

CO-PARENTING RELATIONSHIPS: SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

By
Janet Eaton, PhD, R.N, LMFT
952-405-2017
eaton.janet@gmail.com

When couples with children divorce it becomes necessary for the parents to **consciously** redefine their relationship as it relates to the continued parenting of their children. Couples may choose to end their marital connection, but the parenting connection continues.

It requires a **conscious** effort to redesign or transform the marital relationship to one that focuses only on co-parenting. Without this **conscious** effort co-parenting relationships tend to evolve out of the conflict and negativity of the ending marriage. As a result, children are absorbing the stress of intense parental conflict when they should be absorbing gentle parental nurturing.

Marital / committed relationships imply intimacy. As relationships break down the intimacy proceeds from positive to negative intimacy, unless there is a **conscious** effort to redefine the co-parenting relationship. Redefining the relationship requires that parents learn to consistently 1) separate personal issues from parenting issues and 2) establish new boundaries. The former husband and wife or committed couple now only interact in the best interest of the children. The quality of those interactions highly affects the emotional security and wellbeing of the children, as well as, the children's relationship with each parent.

Healthy co-parenting is a difficult but necessary task, thus the continued reference to it requiring a **conscious** effort. Parents are being asked to accomplish an "emotional contradiction". Possibly the most intense, highly conflictual negative experience in ones lifetime is that of the divorce experience. Then, to request that parents peacefully co-parent is truly an emotional contradiction. Developing a productive co-parenting relationship often requires outside help such as classes or counseling. It clearly requires, of the parents, a shift in their perception of each other.

Messages sent to divorced families have much to do with the negative experience parents and children encounter. The court system, religions, the mindset of family and friends, and the overall mindset toward the traditional family in many subtle ways lead parents and children of divorce to perceive themselves as inadequate, not whole, and generally not ok.

IT IS OK TO BE A DIVORCED FAMILY. It is ok if a child has two dads and one mom or two moms and two dads. What isn't ok is if conflict, deceit, manipulation, and anger are a continuous part of the parental interaction. When the co-parenting interactions prevent a child from a nurturing relationship with each parent, then, that co-parenting relationship needs to be **consciously** redefined.

Divorced parents have the right and responsibility to live and view themselves as whole and adequate human beings who have within them the power and ability to provide nurturing environments for their children.

Dr. Eaton is a Licensed Individual, Marriage and Family Therapist with a specialty in co-parenting relationships following divorce. Dr. Eaton has several years of experience working in the court system with families in the divorce process. She has conducted research on co-parenting relationships, and is in the process of writing a book on redefining family and acknowledging various forms of family as whole and viable.