

tips for co-parenting

with your ex-partner.

- **Communicate.** Be willing to talk over any problems that come up in the transition. There are no winners and losers when you set clear boundaries for discussion.
- **Let your co-parent know about changes in your child's health, education, interests or other areas of his life.** Find ways to make decisions together.
- **Never use children as messengers.** Don't send money or lists of things the other parent should do with or buy for the child. Avoid asking your child to keep secrets from the other parent.
- **Allow children to talk about their time with the other parent if they want, but don't push them.** Just listen!
- **Keep transition times pleasant.** Don't use this time to bring up negative points about the other parent. Parents should make the arrangements for visits, unless the children are teenagers. Be flexible and realize that children's needs change as they grow.
- **Recognize talents and qualities your child has received from the other parent.** Mention positive things about the other family and how they have added to your child's life. Encourage your child to remember his "other" family on birthdays and holidays.
- **Admit that you may not be the only good parent.** Allow your co-parent to share in the successes of your child and realize that he also has good ideas on parenting.
- **If you do not see your children often, maintain your relationship through phone calls, emails, tapes or other activities.**
- **Don't make the time with your kids all "fun and games."** Have a balance of fun, chores, homework and just being together.
- **It's not essential that the rules at both houses be the same, only that they be healthy and consistent for the children.** Try to agree on important rules and let the small stuff go.
- **Treat the other parent the way you want to be treated.**



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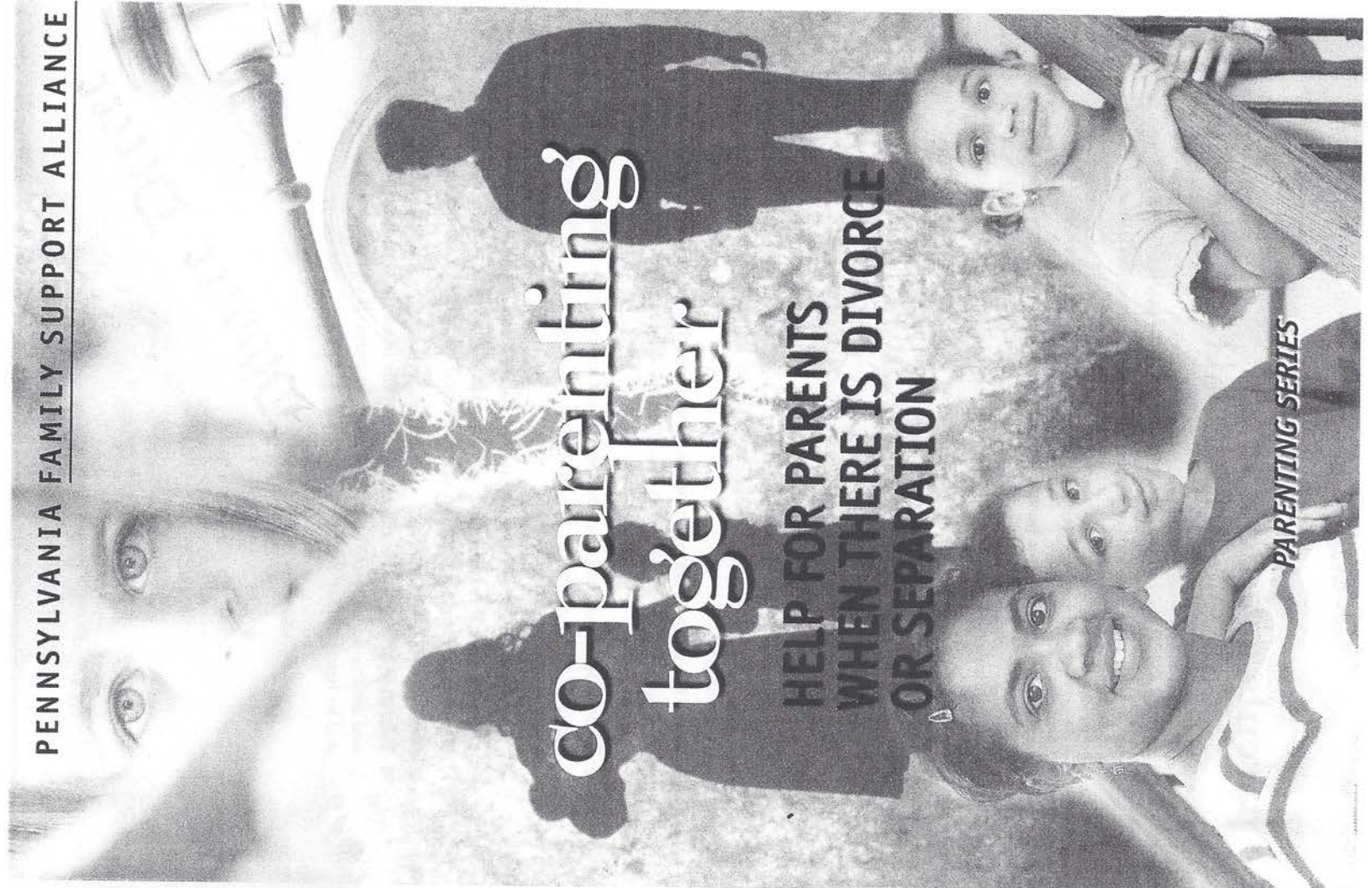
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co-parenting together

