

Parents: Work together for sake of children

My daughter's father and I have never been married, but he's always been somewhat involved in her upbringing. We don't get along, though, and sometimes I wish he would just stay away. How can I get him to be more cooperative?

Co-parenting is not always easy even for married couples, but it can get very complicated for parents who divorce or who have never been married to begin with.

However, you may get more traction if you stop focusing on your co-parent's lack of cooperation, and instead focus on better ways to communicate with him and by learning to "let go" on certain issues.

This is not only important for your own well-being, but it's extremely important for your child. Continual outward conflict between parents, married or not, can be a cause of major stress for children. You may see this stress manifest itself in behavior problems, failure at school, depression, delinquency, substance abuse, or worse.

A six-page fact sheet from University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension offers detailed guidance on co-parenting that may be helpful in your situation. Titled "Co-Parenting After Divorce," it's available online by going to <http://extension.unh.edu/resources/> and clicking on "Families and Parenting." The fact sheet offers guidelines to help you and your



co-parent discuss what aspects of parenting to share, which decisions will be yours alone, and which decisions will be his alone.

This may be a very difficult conversation to have, but it's a critical conversation for your child's sake. Start by trying to find common ground on at least a few important issues. In the process, try to keep these recommendations in mind:

- Don't argue or discuss parenting issues when your daughter is present.
- Never place your child in the middle of a conflict or ask her to pass messages between you and your co-parent.
- Never criticize or make negative comments about your co-parent, even in jest, in front of your child.
- Try to provide consistent rules no matter which parent the child is with. If you and your co-parent can't agree, help your daughter understand that different situations often have different rules but always should be obeyed.
- Treat your daughter's father as an equal. Refrain from preaching, and do your best to negotiate or compromise.

Even with all this guidance, it will take both of you to make co-parenting work. If your co-parent doesn't cooperate, don't give up. Just keep doing what you can to make the situation better and keep the door open for him to follow suit.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Nancy Stehulak, family and consumer sciences educator for Ohio State University Extension in Henry County.

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