

What to Know

Do you and the mother of your children live apart? Are the two of you divorced, separated, or never married? Do you have full, joint, or no custody of your children?

No matter your answers, raising your children together when you don't live together is called "co-parenting" or "shared parenting."



Parenting together for the sake of your children is so vital. And yet, it is one of the hardest things to get right. Even if you're living with her, parenting together is still hard! That's why you can use what you'll learn in this topic no matter whether you live with her or not, or are married to her or not.

Reflect on your answers to these two questions:

- What are the main issues between you and the mother of your children in raising your children?
- What problems do those issues cause?

If you're like most parents, there are issues between you. Two things can lead to those issues:

- Different **styles** of parenting
- Different **approaches** to parenting

Which one do you think causes the most issues and leads to most problems? If you said "approaches," you're right!

Different styles are different kinds or types of something. Men and women are different kinds of parents—they have different styles. (You can learn more about these styles in the "Fathering Skills" topic.) These styles can sometimes clash, such as when a mom becomes concerned when a dad in a rough and tumble way with their children.

Different approaches are different ways to go about doing a task or solving a problem. Although differences in parenting styles can lead to problems between parents, it's different approaches to parenting that cause major problems between parents. The reason is beliefs, morals, and values lead to different approaches.

Let's take values as an example. Values are the things people think are important and have worth. A different value can cause a major problem. Let's say mom and dad don't place the same value on their children going to college. That could lead to fights and cause them to place a different value on saving money for college. And that could lead to fights over whether and where to spend their extra income. It's easy to see how their different approaches can lead to one problem after another.

Do you and the mother of your children approach parenting differently?

What Else

The good news is no matter the problems caused by different parenting approaches; you can try to work with the mother of your children to solve them.

There are three views you must take into solving any problem with her.

- Solve problems that are “solvable.” Don't tackle those that you and she can't solve.
- It's okay to reduce a problem and not solve all of it.
- You can only control what you say and the actions you take to solve problems. You can't control what she says or does.

That said, here are eight tips for solving problems.

1. **Get in touch with your point of view.** Ask yourself: Where did it come from? What caused it? Why do I defend it? What am I holding on to that I could let go of?
2. **Listen to her point of view.** Ask her: Where does it come from? Why do you believe or value it?
3. Know that her view is as important to her as yours is to you.
4. Put yourself in her shoes to see things as she does.
5. **Use these ground rules:**
 - No more than 15 to 30 minutes for talking
 - Don't attack each other
 - No name calling
 - Stick to the subject or difference
 - Don't bring up the past if it has nothing to do with the difference
 - Keep calm and end the talk if one of you becomes angry
 - Respect each other

6. **Be willing to bargain or strike a deal.** What can each of you give to the other? What is each of you willing to let go of?
7. Be ready to walk away if either of you become angry.
8. It might take more than one talk to solve the difference.

What to Ask

Reflect on each of the questions below. Take your time. Write down your answers if you like.

1. Do I have a different parenting approach than does the mother of my children? What aspects of parenting do we approach differently?
2. What problems do our different approaches cause?
3. How do the problems between us affect our children? Do our children say and do things that are clearly caused by those problems?
4. Do I take her view into account when we discuss our problems? How can I do a better job of taking her view into account?
5. Do we have ground rules that help us solve problems between us?
6. Am I willing to bargain with her when I can't get the exact outcome I want?

Learn More

One of the hardest things for parents is to let go of the way they want to solve a problem. They walk into a talk with the other parent with a closed mind, and walk away with nothing, instead of something they can live with.

When you fail to let go, you can end up in a power struggle with the mother of your children. Has that happened to you? Here are some tips to reduce power struggles.

Be Proactive. A good dad tackles problems head on before they get worse. Deal with problems you have some control over solving. Power struggles will become worse when you run from or ignore them.

Begin with the End in Mind. Can you solve the problem or only reduce it? Can you solve it yourself or do you need her help? Keep the answers to those questions in your mind at all times.

Put First Things First. Work with her to figure out the best way(s) to solve or reduce the problem. Don't waste time on things that have little or no chance to address the problem.

Think Win-Win. The best way to solve or reduce a problem is to do it in a way that both of you get something out of it (“A Win”). Be open to striking a deal. If only one of you wins, the problem might go away for a short time, but will come back later.

Listen First, Talk Second. Before you share your view and ideas on how to solve the problem, listen to her point of view and ideas first. This will open both of your minds to find a win-win. Ask a lot of questions to make sure you get her point of view and ideas.

Be Patient. You might need more than one talk to work out a problem. Men tend to want to solve or reduce problems now rather than later. Women often need to talk about a problem many times before they’re ready to solve or reduce it. If you rush to address the problem before she’s ready, you’ll make the problem worse. You might need to Listen First, Talk Second many times before you can reduce or solve the problem.