

Up To Parents

by
Linda Gryczan
Mediation Works

Children of divorce are like kids bobbing facedown in a river. What a tragedy that some of their parents stand on the riverbank arguing how the children got there, why their swimsuits don't match, or who is going to pay for the hospital bill if a rescue is ever mounted.¹

--Dr. Timothy A. Onkka

UpToParents.org is a free & confidential website for parents to take an interactive timeout from conflict.

Charlie and Barb Asher are Indiana mediators who developed tools to help parents lessen the conflict of divorce and get beyond "why the swimsuits don't match." They offer free and confidential websites for parents to take an interactive timeout from their conflict. The websites are www.UpToParents.org for divorced or divorcing parents, www.ProudToParent.org for co-parents who never married, and www.WhileWeHeal.org for parents who are rebuilding their marriage.

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"Yeah, but you don't know my co-parent."

With the caveat that survivors of domestic violence should always have effective counseling and legal support, the Ashers offer these ideas to help with the challenge of a difficult co-parent.

1. Children are helped by having even one parent who gives them a safe sanctuary from the storm. Each parent can give the children the gift of withdrawing from the fight, and help the children develop an independent and positive relationship with the other parent. Write ten compliments and good memories about your co-parent and share them with the children.

Encourage the children to call and contact their other parent. Whatever your co-parent does, make sure your children always have one sanctuary to live, love, and grow.

Children are helped by having even one parent who offers a safe sanctuary from the storm.

2. Understand the need to pick up the slack.

Parents in these circumstances often correctly diagnose the problem ("My co-parent isn't a help")—and then jump to precisely the wrong conclusion ("Then I quit, too").

What?

Suppose your children were in a burning building and the only people around to save them were you and your co-parent. If your co-parent did nothing, or started a fight about child support, what would you do? You'd run into the building alone.

Your job isn't to reform your ex, your responsibility is to save your children by stopping conflict they can't end.

3. Use good resources.

* The "Parents Corner" on UpToParents.org

* A good book like Robert Emery's The Truth about Children and Divorce or Julie Ross and Judy Corcoran's Joint Custody with a Jerk.

* Time spent with people who have good divorces.

* Child-focused counseling or mediation.

4. Remember that your co-parent may have a different perspective, and many private

wounds. The job of co-parents is to accept each other as they are and merge the strengths they bring to the table.

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5. Focus on those who really can't go it alone—your children. Give yourself high marks on your most important lifework. At the same time, remember that children don't have the skills and experience to get what they need. They depend on you.

6. Remember the joy.

Focus on your children who can't go it alone.

In the end, it's the joy of parenthood that sustains. On paper, parenthood makes no sense. None. The output exceeds any prospect of return. From the pains of labor to the years of physical and emotional and financial dependence, from the calls about embarrassing outbursts at school to worry over their survival, from skinned knees to broken hearts.

Parents endure those sacrifices because they are our children. They are a link to a world we will never see. Our hope that they will get things right and do better than their parents.

And when we nobly endure the burdens—including the burdens of co-parenting with a flawed partner, just as our partners must do with us—the sun still rises.

We nobly endure the burdens,
Including co-parenting with a flawed partner,
just as our partners must do with us.

And there is no greater joy.

A final thought

Parents sacrifice everything for their children. They generously, almost recklessly, give time, money, and peace of mind. They do not tally sacrifices, nor expect a fair return—other than their children's happiness and the hope that they'll do well.

Tragically, a difficult divorce can lead parents to begin keeping tabs—and hoarding what was once freely given. "My co-parent is being combative, failing our children, so I will, too"—

Even if you and your co-parent are not to this point, I invite you to have a look at UpToParents.org. You will find support, understanding and encouragement.

We'll all be better for it.

Adapted from Up To Parents by Charlie and Barb Asher www.UpToParents.org. Used by permission.

Linda Gryczan helps people transform conflict to

For support, understanding & encouragement, go to: UpToParents.org.

cooperation at Mediation Works in Helena, Montana. She mediates; divorce, parenting plans, small claims, family and neighborhood disputes. She can be reached through www.mediationworks.tv, lindag@mediationworks.tv or (406) 431-3635. For daily tips to help you solve conflict, follow her on Twitter @_mediationworks.

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