HELP FOR PARENTS WHEN THERE IS DIVORCE OR SEPARATION

PARENTING SERIES



When there is a separation or divorce*

- There is no "one size fits all" way that divorce affects children, who are both resilient and fragile. They can adjust to the changes caused by separation if their parents develop a good co-parenting relationship and keep kids out of the conflict.
- Children can react to change in ways that seem strange to their parents. They may go back to a previous stage -- for example, they now want a bottle when they had been drinking from a cup -- or become clingy and anxious. Some children act out by becoming aggressive and angry; others withdraw or lose interest in playing and having fun. These behaviors are a normal part of the divorce.
- Parents sometimes forget that ending their relationship with each other does not end their relationship with their children. It's hard to put aside anger and hurt, but that's just what parents must do to help their children.
- Remember that divorce doesn't end a family. It reorganizes a family into two households, and your family values and traditions can continue.

**This brochure uses the word "divorce" to discuss the ending of an adult relationship. The information also applies to parents who have never been married but who have lived together with their child.*

Parents can do a lot to help their child cope and adjust.

- Give simple, honest explanations that your child can understand. Don't tell the child all your problems -- just give him the information he needs to reassure him and answer his questions. Children worry about where they will live, how their parents will treat each other, and what will happen to them.
- Reassure your child that he is not to blame. Children create scenarios to explain what is happening, and they often imagine the worst. Take your child's concerns seriously -- there is no "minor" issue when it comes to your children.
- Try to tell your child about the separation before it happens. Ideally, both parents should be there to answer questions and reassure the child.
- Don't sabotage your child's relationship with the other parent. Your child has a right to a loving relationship with both parents. Don't force your child to take sides or say negative things about the other parent -- ever.
- Keep your child's life as consistent as you can. This is not the time to change schools, move or bring in a new partner. Maintain bedtimes, family rituals and daily routine as much as possible. You may see the changes as positive, but your child sees them as losses.
- Watch for signs of serious trouble. If your child begins to "act out" in extreme ways, becomes very withdrawn or just seems to be not adjusting, consult a professional.
- Your child is not your friend; don't count on him for emotional support. Develop adult friendships for companionship and avoid the "it's us against the world" mind set.
- Don't rush into new relationships. Almost all children hold on to hope that their parents will reunite, so they may resent a new adult in their lives. Give yourself and your children lots of time before you get involved with a new partner.
- Take care of yourself. A divorce is one of the most stressful times of your life, and anxiety and depression are common reactions. If you nurture yourself, you will be better able to nurture your children.

