced parents, you each put forth effort to take care of ourselves and manage our emotions so you can make decisions that are in alignment with your children's best interests.

When children hear a tone between divorced parents that is open, helpful, and kind, they feel good. They know the decisions you make are for them and even if they don't like the consequence they receive (you lose your phone for a week), or a decision you may make (you cannot go on a party bus until you are older, even if 'everyone' else is allowed to go). Set an intention that when your child hears you talking on the phone with their other parent that your child would not know if you were talking to the other parent or to a good friend.

This all sounds good, but it's unrealistic for me because my former spouse is unwilling to co-parent. What about my situation?

Just as in marriage, the co-parenting relationship is created by a dynamic between two people. Here are suggestions for coping that benefit children:

1. Keep your half perfect. Miguel Ruiz teaches in *The Mastery of Love* that we love better when we focus on keeping our half of any relationship perfect, rather than

creating expectations for the other side. Keep your personal integrity in check. At a minimum, you will always know you have done this, even if little or no change is yielded on the other side. This will be a tremendous benefit to your children, both now and when they are grown.

2. Keep your ego at bay. Do not stop attempting to bridge the gap between the two of you or “give up” thinking it is hopeless. I have coached couples who were at war for years, unable to communicate in any way except through fax or attorneys. I watched them get to a space where easy, pleasant phone calls became the new norm. One couple even attended my Happy Kids class together, along with each of their new spouses. Shifts of belief, heart, and mind are always possible. If you shut down the possibility or give up, it can never happen. Remain open. Stay the course.

3. When communicating with your children about the tense situation, let them know that everyone is “limited.” Just use that word. Don’t use other words to describe your former spouse. You don’t want to say they are angry, or fighting, or worse. Simply say, “We are all limited by our beliefs and abilities in any given moment. Hopefully someday it will get better. Until then, let’s all be our best selves and be the love we want to see,” or whatever version of this feels comfortable for you. If there are legal issues being resolved, address this by saying, “The court is there to help people figure out what is fair when two people cannot agree on what is fair. Each person usually gets a little bit of what they want. Ultimately, it is up to the judge to make the decision. Even though it can be a little stressful to go to court, it is not a bad thing. It is helpful for us to have the court so we have a place where each of us can be heard.”

Notice my language is supportive and void of any mention of the other parent directly.

Focus on the situation and how it affects your child, not the other parent.

4. Finally, and most importantly, always express stability for your child. Say, “We are always going to take care of you. You will always have a loving home and two parents who love you. It’s our job to be sure you always have what you need and to have the life experiences we want you to have. I will always work to make sure that happens. I will never stop loving you or taking care of you.”

Final thought:

Divorcing does not reduce the number of parenting decisions you will make. It just changes how you will make them. The ability to make these decisions with your child’s other parent is a huge achievement which goes a long way toward healing the pain of divorce.

Even if both parties wanted a divorce, there is still tremendous loss—loss of the original dream you had of your family—since no one goes into it hoping for divorce. Effective co-parenting allows you to raise terrific children, and goes a long way toward creating a happy life for them, as well as yourself, and your entire family.